

Columbia University Press

*Publishers Since 1893*

New York Chichester, West Sussex

Copyright © 2006 Columbia University Press

All rights reserved

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

{to come}

{set infinity symbol}

Columbia University Press books are printed  
on permanent and durable acid-free paper.

Printed in the United States of America

c 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

p 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

---

## Iraq and the New Arab Public

At the end of August 2003, the controversial al-Jazeera talk show host Faisal al-Qassem introduced the topic for the night's live broadcast of *The Opposite Direction*: do the Iraqi people have the right to demand an apology from the Arabs for their support of Saddam Hussein over the years? With Abd al-Bari Atwan, editor in chief of the Pan-Arabist newspaper *al-Quds al-Arabi*, facing off against Entifadh Qanbar, spokesman for the Iraqi National Congress (INC), Qassem framed the show—as he always does—by posing a long series of questions. The first dozen questions offered a strong defense of Arabs against their accusers: “Do Iraqis have the right to demand an apology from the rest of the Arabs? Should the Arabs actually make such an apology, or should the Iraqi people extend their thanks to the Arab regimes who did terrible things to the departed regime? Aren't they the ones who conspired against [Saddam] and allied with the occupiers against him? . . . Do they want an apology from the Arab regimes which enforced the embargo? Why don't we hear the Iraqis demanding an apology from the Americans and British who starved them and blockaded them and enslaved them? . . . Who is the real traitor to the Iraqi people: the one who minimized Saddam's crimes or the one who rode American tanks to occupy Iraq? Aren't those who opposed the invasion of Iraq worthy of praise?”<sup>1</sup>

In the popular stereotype of al-Jazeera, Qassem's questioning would have ended with this defense of the Arabs and attack on their critics.

## 2 *Iraq and the New Arab Public*

But it did not. Instead, Qassem pivoted 180 degrees and posed a series of sharp questions to his Arab audience: “But on the other side: why were the Arabs silent politically and in the media for years about the horrors of the Iraqi regime? Aren’t all of those who defended Iraq in the past now free to apologize to the Iraqi people after seeing the mass graves? Doesn’t the revelation of the mass graves give Arab states some moral responsibility for the crimes of the old regime? Why did Arab rulers and information ministers and editors in chief of newspapers and television stars incline toward Saddam and not toward the people? . . . Why do some use the question of the relations between the Iraqi opposition and the Americans to justify their refusal to condemn the repression faced by the Iraqi people under Saddam? . . . Was there a single Arab government which issued a statement condemning the massacres of the Iraqi people? Isn’t it the right of the Iraqi people to ask for an explanation for the Arab silence?”

Qassem’s framing of the arguments to come is remarkable in part for not being remarkable. Such open arguments over the most sensitive issues, involving strong representatives of both sides of the dispute, represent the hallmark of al-Jazeera’s approach to Arab politics. Where Arab public life had for decades been dominated by the voice of the state, al-Jazeera ushered in a new kind of open, contentious public politics in which a plethora of competing voices clamored for attention. Rather than imposing a single, overwhelming consensus, the new satellite television stations, along with newspapers, Internet sites, and many other sites of public communication, challenged Arabs to argue, to disagree, and to question the status quo. These public arguments, passionate in their invocation of an aggrieved Arab identity, sometimes oppressively conformist and sometimes bitterly divisive, sensationalist but liberating, defined a new kind of Arab public and new kind of Arab politics.

What I call the *new Arab public* is palpably transforming Arab political culture. It has already conclusively shattered the state’s monopoly over the flow of information, rendering obsolete the ministries of information and the oppressive state censorship that was smothering public discourse well into the 1990s. The new public rejects the long, dismal traditions of enforced public consensus, insisting on the legitimacy of challenging official policies and proclamations. This has

created an expectation of public disagreement, an expectation vital to any meaningfully pluralist politics. The new public has forced Arab leaders to justify their positions far more than ever before, introducing a genuinely new level of accountability to Arab politics. By focusing relentlessly on the problems facing the Arab status quo—social, cultural, and political—it has generated a sense of urgency for change that had long been lacking. And by placing political developments both positive and negative into a common Arab narrative, treating protests demanding political change in Egypt alongside mass demonstrations against the Syrian occupation of Lebanon and elections in Iraq and unrest in Saudi Arabia, the new Arab public has made it impossible for any Arab state to set itself apart from these demands. While this new Arab public cannot alone substitute for electoral democracy, it is doing something in many ways more important: building the underpinnings of a more liberal, pluralist politics rooted in a vocal, critical public sphere.

