



Arab Media Watch
for objective British coverage of Arab issues

Monitoring Study:

Channel 4 News Coverage of the Arab World

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SUMMARY

Monitoring period: 15 November - 31 December 2007 (excluding weekends)

For six weeks, Arab Media Watch taped, transcribed and analysed the 7pm Channel 4 news, which is its flagship news broadcast. Henceforth, all mentions of Channel 4 will refer to this particular programme.

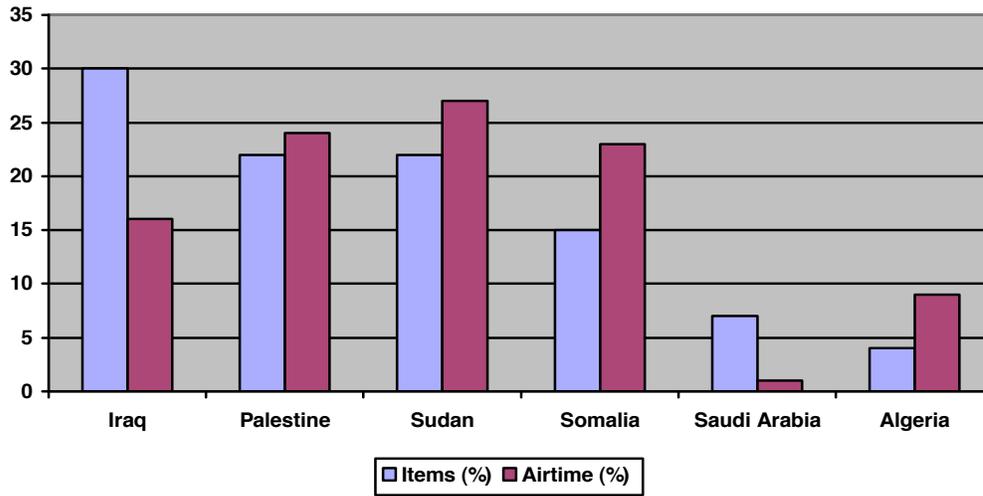
During the monitoring period, 27 items relating to the Arab world were broadcast, totalling just over an hour and 20 minutes of airtime, and averaging almost an item per day. Of the 22 members of the League of Arab States, six were covered: Algeria, Iraq, Palestine, Saudi Arabia, Somalia and Sudan.

Iraq had the most items, followed equally by Palestine and Sudan, but Sudan had the most airtime, followed by Palestine then Somalia. Algeria had the least items followed by Saudi Arabia, though the two countries switched places in terms of airtime.

The breakdown for each country is as follows:

Country	Items	% Total Items	Airtime	Average Length	% Total Airtime
Algeria	1	4	6m 52s	6m 52s	9
Iraq	8	30	13m 24s	1m 41s	16
Palestine	6	22	20m 5s	3m 21s	24
Saudi Arabia	2	7	1m	30s	1
Somalia	4	15	19m 8s	4m 47s	23
Sudan	6	22	22m 9s	3m 42s	27
Total	27	100	82m 38s	3m 4s	100

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



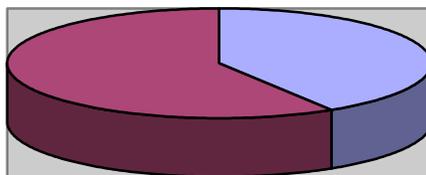
The average length of each item was 3 minutes and 4 seconds. Eleven items were less than a minute each.

Angles

In contrast to AMW studies on ITV and Channel 5, Channel 4 displayed a demonstrable focus on international news. Those items with a UK angle represented a minority of items and airtime, consisting of all the Sudan and Saudi items, and half the Iraq items. However, airtime on Iraq was heavily weighted in favour of those items with a UK angle.

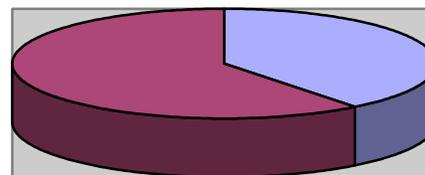
	<u>Items</u>	<u>Items (%)</u>	<u>Airtime (s)</u>	<u>Airtime (%)</u>	<u>Average Length (s)</u>
UK Angle	11	41	1959	39.5	178
No UK Angle	16	59	3001	60.5	188

Angles (%)



UK Angle No UK Angle

Airtime (%)

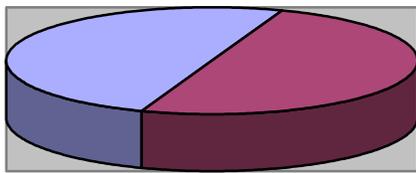


UK Angle No UK Angle

IRAQ

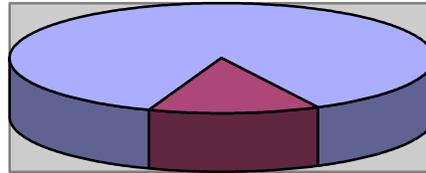
	<u>Items</u>	<u>Items (%)</u>	<u>Airtime (s)</u>	<u>Airtime (%)</u>	<u>Average Length (s)</u>
UK Angle	4	50	702	87	176
No UK Angle	4	50	102	13	26

Items (%)



■ UK Angle ■ No UK Angle

Airtime (%)



■ UK Angle ■ No UK Angle

Three of the four reports containing no UK angle were on suicide attacks, and the fourth was on the arrest of foreign security guards after they fired on civilians. The items with UK angles were on British troops in Basra, British hostages held in Iraq, and problems encountered by the Ministry of Defence regarding a computer system designed to help troops on deployment operate more effectively. There is sympathetic and objective coverage of Iraqis in those stories with a UK angle.

