



**Arab Media Watch**  
for objective British coverage of Arab issues

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## **Monitoring Study:**

# **ITV News Coverage of the Arab World**

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## SUMMARY

*Monitoring period: 1 September - 30 November 2007 (excluding weekends)*

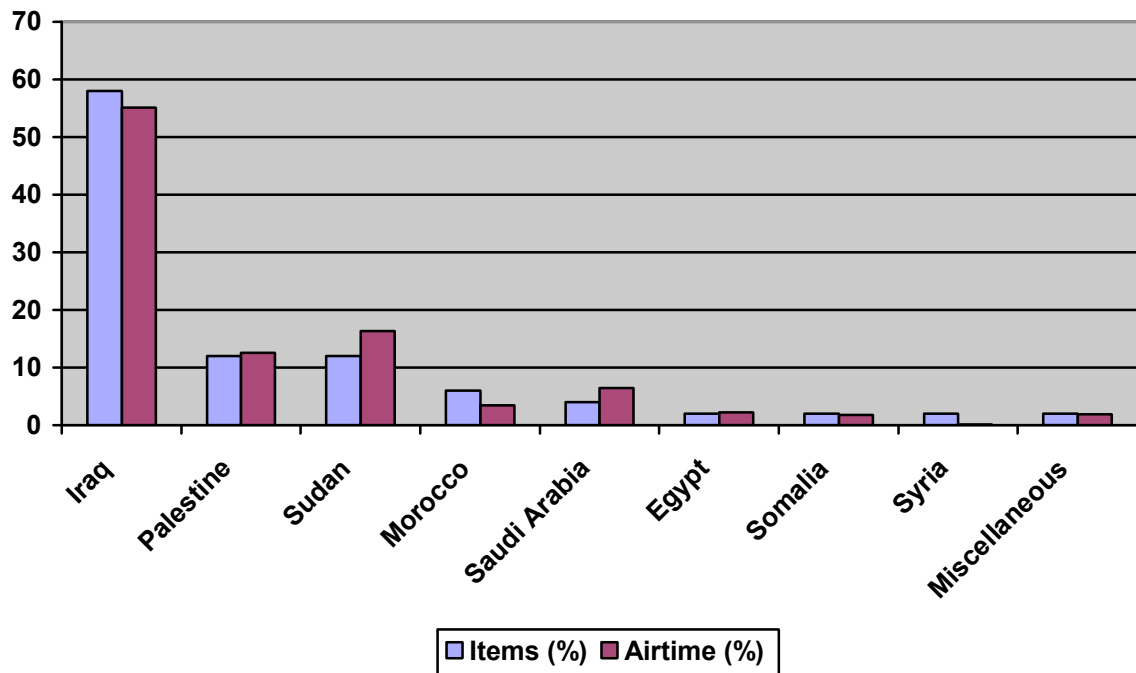
For three months, Arab Media Watch taped, transcribed and analysed the ITV news at 6.30pm, which is its news broadcast with the highest viewing figures, according to the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board. Henceforth, all mentions of ITV will refer to this particular programme.

During the monitoring period, 49 items relating to the Arab world were broadcast, totalling almost two hours of airtime. Of the 22 members of the League of Arab States, 10 were covered. Iraq had the majority of items and airtime, followed by Sudan and Palestine. The breakdown for each country is as follows:

<b>Country</b>	<b>Items</b>	<b>% Total Items</b>	<b>Airtime</b>	<b>Average Length</b>	<b>% Total Airtime</b>
<b>Egypt</b>	1	2	2m 30s	2m 30s	2.2
<b>Iraq</b>	28	58	63m 29s	2m 07s	55.1
<b>Morocco</b>	3	6	4m 03s	1m 21s	3.5
<b>Palestine</b>	6	12	13m 49s	2m 18s	12.6
<b>Saudi Arabia</b>	2	4	7m 29s	3m 44.5s	6.5
<b>Somalia</b>	1	2	2m 03s	2m 3s	1.8
<b>Sudan</b>	6	12	18m 58s	3m 10s	16.3
<b>Syria</b>	1	2	0m 03s	0m 03s	0.1
<b>Miscellaneous*</b>	1	2	2m 07s	2m 07s	1.9
<b>Total</b>	49	100	114m 58s	2m 21s	100