This new public was highly self-aware of its own role in challenging the status quo, giving it a self-defined sense of mission that sometimes sat uneasily with the standards of objective journalism. And challenge the status quo it did, with a fierce drive toward internal reform and foreign policy changes that led Arab governments and the West alike to regard it with great suspicion. This new public emerged in something of a cocoon, with a sharp contrast between its internally extraordinarily public politics and its general isolation from wider international debates and concerns. Its arguments took place within a common frame of reference, an Arab identity discourse that shaped and inflected all arguments, analysis, and coverage. Together, these three elements produced a distinctive kind of political public sphere, an identity-bound enclave, internally open but externally opaque.

Whether such a populist, identity-driven, enclave public could be the foundation for reform and liberalization—at a time when neither Arab states nor the most powerful popular movements such as Islamism offer such a foundation—represents one of the most urgent problems facing the Arab world today. The centrality of identity politics to the new Arab public, with its avowed goal of giving voice to an oppressed and long-silenced Arab political society, is rife with paradoxes. It is fueled by a determination to bring publicity to the closed, repressive

#### 4 *Iraq and the New Arab Public*

Arab political world, shattering every taboo and crossing every red line with abandon. At the same time, its politics of identity could all too easily slide into a tyranny from below, excommunicating those who disagree and demonizing outsiders to enforce internal unity.

The new media has dramatically affected conceptions of Arab and Muslim identity, linking together geographically distant issues and placing them within a common Arab “story.” In a 2001 survey, Shibley Telhami found that watching Arab television news made 46 percent of Saudis feel more sympathetic to Arabs in other countries, a sentiment shared by 87 percent in the United Arab Emirates and 75 percent in Kuwait.<sup>2</sup> Even more striking, large majorities in the Arab countries he surveyed ranked the Palestinian issue as the most important political issue to them personally. But these greater feelings of closeness capture only half of the story. At the same time, Telhami found upwards of 40 percent in each population felt that despite feeling *closer* to other Arabs, *differences* among Arabs had grown greater in recent years. Why? I argue that this seemingly paradoxical finding follows from an exceptionally important change in the way this new public conceives of Arab identity.

In the new Arab public, Arab and Islamic identities serve as a reference point, but no single set of policies or orientations necessarily follows from that identity. Arabs take for granted that Palestine and Iraq are Arab issues about which Arabs *should* agree, but they often disagree vehemently about what should be done about them. In contrast to earlier eras of Arabism, such as the “Arab Cold War” of the 1950s and 1960s (Kerr 1971), the public political arguments today throw wide open fundamental questions of what it means to be Arab. Anti-American voices routinely square off against pro-American figures, or against Americans themselves; defenders of Saddam argue with representatives of the Iraqi National Congress; Islamists argue with secularists. Al-Jazeera, in particular, thrives by pitting people who sharply disagree against one another, thereby proving by example that Arabs can disagree and still be authentic Arabs. Al-Jazeera’s innovation was to open the phone lines during live broadcasts, to let ordinary Arabs into the arguments for perhaps the first time in their history. By 2005, political talk shows had become an entirely normal and indispensable part of Arab political life, with dozens of such programs broadcast by

a bewildering array of satellite television stations. Virtually any political trend or position could be found by channel-surfing Arab viewers: pro-American “moderates” on the Saudi-owned al-Arabiya, radical anti-American Islamists on the Hezbollah-owned al-Manar, and all points in between. In later chapters, I present some of these exchanges in detail to show the diversity of opinions and the style of political argument that ensued.

The ramifications of a rapidly emerging public sphere for Arab politics are only beginning to be felt. Fueled by technology, by a shared identity, and by enormous frustration with the status quo, this new Arab public has already reshaped the regional and international political terrain. In what direction, however, remains unclear. Arabs can interact, argue, and mobilize in revolutionary ways, defying the attempts of states to maintain their dominance over all aspects of life. At the same time, the new Arab public offers no mechanism for translating its ideas into outcomes. Without effective Arab international institutions and domestic democratic politics, feeling besieged by hostile powers and unchecked global forces, Arabs find themselves frustrated within their new consciousness. And with that frustration, the public sphere is increasingly consumed with sensationalism and anger, which threaten to undermine its contribution to liberal reforms.