For example, a report on the security situation in Basra prior to the withdrawal of British troops, broadcast on 3 December 2007, paints a clear picture of the difficulties faced by ordinary Iraqis in the city, and in particular the dangers faced by those who have worked as interpreters for the British army.

The number of sources used was balanced, though British sources were given slightly more airtime than Iraqi ones. Only two of the eight items on Iraq used sources. Between them, three British and three Iraqi sources were used, with an average length of 23 and 18 seconds respectively.

Channel 4 is to be commended on avoiding sectarian labels which occur frequently in, and confuse, other coverage of the conflict. The terms 'Sunni' and 'Kurd' were not used, while 'Shia' was applied when appropriate as a descriptive term. Furthermore, a report on 14 December dealing with the withdrawal of British troops from Basra gave part of the coverage to the Marsh Arabs, an Iraqi minority that has been largely forgotten.

SOMALIA

Of the four news items on Somalia, three dealt with the instability following the Ethiopian invasion, and one brief piece was about piracy off the coast of Somalia. Coverage was in-depth and objective, describing the human costs and offering viewpoints of all those involved in the conflict.

A good range of sources were used in the pieces on the Ethiopian invasion: two from the UN, two from the US government, a statement from the Ethiopian government, and seven Somalis, including five ordinary people (such as residents, eye witnesses and doctors) and two insurgents.

The greatest amount of airtime was given to the UN emergency relief coordinator and the US Assistant Secretary of State - around two minutes each - whereas each Somali source was given on average around 12 seconds.

In total, 275 seconds were given to the five non-Somali sources: 141 seconds for the UN, 117 seconds for the US government, and 17 seconds for the Ethiopian government. The Somali sources, though greater in number, were given approximately three times less airtime (87 seconds). The coverage allowed for a full picture of the conflict, and gave a human face (and frequently name) to the humanitarian crisis in Somalia.

PALESTINE

Six items were broadcast on Palestine. Two were less than 30 seconds (about the release by Israel of Palestinian prisoners, and Palestinian militants killed in an Israeli incursion into the Gaza Strip), and the remaining four were on the situation in Gaza, Annapolis, and an art exhibition in Bethlehem.

The coverage of Palestine was well-rounded, and contained descriptions of the political and humanitarian aspects of the conflict. In terms of sources used, a voice was given to all the relevant parties to the subjects covered, including Hamas, the Israeli government, the World Health Organisation, and ordinary Palestinians.

Nine Palestinians were used as sources, of which six were ordinary people caught up in the conflict. Each Palestinian source was given an average of 16 seconds of airtime, making a total of 143 seconds, more than twice as long as the non-Palestinian sources. Two non-Palestinian sources were used - the WHO and Israeli government - totalling 68 seconds (32 and 36 seconds respectively).

SAUDI ARABIA

Channel 4 broadcast two items totalling one minute on Saudi Arabia, both of which had a UK angle: about a judge being removed from a divorce case involving a Saudi Sheikh (28 seconds), and a British resident returned from Guantanamo Bay who is a Saudi national (32 seconds).

SUDAN

Six items were broadcast on Sudan, all on the case of British teacher Gillian Gibbons. The coverage was in depth, with thorough and balanced use of sources.

Six Sudanese sources were given a total of 3 minutes and 14 seconds, and seven non-Sudanese sources were given a total of 3 minutes and 5 seconds. The Sudanese sources ranged from the man in the street to an Embassy official in London. The non-Sudanese sources included British politicians and Gibbons' son.

Although hinted at by the correspondent, Darfur ("where 200,000 people have died. The UN, on Saturday, declared the violence is getting worse") was not reported by Channel 4.

ALGERIA

There was an in-depth report on two bombs exploding at the UN offices in Algiers. The report quoted an Algerian government minister (nine words), and used three UN sources for a total of 141 seconds. The report was well-rounded, and acknowledged the deaths of not only the UN staff, but also Algerian civilians.

MISSED NEWS

- Iran's president was invited and attended for the first time a summit of the Gulf Cooperation Council: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. There was also a high-level meeting between Iran and Egypt.

- US President George Bush visited Israel and the West Bank regarding the Middle East peace process. He also visited Bahrain, Egypt, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia and the UAE.

- The independence movement Polisario held a congress on whether to revive its armed struggle against Morocco over Western Sahara.

- Libya became UN Council President, and its leader visited Paris to bolster trade partnerships.

- Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Tunisia continued their fight against Islamic militancy.

- Hundreds were killed in Sudan's Darfur region due to attacks from all sides, and unrest near the Chadian border continued to create many refugees. There were also ongoing difficulties over the fragile peace between northern and southern Sudan.

- A power vacuum persisted in Lebanon, with the presidency remaining unfilled due to disagreement between the government and opposition. Also, a car bomb killed a general who was set to lead the army, creating further instability.