



Arab Media Watch
for objective British coverage of Arab issues

Monitoring Study:

Channel 5 News Coverage of the Arab World

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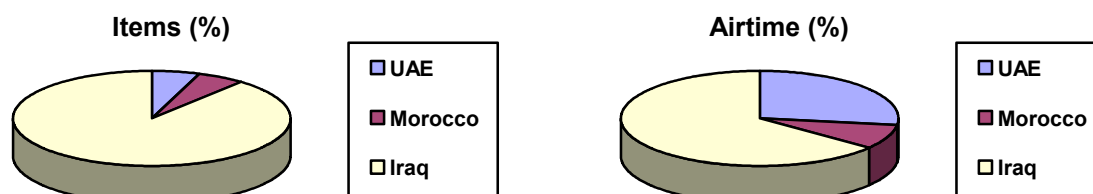
SUMMARY

Monitoring period: 1 August - 31 October 2007 (excluding weekends)

For three months, Arab Media Watch taped, transcribed and analysed the Channel 5 news at 5.30pm, which is its news broadcast with the highest viewing figures, according to the Broadcasters' Audience Research Board. Henceforth, all mentions of Channel 5 will refer to this particular programme.

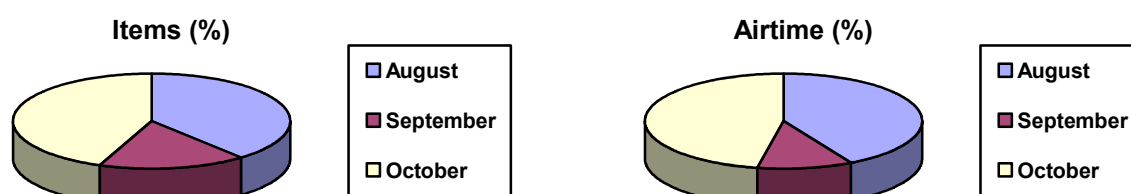
During the monitoring period, just 18 items relating to the Arab world were broadcast, totalling less than 25 minutes of airtime. Of the 22 members of the League of Arab States, only three countries were covered - Iraq, Morocco and the United Arab Emirates. Even then, the coverage was overwhelmingly on just one country (Iraq), and that of Morocco was incidental.

<u>Country</u>	<u>Items</u>	<u>Items</u> (%)	<u>Airtime</u>	<u>Airtime</u> (%)
Iraq	16	89	15 mins, 47 secs	64.47
UAE	1	5.5	6 mins, 39 secs	27.16
Morocco	1	5.5	2 mins, 3 secs	8.37
Total	18		24 mins, 29 secs	



Though Channel 5 aired an average of six Arab-related items per month, September was particularly quiet, with just three items - less than half the number for August and October, and around a quarter of those months' airtime (less than three minutes).

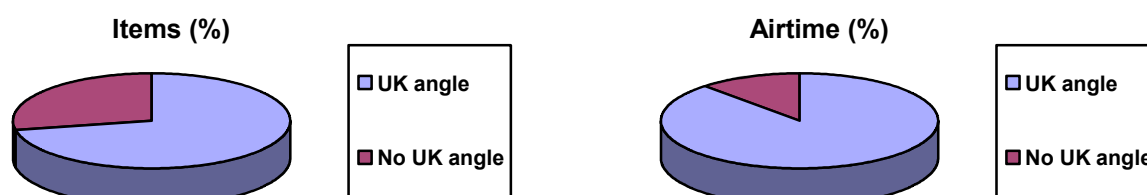
<u>Month</u>	<u>Items</u>	<u>Items</u> (%)	<u>Airtime</u>	<u>Airtime</u> (%)
August	7	39	10 mins, 12 secs	42
September	3	17	2 mins, 45 secs	11
October	8	44	11 mins, 32 secs	47



The average item length was 82 seconds. However, discount the longest one - on the UAE - and the average becomes 63 seconds. Only six items (33%) exceeded one minute: four on Iraq, and those on the UAE and Morocco. The other 12 items (67%) were snippets averaging 29 seconds.

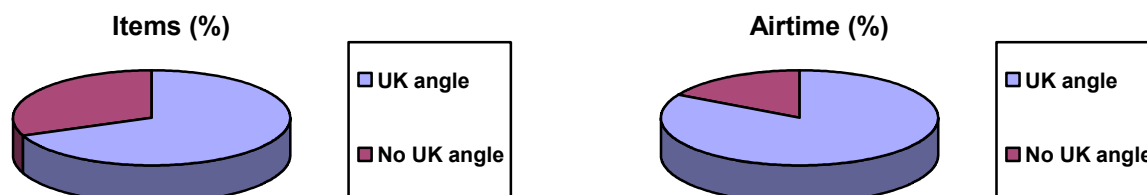
There were almost three times as many items with a British angle as those without, with almost triple the airtime. The items without a British angle were all on Iraq.