Where political talk shows have transformed the nature of Arab public opinion, the impact of the news coverage has similarly revolutionized political behavior. News coverage has inspired contentious politics on the so-called Arab street, from the fierce demonstrations sparked by al-Jazeera’s coverage of the American-British bombing of Iraq in December 1998, to the intense waves of sustained popular protests over the bloody fighting between Palestinians and Israel in 2000 and 2002, to the demonstrations against the invasion of Iraq in 2003, to the wave of protests demanding political reform that swept from Lebanon through Egypt into the Gulf in the first months of 2005.

The new information environment has palpably affected American strategy in the region as well. In Operation Desert Storm (1991), the American-led coalition was largely able to control the information war, shaping the media coverage and carefully managing perceptions of civilian casualties and the course of events (MacArthur

## 6 *Iraq and the New Arab Public*

1992; Tayler 1992). In 2003 the Americans proved unable to control the flow of information, images, or reporting from Iraq. Al-Jazeera, al-Arabiya, and other Arab satellite stations reporting live from Iraq conveyed a picture of the war dramatically different from that emanating from the coalition, one that emphasized civilian suffering and American setbacks rather than a bloodless and popular liberation. As the occupation turned uglier, the Arab media's coverage of the violence gripping Iraq infuriated the Americans, who wanted to maintain information dominance but seemed powerless to achieve it. Al-Jazeera's reporting from the besieged city of Falluja in April 2004 contradicted the coalition's narrative so graphically and dramatically that it determined the outcome of that battle. The new Arab media arguably represented the single greatest strategic difference between 1991 and 2003.

Given the magnitude of its challenge on every political front, it should be no surprise that the new Arab media has become as intensely controversial within the Arab world as it has in the United States. Many Americans view al-Jazeera and the new Arab media as a fundamentally hostile force generating anti-Americanism and complicating foreign policy objectives in Iraq, Israel, the war on terror, and more. Inside the Arab world, al-Jazeera has generated equally intense criticism, as well as impassioned defense. For its supporters, al-Jazeera represents the best hope for challenging the repressive Arab status quo and for defending Arab interests. For its critics, al-Jazeera represents a tremendously damaging cultural phenomenon, one which threatens to drag the struggling Arab world down into the abyss.

As it has risen in influence, then, the Arab media has become a topic as divisive as Iraq itself. The political war over the media raging in the Arab world resembles American battles over media bias from the left and the right in its intensity and its venom. For example, the journalist Fadhil Fudha laments that al-Jazeera betrayed its vast potential by transforming itself from an objective news station into a self-proclaimed carrier of an ideological message.<sup>3</sup> Abd al-Monam Said, director of *al-Ahram's* Center for Strategic Studies, blames al-Jazeera for the failures of Arab interests; according to Said, al-Jazeera's propensities for crowd-pleasing radicalism make it too easy for Israelis and Americans to portray Arabs as radical.<sup>4</sup> The American-based Egypt-

tian columnist Mamoun Fandy denounces the Arab media for succumbing to sensationalism and a “political pornography” of violence, extremism, chaos, and beheadings.<sup>5</sup> Mohammed Ma’wadh of Kuwait University complains that the new media “incline to the superficial and the sensational and they lack focused and scientific dialogue. . . . They are dominated by accusations and settling of scores.”<sup>6</sup> A cartoon in *al-Sharq al-Awsat* portrays “the satellites” spooning garbage into the heads of Arab viewers.<sup>7</sup> *Al-Hayat* journalist Hazem al-Amin argues that al-Jazeera is dominated by the spirit of a dogmatically Islamic Yusuf al-Qaradawi and the legacy of former director Mohammed Jassem al-Ali, who allegedly was on the Iraqi payroll, with the “embarrassing comedies” of Faisal al-Qassem and Ahmed Mansour drowning out more serious voices.<sup>8</sup>