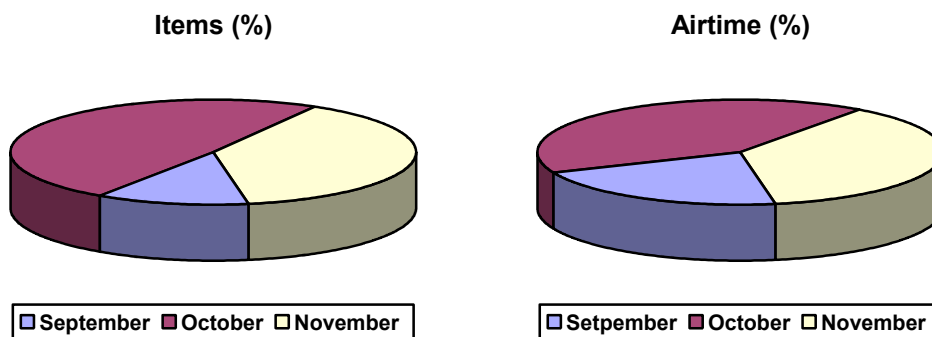
\* Includes Lebanon and Yemen.

This information, displayed as a percentage of total items and airtime, is as follows:



Although ITV averaged approximately 16 Arab-related items and just over 38 minutes of airtime per month, September was particularly quiet: there were four times as many items in October, and more than three times as many in November. Likewise, there was almost half as much airtime in September as each of the other months.

<u>Month</u>	<u>Items</u>	<u>Items (%)</u>	<u>Airtime</u>	<u>Airtime (%)</u>
September	6	12.3	24m 28s	21.3
October	24	48.9	47m 53s	41.6
November	19	38.8	42m 37s	37.1



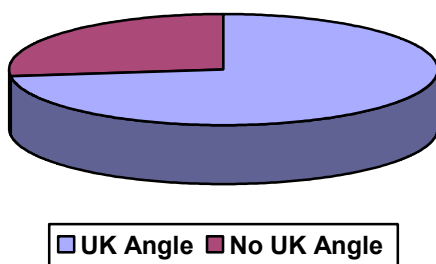
The average length of an item was 2 minutes and 21 seconds, though a third of the items were under a minute each, averaging 17 seconds.

## Angles

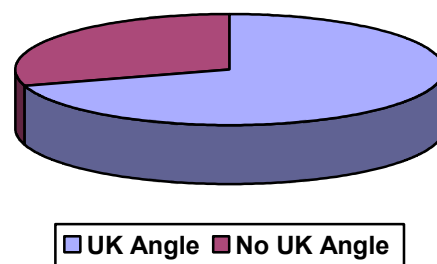
There were almost three times as many items with a British angle (and more than double the airtime) as those without. Of the latter, eight items were on Iraq, four on Palestine and one on Syria.

	<u>Items</u>	<u>Items (%)</u>	<u>Airtime (s)</u>	<u>Airtime (%)</u>	<u>Average Length (s)</u>
UK Angle	36	73	4,847	70.2	135
No UK Angle	13	27	2,051	29.8	158

**Angles (%)**



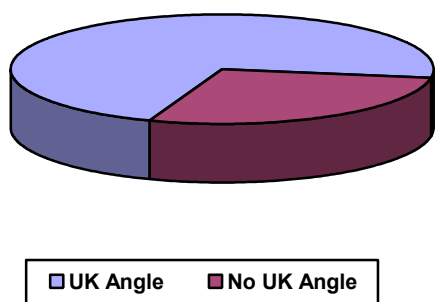
**Airtime (%)**



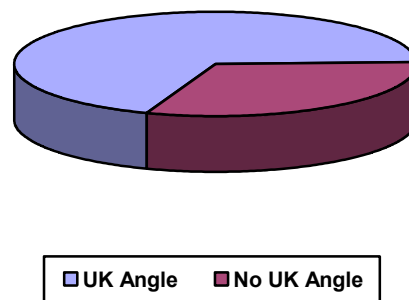
## IRAQ

	<u>Items</u>	<u>Items (%)</u>	<u>Airtime (s)</u>	<u>Airtime (%)</u>	<u>Average Length (s)</u>
UK Angle	21	75	2,732	71	130
No UK Angle	7	25	1,104	29	158

**Items (%)**



**Airtime (%)**



Twenty-one of the 28 Iraq-related items had a direct and predominant British angle: three on the political relationship between the government and military; three on British troops in Iraq; four on the significance of Iraq on domestic politics; four on returning soldiers and their pursuit for justice; and seven on various domestic issues, including the poppy appeal, an alleged terrorist camp in the New Forest, and the implications of sanctions imposed on Iraq by the US.

