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Baghdad-Based Reporters Issued Piles of Unreliable, Inaccurate "Reporting" On Iraqi Public Opinion

Wrong, Wrong, Wrong on the "Arab Street"

The crowds of jubilant Iraqis toppling Saddam Hussein statues underscore a crucial point about journalism from behind enemy lines. Talking about public opinion within a dictatorship is a preposterous — and as yesterday would suggest, highly inaccurate — business. Here, then, is a short review of how tremendously wrong Baghdad-based reporters were about Iraqi opinion:

☛ "Many Iraqis believe America's true motive is to remove Saddam Hussein from power, install a puppet government and seize Iraq's vast oil wealth. On the streets, many see Hussein's offer to allow the inspectors back as a wise, brave decision showing strength." — NBC's Ron Allen reporting from Baghdad for the September 17 *Nightly News*.

☛ "Iraqi reverence for President Saddam Hussein is rarely more expressive than when their leader calls a referendum....Amid even bolder demonstrations of devotion to the Iraqi leader, students at Baghdad's fine arts school, too young to vote in the last referendum in 1995, appear eager now." — CNN's Nic Robertson on *American Morning*, October 14.

☛ "It's official, yet still unbelievable! Saddam Hussein re-elected to another seven-year term as President in a referendum where he got 100 percent of the vote! The celebrations were genuine, but already the validity of the vote is being questioned. The Bush administration dismissed the vote as not credible." — NBC's Keith Miller on the October 16 *Today*.

☛ "On the streets of Baghdad, the word to the U.S. is essentially, 'Put up or shut up!' People here just don't believe their President is hiding weapons of mass destruction. These men say the inspectors have found nothing because Iraq has nothing to hide, that the U.S. government's real agenda is to seize Iraq's oil fields." — NBC's Ann Curry in Baghdad on *Today*, February 5.

☛ In return for singing "Itsy Bitsy Spider" to Iraqi kids on the February 10 *Good Morning America*, Diane Sawyer said

"I got a song back. It is a song about Saddam Hussein, his strength and their desire to protect him."

☛ "Tonight, word of America's new deadline and threat of war faded no one at this Baghdad cafe. 'America is a terrorist country,' he [one Iraqi man] says." — NBC's Ron Allen reporting from Baghdad for the March 7 *Nightly News*.

☛ On the March 7 *GMA*, Diane Sawyer asked: "I read this morning that he's also said the love that the Iraqis have for him is so much greater than anything Americans feel for their President because he's been loved for 35 years, he says, the whole 35 years." Dan Harris in Baghdad replied: "He is one to point out quite frequently that he is part of a

historical trend in this country of restoring Iraq to its greatness, its historical greatness. He points out frequently that he was elected with a hundred percent margin recently."

☛ "I asked this man if he thinks the war is about liberating him from Saddam's brutal regime. 'Liberation?' he asked me. 'Who asked for America to liberate us?'" — ABC reporter Richard Engel, April 2 *World News Tonight*.

☛ "And people here have been buoyed by the sight of Saddam Hussein on Iraqi television last night....greeting people in a residential area of Baghdad." — CBS reporter Lara Logan on *The Early Show*, April 5.

In all the liberal media fuss over the quick-trigger anti-Americanism in the Mideast, perhaps yesterday's reactions will jar reporters who love to "question authority" into wondering about the accuracy of Arab tyrannies in their "Arab street" blustering. Perhaps these regimes should not be considered reliable sources on regional public opinion until they liberate their own "Arab streets." — *Tim Graham*

No Longer "Impossible" to Discover

"Seven years ago, when the last referendum took place, Saddam Hussein won 99.96 percent of the vote. Of course, it is impossible to say whether that's a true measure of the Iraqi people's feelings." — ABC's David Wright, October 15 *World News Tonight*.

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