Even sympathetic Arab observers wonder whether the introduction of “Crossfire”- and “Hardball”-type talk shows could really be called a positive contribution to a political culture. Rami Khouri, a liberal Jordanian journalist, dismisses the new public sphere as “more of the same vapid talk.” Abdullah al-Ashal, an Egyptian writer, points out that the political effects of the new public can hardly be taken for granted.<sup>9</sup> Despite all of the real problems of the Arab order, and despite the real need for democracy in the region, more democracy would not lead Arabs to be more accepting of American and Israeli policies. Quite the opposite, he argues—it is the craven and weak leaders of the Arab world that give in to these demands, whereas a strong Arab public would resist. It is not lost on the new Arab public sphere that many Arab states enforced the sanctions on Iraq even as public opinion denounced them, and quietly cooperated with the American war against Iraq even as public opinion loudly opposed it. Indeed, some of the most vocal critiques expressed in the new Arab public sphere emphasize the hypocrisy of Arab regimes, exemplified by their failure to act on the policy preferences that they claim to share with their publics. It is quite striking that opinion surveys have consistently found that those Arabs with access to satellite television consistently have more positive attitudes toward democracy—but not toward American foreign policy (Tessler 2003).

This book presents these debates and controversies in all aspects, both from a Western perspective and from an internal Arab view,

## 8 *Iraq and the New Arab Public*

offering substantial evidence for assessing claims on both sides. It relies primarily on what Arabs themselves have actually said rather than on what others have said about them.<sup>10</sup> First, I have compiled a database of transcripts of 976 episodes of the five most important al-Jazeera talk shows broadcast between January 1999 and June 2004.<sup>11</sup> Second, I have compiled a secondary database of al-Jazeera programs dealing specifically with Iraq; while there is some overlap with the first data set, this one includes a number of more specialized programs, including several new programs broadcast directly from Iraq after the fall of Saddam Hussein. Third, I draw on thousands of opinion essays published in Arabic newspapers between 1992 and 2004. Fourth, I have interviewed a large number of people involved in both the Iraqi issue and the Arab media, including American, European, and Arab officials as well as a wide range of Arab journalists and political activists. Finally, I draw on additional published and unpublished public opinion surveys. All translations, except where otherwise noted, are my own.

Certain points become clear on even a cursory reading of these sources. It is manifestly untrue that the Arab media is dominated by a single perspective. On a typical day, the Saudi newspaper *al-Sharq al-Awsat* publishes translated op-eds by Thomas Friedman and Jim Hoagland alongside essays by Egyptian Islamist Fahmi Huwaydi, the pro-American Egyptian commentator Mamoun Fandy, and the more anti-American Syrian secularist Bathina Shabaan. Next to it on most newsstands is the popular Arabist daily *al-Quds al-Arabi*, which highlights voices critical of Arab governments and the United States, and heavily covers the violence and traumas of Palestine and Iraq. Al-Jazeera, as I document in the chapters to come, offers an extraordinarily wide range of viewpoints, while its live call-in programs offer an unprecedented glimpse into the concerns and passions of ordinary Arabs. Al-Jazeera's satellite television rivals offer a variety of alternative viewpoints, as do domestic television stations and other local media. American news agencies provide significant percentages of the copy used by many Arab newspapers and television stations. Where only a decade ago the typical Arabic-speaking media consumer would have struggled mightily to find serious differences of political opinion, by 2003 she would be relentlessly bombarded with political arguments across the satellite television dial.

Long before the American invasion of Iraq, al-Jazeera programs railed against the repressive, corrupt, stagnant Arab order, shattering what Kanan Makiya described despairingly as “a politics of silence” stifling Arab intellectual and political life (1995: 25). In 1999 alone almost a dozen al-Jazeera talk shows criticized the absence of democracy in the Arab world. In a January 2005 online al-Jazeera poll, almost 90 percent of some 30,000 respondents expressed their doubts that Arab governments really wanted reform. Indeed, virtually every issue that American critics claim is ignored by the Arab media has in fact been covered in these programs. Does the Arab public ignore Iraq’s mass graves? Not in the May 31, 2004, episode of *al-Jazeera Platform* hosted by Jumana al-Namour entitled “The Mass Graves.” Does the Arab public not question the legitimacy of suicide bombing? How then to explain the furious arguments on the May 15, 2002, episode of *No Limits* on “the future of martyrdom operations,” or the June 29, 2002, *Open Dialogue* on “the martyrdom phenomenon,” or the August 20, 2002, *Opposite Direction* treatment of “martyrdom operations”? The first, and most visible, response to the revelations of sexual torture of Iraqis by Americans in the Abu Ghraib prison was Faisal al-Qassem’s provocative program discussing conditions in Arab prisons.