The remaining seven items had no British angle: two on US private security firms in Iraq; two on Turkey's plans for military action in the country; and one each on the surge, General Petraeus in Congress, and war veterans in the US.

## **Human Cost of War**

ITV's reporting of the human cost of the war was highly selective, weighted heavily in favour of the British and Americans.

### ***British fatalities and bereaved***

In the 21 items with a British angle, there were 12 references to British soldiers who had died in Iraq, and the search for justice that their families have undertaken where necessary.

Seven soldiers were individually named, while the nine-year-old daughter of another was named and interviewed about her father. Two pieces dealt with the death of soldier Gordon Gentle and his mother's fight for an inquest, totalling 8 minutes and 53 seconds.

It was made clear when the soldiers died, and reference was made to the total number of British soldiers killed in Iraq. These items on soldier's deaths also reported the grief of the bereaved.

### ***British injured and returned soldiers***

The continued welfare and recognition of the efforts of injured and returned soldiers featured prominently in news coverage. In total, 12 minutes and 48 seconds in six items - at an average of 2 minutes and 8 seconds each - were given to issues such as the government's duty of care to soldiers, the unveiling of a war memorial, or awards for bravery.

### ***US injured and returned soldiers***

An item on 10 September 2007 on General Petraeus appearing before Congress included a segment from Fort Hood, a US military base in Texas, which was sensitively handled to show the human cost of war to families whose parents are serving in Iraq.

The piece is notable for being the longest news item broadcast on ITV during the monitoring period - 9 minutes and 40 seconds - and for containing the highest number of sources: six (each given an average of 11 seconds).

Of these, five were from Fort Hood; two were children whose parents were serving in Iraq; one was the school councillor of many more children like them; one was a serving soldier who did not want to return to Iraq; and one was a war widow.

### ***Turkish deaths***

ITV reported twice on Turkish casualties in northern Iraq. In one report, "dozens" of Turkish soldiers were killed "in recent days," and in the other, "eight are being held hostage, kidnapped in an ambush...which left 12 of their colleagues dead."

### ***Iraqi deaths***

Only three news items out of 29 reported Iraqi deaths, and two of those were on the same incident. The first instance was nine words in passing from correspondent Tom Bradley, and only hinted at the scale or impact: "...not to mention the thousands of Iraqis who have died."

The second and third instances were a preview on 19 September 2007 of the 10pm news (8 seconds), and the report on 30 October (2 minutes and 55 seconds) on the conduct of security contractors in Iraq, who were responsible for the deaths of 17 civilians. The longer item also concerned the immunity from law of the contractors, and their being brought to justice.

This piece is also notable for being only the second (and last) item broadcast during the monitoring period that used an Iraqi source, and the first (and only) that provided a name for an Iraqi source.

A tally of figures in the database provided by Iraq Body Count reveals that well over 3,000 Iraqis died in over 1,100 incidents during the monitoring period.

<http://www.iraqbodycount.org/database/incidents/>

This body count may be seen as conservative, given the fact that the IBC only includes documented, violent, civilian (non-combatant) deaths.

<http://www.iraqbodycount.org/about/>

At the same time, no mention was made of the millions of Iraqis who have been injured, bereaved or displaced by the conflict.

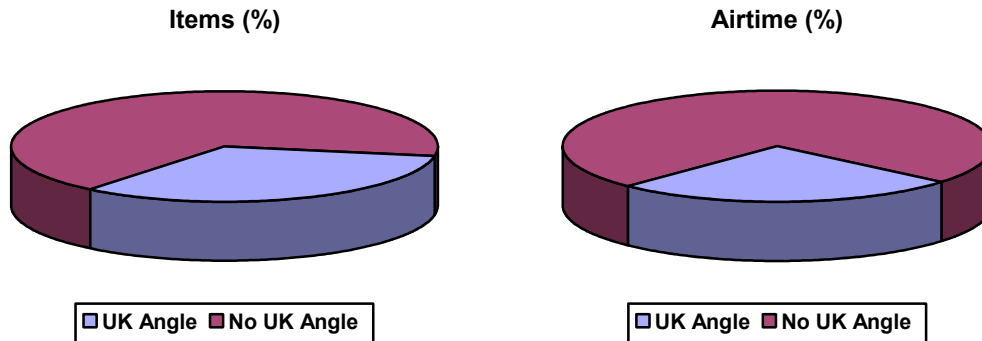
Rose Gentle, the mother of a British soldier killed in Iraq, says in a 7 November piece: "They have deprived me of a beautiful son, and his...two sisters of a brother."

