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"Seeing no evil doesn't mean there is no evil"

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By Firas Al-Atraqchi
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(YellowTimes.org) – In recent weeks, I have been writing more profusely about the Iraq situation. I have been in touch with various Iraqi groups and individuals, human rights groups, non-governmental agencies, and other independent journalists who have visited Iraq since the capture of Baghdad. The news from all is absolutely dismal; Iraq has disintegrated into a ruthless avenue of rogue militias serving one cleric or another, various business interests of some foreign-based Iraqi corporations competing against other Arab enterprises, or a spectacular venue for revenge killing.

The capture of Saddam, which is meaningless at this point, has not helped Iraqis come together in a spirit of reconciliation. Rather, it has propagated and hastened Iraq's decline into a violent, inhospitable battleground between various ethnicities. While Iraqis butcher one another in the ungovernable environment systematically created by the U.S. presence in Iraq, U.S. media continues to tout the White House line that there are "good stories" coming out of Iraq. White House officials have chastised the media, in fact, for not reporting on these stories. These officials claim that Iraqis are on the verge of a new dawn, enjoying a freedom never enjoyed by any other Arab populace. Unfortunately, there couldn't be anything farther from the truth. Iraqis today are experiencing anarchy not democracy, chaos not liberty, lawlessness not security. The country is about to be torn asunder; a civil war is brewing in the north.

So, there you go. I effectively called these White House officials liars, systematic and contrived in the fabricated news they put out to an audience that cares very little for what happens to Iraqis now.

With such an understanding of the outside world, it is no surprise that I receive e-mails calling me a liar, a propagandist, or, surprisingly, that I am employed by U.S. presidential hopeful Howard Dean. No such luck, I have never met Dean. These same said e-mails quickly ask me where my evidence is that Iraq is in chaos, or, more astonishingly, what made me an expert on Iraq. I suppose the fact that I speak the language and have Iraqi heritage is not enough. I suppose the fact that I hear from Iraqis on a daily basis, some crying on the phone, narrating the horrors of Iraq, is not enough. I suppose the fact that I am in the Middle East right now seeing the horrors unfold on a daily basis is not enough.

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I do respond to these detractors. I ask "where were your calls for evidence when the White House knew beyond a shadow of a doubt that Iraq had WMDs?" "Where were your calls for proof when the world was told by U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell that Iraq had bio-labs," which were consequently shown to be labs for processing hydrogen for weather balloons. Where was the scrutiny, the doubt, the demand for hard, analytical evidence? Why aren't the same people who said they know for a fact Iraq could strike U.S. shores speaking up now that it was discovered the Iraqi army had been plagued by 13 years of U.N. sanctions and was effectively subdued?

Were people asleep and just woke up demanding a more forthright approach to journalism? No, hardly, but the answer lies in ethnocentrism, racism and pug arrogance. The ethnocentrism and racism are derived from the subconscious understanding that only Western media can tell the truth. Examine for a moment how ridiculed Al Jazeera was for its coverage of the Iraq war. They were called, flatly, liars. Why? Well, because they showed a side of the story no one in the U.S. wanted to hear. When Canadian media offered a different side to the war in Iraq, a sharp rebuke was delivered from Washington.

When various news networks aired captured U.S. soldiers, there was a flurry of protest that this was a violation of human rights, the Geneva conventions and so on. When YellowTimes.org published pictures of U.S. soldiers and Iraqi civilian dead, the response was so aggressive that YellowTimes.org was forced offline, threatened, branded as traitors. However, and sadly, when Iraqi soldiers were paraded, when Iraqi dead were shown, when CNN showed U.S. soldiers cheering as they shot a wounded Iraqi officer in the back, there was no outcry. There was no protest. Why? Well, it seems okay to show Iraqis in such humiliating scenarios because, after all, they are Iraqis. They aren't white, they aren't Americans, and so it's okay to bend the rules a little. Anyone who tried to tell a different side to the beautiful pictures on your television screens was branded a traitor, an anarchist, a terrorist-hugger.

Shocking? Not really, because this happens on a daily basis. When an Israeli is killed by a Palestinian, U.S. media presents the audience with the synopsis of the Israeli's life, his hobbies, his family, his childhood dreams. The reader is then enraged and feels sympathy and compassion for the Israeli, who is identified by name. When a Palestinian is killed, there are no names, no life stories. Just the word "militant." No compassion for that dog.

Even more striking is the use of the phrase "relative calm." Last week, a suicide bomber killed himself and 4 other Israelis at a bus stop in Israel. U.S. media reported on the suicide bombing having broken the relative calm that prevailed in the area. That relative calm was also a period that saw the killing of 117 Palestinians, various Israeli military incursions, wounding and maiming of countless hundreds of other Palestinians. While U.S. media shoved the story of relative calm aside and focused on *American Idol* and Michael Jackson, Arab media was showing pictures of horror and terror. Relative calm is the epitome of hypocrisy; it is relative calm when Palestinians are killed and Israelis are not.

That's where the racism and ethnocentrism come in. No one wants to hear what the Arabs have to say. So, U.S. media, and

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by default, the American people shut their senses to what is really happening in the world.

At the end of it, we all lose from this charade.

[Firas Al-Atraqchi, B.Sc (Physics), M.A. (Journalism and Communications), is a Canadian journalist with eleven years of experience covering Middle East issues, oil and gas markets, and the telecom industry.]

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