In this new Arab public, Iraqi opposition figures argue with their critics on live television, Islamists and feminists square off over women’s rights, a call-in vote resoundingly declares the current Arab state system to be worse than colonialism, Kurds openly challenge al-Jazeera on its own broadcasts over its alleged silence about Saddam’s mass graves. Kanan Makiya’s “wall of silence” has been broken, but by Arab satellites rather than by American guns.

### Iraq and Public Arab Arguments

While several outstanding recent works have offered general overviews of al-Jazeera (Miles 2005) or Arab public opinion (Telhami 2005), this book takes a slightly different approach, using a single, vital issue in Arab politics to document the political significance of this new Arab public. Given the centrality of the question of Palestine, or

the urgent concerns surrounding terrorism and radical Islamism, it is worth asking why I have chosen Iraq as my focus. In part, simply because the Palestinian dimension has been widely studied. But more important, reducing Arab politics to attitudes toward the Israeli-Palestinian conflict presents a highly misleading picture of a relatively unchanging Arab public opinion. The issue of Palestine was, without question, the area of the widest consensus in the new Arab public sphere. Support for the Palestinians against Israel was rarely, if ever, contested (although there were moments of frustration, as in Faisal al-Qassem's January 2002 program asking "is the Intifada a waste of time?"). Palestine served as a unifying focal point, one which diverse political groups could use as a common front, rather than as a point of meaningful debates. The political implications of the new Arab public are more clearly demonstrated through its engagement with Iraq, an issue on which no such clear Arab consensus exists and on which Arabs have openly argued and disagreed with each other over the right course of action.

Iraq stands out as a window into both the power and the limitations of the new Arab media. Unlike Palestine (a unifying issue about which virtually all Arabs agree) or domestic political issues (which generally interest only local audiences) Iraq in the 1990s generated both a clear sense of commitment to a collectively shared "Arab" issue and intense disagreements. Arguments about the Iraqi sanctions allowed Arabs to rebuild the sense of sharing a community of fate, as Iraqi suffering under the sanctions became a potent symbol of the suffering of all Arabs. As the influential Sudanese Islamist Abd al-Wahhab al-Affendi evocatively described it, Iraq posed "a crisis of the Arab soul [about which] silence is not an option." This crisis proved deeply divisive and generated tremendous passions. But even if divided over the nature of the problem in Iraq and the appropriate response, most Arabs agreed that it was a matter about which a collective Arab position *should* exist. Arabs defined themselves as Arabs by the act of participating in the debate, an *expressive* approach to political action whose importance cannot be reduced to strategic outcomes.

Iraq has been far more central to the new "street politics" of the last few years than is often recognized. While many observers date the "re-surgence of the Arab street" to the outbreak of the "al-Aqsa Intifada"

in September 2000, and others consider the 2005 protests for reform across the Arab world as something wholly novel, both share roots in the Iraqi question. As documented in chapters 3 and 4, showdowns over Iraq frequently galvanized Arab protests in the 1990s, while the growing Arab movement against the sanctions on Iraq helped build many of the techniques and networks that later agitated for political reforms. The Egyptian analyst Mohammed Sid-Ahmed attributes the nature of the Arab response to the “al-Aqsa Intifada” as beginning with the shift in Arab public perceptions of American policy toward Iraq, rather than the other way around.<sup>12</sup>

Iraq became central to Arab identity as a result of the intense public arguments in the new Arab media, which were characterized by visceral disagreement rather than by consensus. Just as the Palestinian issue became a part of personal identity for many Arabs, so did the Iraqi situation. The “suffering Iraqi people” became a vital touchstone for all Arab debate, a starting point of consensus rather than a point to be established. Indeed, concern for the Iraqi people became, in a very real sense, part of what it meant to be Arab in the late 1990s. Even Iraq’s fiercest enemies found themselves forced to justify their support for the sanctions or for American military efforts in terms of their concern to “liberate the Iraqi people from Saddam Hussein’s regime.” And for growing numbers of Arabs, those responsible for the suffering of the Iraqi people dovetailed with those responsible for the suffering of Palestinians: not only Israel, but the United States and the Arab regimes that either actively supported or did nothing to overturn the pernicious policies. The hostility to the American occupation of Iraq, so baffling to many Americans, arises out of this particular conception of identity, a narrative of solidarity and enmity that has shaped the meaning of all that happened. And the new Arab public sphere was a primary source of this identity and this narrative.

