

**THE BLOG**

Paris is Push; Baghdad is Pull

By Marty Kaplan

06/07/2007 11:57 am ET | Updated May 25, 2011

Within 24 hours, no primate on the planet will be unaware of Paris Hilton's transfer from the pokie to the ankle bracelet, but it is a safe bet that within weeks or even months, relatively few Americans will know the big news going down now in Iraq.

That's because journalism is distributed in two flavors: push and pull.

Push-news is what media gatekeepers dangle to grab our lizard-brain attention. It's most apparent in the stories that dominate local television news, which an astonishing 70 percent of Americans say is their primary source of information: crime, celebrity, fires, freak accidents, cats behind drywall, and cross-promotion of network entertainment. This diet of fear, freakshows and touching human interest stories now also drives cable news programming, which has largely become the national version of local news, with bile-spitting national pundits filling in for happy-talking local anchors.

Pull-news is what people seek out. If you read a national newspaper or small-circulation magazines; if you've found non-MSM radio and television programming that values importance over sensation; if you seek out online news aggregators whose priorities you find nutritious; if you bookmark blogs whose hyperlinks take you off the beaten path — if you've become your own meta-editor and meta-publisher, then you're among the minority who have filled the responsibility-vacuum abdicated by push-news.

This week, the Iraqi parliament "passed a binding resolution that will guarantee lawmakers an opportunity to block the extension of the U.N. mandate under which coalition troops now remain in Iraq when it comes up for renewal in December." But if you didn't read that in an exclusive altnet.org story by Raed Jarrar and Joshua Holland, or if you didn't get an email from a friend (as I did) saying, Didja see this?, you might not know that a majority of Iraqi lawmakers has now fashioned a two-by-four to thump President Bush on the head and end our occupation. But no doubt you *would* know about the girl locked in a tiny room in Connecticut.

This week, Iraqi Prime Minister Nouri Maliki's top political adviser said "he doubts the prime minister will be able to win passage of key legislation ardently sought by U.S. officials, including a law governing the oil industry and one that would allow more Sunni Arabs to gain government jobs." But if you didn't read that in Ned Parker's exclusive story in

the *Los Angeles Times*, you might not now know that even the Iraqi government has given up on meeting crucial political benchmarks by September. But surely you'd be thoroughly familiar with the anorexia plague stalking starlets.

And as for military benchmarks, a few days ago al-Maliki said, "I have to watch the army, because those still loyal to the previous regime may start planning coups. Those people don't believe in democracy, and for that reason we are monitoring the status of the army very closely." A military coup - by the army we're training! But if you didn't see Lara Logan's exclusive interview with al-Maliki on the cellar-rated *CBS Evening News*, or watch the clip online, you wouldn't know how close our "freedom agenda" is to becoming a Musharaf-style "democracy." But you'd definitely know that the TB guy's bride is a hottie.

The upside of the ubiquity of Paris push-news is the inevitable — I hope — comparison with Scooter Libby. If he spends five days in the slammer bawling on the phone to Dick Cheney, will that get him a house-arrest (or will Dick duck the call)? The downside of the obscurity of Baghdad pull-news is that most of the 24/7 infotainment sewage we swim in remains bereft of reporting from Iraq beyond the repetitive, depressing, and depressingly numbing body-counts.

Democracy, said our Founders, depends on an educated citizenry. That's why they protected the news business with the First Amendment. On the other hand, it's a good bet that *Spring Comes Early for Paris* isn't exactly what they had in mind.

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