Ursula Pirtle, widow of an American soldier, said in a 10 September report that she copes with her loss in a support group: "There are a lot of tissue boxes. We do a lot of laughing, a lot of crying, and a lot of everything. You run the gamut of emotions."

Sadly, such humanisation was not given to Iraqis, who have borne the brunt of the human cost of the war.

## PALESTINE

	<u>Items</u>	<u>Items (%)</u>	<u>Airtime (s)</u>	<u>Airtime (%)</u>	<u>Average Length (s)</u>
UK Angle	2	33	214	26	107
No UK Angle	4	67	615	74	154



The coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict displayed a certain ambiguity due to a lack of context. Furthermore, Palestinians were rarely given the opportunity to speak for themselves.

There were sympathetic portrayals of the situation of Palestinians in the occupied territories:

"For 46-year-old Maher from Gaza City, Israel's blockade is a matter of life and death." (2 November 2007)

"At 4 a.m. they start their journey to work, Palestinian labourers who work on farms controlled by Israeli settlers." (26 November)

However, no real context was provided for why the blockade is taking place, or what a 'settler' is settling on - occupied Palestinian land. This lack of context was equally true of other sections of the coverage.

In an item on rocket fire into Israel broadcast on 25 October 2007, the descriptions that correspondent Damon Green provided of the Palestinians were mere caricatures, labelling them as "those who just want to kill" and having "a very real desire to kill."

There is a relationship between the Palestinians described in the 25 October item and, say, "46-year-old Maher from Gaza City," as the Israeli blockade of Gaza (which was in place before Hamas took over the territory) fuels directly the activity of those firing the rockets.



It is therefore inaccurate to describe them as just wanting to kill, and this dehumanisation sheds little light on the dire humanitarian crisis unfolding in Gaza that was the subject of the 2 November item.

Seven sources overall were used in the six items broadcast. Two were Palestinian and two were Israeli, and in total were given almost exactly the same amount of airtime: 25 and 24 seconds respectively.

However, there was a notable disparity in the 27 November item on the Annapolis conference, where US President George Bush and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert were interviewed, but Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas - who was present - was not.

## **SUDAN**

Of the six news items on Sudan, one was about Darfur and the rest were about British school teacher Gillian Gibbons.

The Darfur piece was about the impact of celebrities on raising the profile of the conflict and humanitarian situation. It could be seen as unfortunate that the celebrity angle is the characteristic that prompted coverage - no other items were broadcast during the monitoring period, despite the 200,000 dead and 2 million displaced, as the report suggests.

The items on Gibbons were done fairly well, avoiding unnecessary judgement on Sudan, its legal system or its pronouncements. There was also a fairly well balanced use of sources: 14 were used, of which six were Sudanese (roughly 43%). The Sudanese sources were given a total of 93 seconds of airtime (45%), whereas the others were given a total of 115 seconds (55%).

## **SAUDI ARABIA**

ITV coverage of the Saudi royal visit to Britain revealed a tendency to condemn without hearing a different side to the story. During the two items broadcast on 29 and 30 October 2007, there were only sources critical of the Saudi government.

There was also a certain stringency in the reporting of information. William Sampson was used as a source on 29 October with the caption "Former Saudi prisoner," one whom correspondent Chris Ship introduces as having been sentenced to death four years ago. Yet to explain his presence four years later very much alive, it would have made sense to mention that he was granted clemency. This was not done.

In general, balance would have been better served with the use of Saudi sources.

## **SOMALIA**

There was a good piece explaining the racial harassment faced by 12 Somali families living in Bristol, though viewers would have been better informed had some analysis of daily life in Somalia been made, thereby placing their living in Bristol in context.

## **EGYPT**

The only relevant item concerned the exhibition in London of artefacts from Pharaonic Egypt. The piece contained several mentions of the artefacts being "back to enthral another generation" ("back in Britain after 35 years"; "on display in Britain again" etc). Despite several mentions of a fascination with ancient Egypt, there is no mention of modern Egypt, the country to whom these artefacts belong.