Iraq has therefore been central to the meaningful debates *in* the new Arab public sphere in the last decade. It has also been central to the debates *about* the new Arab public sphere, with the Iraqi opposition taking the dominant Arab position toward Iraq as the main evidence for Arab corruption, failure, and self-deception. The most important book on the failures of the Arab public sphere, Kanan Makiya’s *Cruelty and Silence* (1995), is primarily about Iraq, and Makiya

himself was an important intellectual figure within the Iraqi National Congress. Fouad Ajami's widely read *Dream Palaces of the Arabs* is framed around a gripping account of the 1996 death of exiled Iraqi poet Buland Haidari, and Ajami places Iraq under Saddam Hussein at the center of his reflections on the degradation of Arab political culture (1998: 173).

Unlike the issue of Palestine, which has tended to produce an unchallenged consensus unifying different sectors of Arab opinion, Iraq tended to exacerbate differences and to bring real disagreements into the open. Where Israel produced mobilization and an artificial consensus through which any politician could score easy points, Iraq produced real arguments. These arguments themselves demonstrated the possibility of disagreement, the simple and essential lesson that policy disagreements need not *necessarily* mean excommunication from a community of identity. Certain Iraqi opposition figures (those who declined to cooperate with the United States) appeared frequently in *al-Quds al-Arabi*, the most Arabist of Arab newspapers. The debates, by virtue of their heat and passion, focused the attention of audiences on arguments that could make a difference, on an issue where change seemed possible. From the first Gulf War to the growing dissension over sanctions, from Desert Fox to the American campaign for war, Iraq repeatedly took center stage. And unlike in Palestine, where Arab states seemed hopelessly stymied, Iraq—at least in the eyes of the Arab public—was an arena in which Arab states could actually do something if they really wanted to: stop complying with the sanctions, support or oppose the war, support or oppose regime change attempts, allow or refuse the reintegration of Iraq into Arab institutions.

These hot debates spanned nearly a decade and a half, the entire life span of the new Arab public sphere. As a historical trauma and ongoing issue about which endless argument seemed possible, Iraq served as a focal point for private Arab debates after 1990. It is not obvious that it should have become such a vehicle. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait shattered Arab norms against inter-Arab warfare; the dissension at the Cairo Summit of 1990 decimated the official Arab order; and the intense divisions between popular support for Iraq and official support for the coalition in many Arab states exacerbated domestic tensions. In

contrast to Palestine, about which regimes often encouraged popular mobilization in order to deflect domestic criticism, Iraq was seen by most Arab regimes as an issue to be avoided. The Iraq issue intensified the political differences of Arab states, while simultaneously helping to reconstitute and to mobilize an Arab public critical of the failure of the Arab order to deal with the problem.

The collective trauma of the first Gulf War, and the failure of the Arab order to deal with it, opened up the field for public argument. Indeed, the sense of general crisis almost demanded it. This potential remained tentative and untapped for several years, however, because of the absence of an appropriate media. Writers did debate the Iraq issue in the elite newspapers, which arguably had some limited influence on Arab state policies, but in general this represented a quiet, internal dialogue within clearly defined red lines. Over the course of the 1990s, however, popular movements from below, often led by social activists working beneath the radar of the official media, forced the Iraqi issue onto the agenda. The Iraqi regime encouraged these activists in a number of ways (described in chapter 3), but they did not create out of nothing the anger and outrage felt by Arabs who deeply identified with Iraqis visibly suffering under sanctions. Palpable public anger over the sanctions and over American bombings of Iraq undermined the pragmatic inclinations of the Arab regimes, forcing them to address the issue at least rhetorically.

With Al-Jazeera's explosive coverage of the December 1998 "Desert Fox" bombing campaign, this new Arab public sphere finally found its voice. Al-Jazeera was virtually the only network operating in Iraq by the end of 1998—just as it was virtually alone in Afghanistan in the fall of 2001. Personnel of al-Jazeera themselves "regard this as the milestone event that brought it to the international attention of many Arab viewers" (Rugh 2004a: 217). After watching the massive street protests against the bombing of Iraq in December 1998 on al-Jazeera, one Arab writer declared that "as the night does not resemble the morning, the winter of 1998 cannot resemble the summer of 1991. . . . Where the Gulf crisis divided the Arabs, these attacks united us."<sup>13</sup>

That Arab opinion changed over time cannot seriously be doubted. A number of major Arab states, including Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia, joined the American coalition against Iraq in the 1991 war,

with that campaign authorized by an Arab League resolution (albeit a contested one). An early study of elite public opinion in the Gulf found that as late as January 1991 some 86 percent agreed that Saddam Hussein bore primary responsibility for the crisis (Ismael and Ismael 1993). Seven years later, in February 1998, 94.1 percent of Palestinians supported Iraq in its confrontation with the United States. By April 2002, only 3 percent of Egyptians favored an American attack against Iraq and 84 percent were against; 7 percent of Lebanese for and 84 percent against; 11 percent of Saudis for and 80 percent against; 13 percent of Kuwaitis for and 61 percent against.<sup>14</sup>

A Zogby poll in early 2003 found that 95 percent of Saudis, 58 percent of Jordanians, and 74 percent of Lebanese believed that the war would create less rather than more democracy; 97 percent of Saudis and 78 percent of Jordanians believed it would create more terrorism. A BBC poll in Jordan in February 2003 found that 68 percent of Jordanians believed that the American motivation for attacking Iraq was to secure oil supplies, while only 4 percent thought that it was to prevent another 9/11 and only 16 percent thought it was to depose Saddam.<sup>15</sup> 64 percent thought that removing Saddam would not make Iraq better off, and 22 percent thought that it would.

State policies followed these changes in public opinion, rather than creating them. At the time of the Gulf War, the entire Gulf Cooperation Council (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, UAE, Qatar, Oman) took strong positions against Iraq, as did Egypt, Syria, Morocco, and Lebanon, in spite of often pro-Iraqi public opinion. By the mid-1990s, only Saudi Arabia and Kuwait remained strongly supportive of American policy toward Iraq in public, even if many Arab leaders continued to support the containment of Iraq privately (Ebert 1992). By the end of the 1990s, most Arab leaders opposed the sanctions in private as well as in public. The first full Arab summit in a decade, held in 2000 in response to Arab popular anger over the Intifada, pointedly included Iraq, signaling the linkages between these two key Arab issues. In March 2002 an Arab summit in Beirut finally brought about a public Arab consensus on restoring Iraq to the Arab order, while a succession of Arab leaders pointedly rejected American vice president Dick Cheney's suggestion that they privately supported the American agenda of war against Iraq.

This change in attitude did not take place naturally, nor did it reflect some pre-rational emotional bond with fellow Arabs. On the contrary, the invasion and occupation of Iraq in 2003 came at the end of a long, tortured public Arab argument. The antiwar consensus produced by these arguments was deeply rooted not only in Arab interests but in this newly constructed Arabist identity. Opposition to the invasion of Iraq merged with a general anger with American policies, as well as disgust with actors viewed as American proxies in the region—from Israel to the Iraqi opposition and Kuwait. The sympathy with the Iraqi people, embodied in the demand to lift the sanctions and opposition to military action against Iraq, emerged through a complex and sustained public argument in the new Arab public sphere. This new public prioritized questions of Arab identity, searching to define Arabness in new ways and to challenge the stagnant and repressive status quo.

### **Saddam, the Iraqi Opposition, and the Arab Public**

Saddam himself enjoyed little popularity by the late 1990s. In a February 1998 survey of Palestinian opinion, for example, 72.4 percent supported Iraq against the United States because of their sympathy with the Iraqi people and only 28.9 percent because of their support for Saddam Hussein's regime. The collapse in support for Saddam personally came partly because of deep frustration with the endless crisis, but also in no small part because the horrors of his regime were far more widely aired in the new Arab public sphere than they had been during the 1980s, when Saddam's Iraq had been the Arab champion against Islamic Iran and Saddam himself had been lionized in the Kuwaiti and Gulf media. While the sanction-induced suffering of the Iraqi people became a core shared point of Arab identity over the course of the 1990s, however, most commentators carefully distanced themselves from overtly glorifying Saddam's regime. For many critics, such a distinction was untenable: protests against the sanctions strengthened Saddam's hand in negotiations with the United Nations, regardless of the sympathies of the protesters. Such criticism became more influential, and more poignant,