## **MOROCCO**

The mention of Morocco in the three news items was incidental, in connection with missing British girl Madeleine McCann.

## **SYRIA**

The reference to Syria was in passing, as the destination of a Russian freighter.

## **MISCELLANEOUS**

In an item on 5 September 2007 about a foiled terrorist attack, a segment of 2 minutes and 7 seconds was introduced thus: "America's history is littered with attacks against its civilians on foreign soil," in which correspondent Tim Ewart "looks at the terrorists who target America." The total number of deaths listed is 509.

Although AMW strongly condemns attacks against civilians, the interests of the viewer are better served by a strong factual basis, not provided by the report. In fact:

- The 241 marines killed in Beirut and the 17 sailors killed on the USS Cole in Aden were military, not civilians
- The 1998 Embassy bombings killed around 12 Americans (Africans were killed in the greatest number)
- The Riyadh 2003 attack killed nine Americans (27 overall were killed)

So 21 American civilians were killed, not the 509 reported. As a result of this inaccuracy, 488 deaths - American military and non-American - were poorly reported. The problem of terrorism is of universal concern, as the figures above testify.

This item represented the only mention of Lebanon and Yemen during the monitoring period.

## **MISSED NEWS**

During the monitoring period, ITV missed a considerable amount of major news from the Arab world that was reported by other mainstream British news outlets. Following is a brief synopsis:

- A summit in Annapolis took place, bringing together Israel and most Arab states.
- Israel declared the Gaza Strip a "hostile entity," with frequent incursions into the territory, many civilian deaths, and reports of a looming humanitarian disaster.
- Thousands were killed in Iraq, and there was an outcry over the killing of civilians by the private US security firm Blackwater.
- Israel bombed Syria.
- A Lebanese MP was killed by a car bomb.
- The stand-off in the Nahr al-Bared Palestinian refugee camp in Lebanon, which claimed over 400 lives (both combatants and civilians) came to an end.
- Algeria, Morocco, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and Yemen acted in various ways - including killing, arrest, trial and imprisonment - against Islamists and alleged Al Qaeda members.
- There was a wealth of business-related news from the Arab Gulf states: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.

## CONCLUSION / RECOMMENDATIONS

- There were 64 broadcasts in three months, consisting of 49 Arab-related items totalling almost 115 minutes. This works out at around two items every three days, with an average length of almost two and a half minutes.

However, distribution and content could be improved. September featured only six news items, and the coverage overall only dealt with two Arab countries (Iraq and Palestine) without a British angle, or without being incidental to the story.

Ten out of 22 Arab countries were reported during the monitoring period, but in terms of number of items and airtime, ITV focused 82% and 84% respectively of its news coverage on just three: Iraq, Palestine and Sudan. Iraq alone accounted for 57% of news items and 55% of airtime.

The Arab world spans a vast area of tremendous geopolitical, economic and strategic importance. As such, a great deal of news was not reported that should have been, and which was covered by other mainstream British news outlets.

- ITV should not rely so much on its international news having a direct British angle. Overall, there were almost three times as many items with this angle as those without, with over double the airtime. There was no coverage of Egypt, Morocco, Somalia or Sudan without a British angle, almost all the Saudi coverage had a British angle, and 75% of items and 71% of airtime on Iraq had a British angle.

While AMW recognises that this may attract more interest from British viewers, ITV coverage largely gives the impression that if something does not have such an angle, it is not news. This limits the scope of news that its viewers are exposed to.

Of the seven items relating to Iraq without a British angle, two had an American angle (69% of airtime) and five had an Iraqi angle, including a Kurdish angle (13% of airtime). Non-Kurdish Iraqi stories made up just 18% of the airtime of items without a British angle.

Greater coverage should be given to the communities who live in Iraq and have to deal with the consequences of the invasion - five such items (18%) out of 28, and 342 seconds of airtime (just under 9%) out of 3,836 are not enough.

- While AMW recognises that there are too many Iraqi deaths and violent incidents to report individually and at length, and that British deaths will be of particular concern to its viewers, ITV should redress its major imbalance in the amount of coverage given to British and Iraqi fatalities, as well as the way they are reported.

During the monitoring period, only a tiny fraction of Iraqi deaths were reported (17 out of several thousand) in just one incident (out of more than 1,100). On the other hand, British deaths were reported in several items, and most were humanised with names and descriptions, unlike the reported Iraqi fatalities. This gives the impression that Iraqi life is of less news value.