	<u>Items</u>	<u>Items</u> (%)	<u>Airtime</u> (secs)	<u>Airtime</u> (%)	<u>Average</u> <u>Length</u>
UK angle	13	72	1,300	88	100
No UK angle	5	28	169	12	34



IRAQ

	<u>Items</u>	<u>Items</u> (%)	<u>Airtime</u> (secs)	<u>Airtime</u> (%)	<u>Average</u> <u>Length</u>
UK angle	11	69	778	82	71
No UK angle	5	31	169	18	34



The Iraq-related items averaged 59 seconds each. Eleven of them (69%) had a direct and predominant British angle: five on army deaths, three on troop withdrawals, and one each on a war memorial, the poppy appeal, and an alleged terrorist training camp in Britain.

At 12 minutes and 58 seconds in total, these 11 items took up 82% of total airtime on Iraq, averaged 71 seconds each, and made up the three longest Iraq-related items during the monitoring period.

The other 18% of airtime (two minutes and 49 seconds) was given to five items without a direct British angle: a bomb attack on a Kurdish sect in northern Iraq; Congressional questioning of the commander of US forces in the country; Iraq in connection with Iran; and two items on Turkish-Kurdish tensions in northern Iraq (one of them on how this was raising oil prices to record highs).

These five items averaged 34 seconds each (less than half the average time for an item with a British angle), and at one and a half minutes, the bomb attack in northern Iraq alone accounted for 53% of airtime given to these items. The lengths of the other four items ranged from 14 seconds to 28 seconds.

Three of these five items (60%) had a specifically Kurdish angle, accounting for 75% of airtime given to Iraq-related items without a British angle, despite the fact that Kurds make up just 15-20% of Iraq's population.

FATALITIES

Channel 5's reporting of deaths in Iraq was highly selective. Nine British soldiers were reported killed in six news items. Seven were named and pictured, six of whom were also given a history.

They were given humane descriptions such as "proud, loyal and professional", "leaves behind his wife...and three-year-old son", "a gentle giant who loved to put a smile on people's faces", "due to get married", "a bright future ahead of him", "married with two children", "an outstanding drummer," and "a kind and generous man who genuinely wanted to make a difference for the people of Basra."

However, the 200 reported killed in the Yazidi attack are nameless and without description.

This is the only incident of Iraqi deaths reported by Channel 5. However, a tally of figures in the database provided by Iraq Body Count reveals that almost 5,000 Iraqis died in almost 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/>

Furthermore, the time given to the reported British and Iraqi deaths was very uneven. The nine British fatalities received 61% of total airtime devoted to deaths in Iraq, even though Channel 5 reported more than 22 times as many fatalities in the Yazidi attack. On average, the British deaths received 15 seconds each, while the Iraqi deaths received just 0.45 seconds each.

	<u>Reported</u>	<u>Items</u>	<u>Airtime</u> (secs)	<u>Airtime</u> (%)
British deaths	9	6	138	61
Iraqi deaths	200	1	90	39

BRITISH TROOP WITHDRAWALS

Gordon Brown's announcements of troop withdrawals from Iraq were treated sceptically by Channel 5.

2 October 2007

At three minutes and 16 seconds, this was the longest Iraq-related news item, and the second-longest Arab-related item during the monitoring period.

Newsreader John Suchet said that Brown is "accused of playing politics," and "it has caused outrage at the Conservative conference in Blackpool, where the Prime Minister was accused of managing a cynical photo opportunity and massaging the figures." He added that "it does seem that Gordon Brown's announcement may not be all that it's set out to be."

Channel 5's political editor Andy Bell twice described Brown's announcement as controversial, and pointed out twice that although the Prime Minister announced that 1,000 troops would be home by Christmas, this includes 500 whose departure had been announced a month earlier, and the Ministry of Defence confirmed that some of those are already back in the UK.

"At the very least I think that Gordon Brown has left himself open to the allegation that this announcement comes with some extra politics thrown in, shall we put it that way," said Bell.

While saying that Brown "does seem to be shifting the emphasis in Iraq onto withdrawal and disengagement," Bell added that the announcement "has been denounced as an attempt to overshadow the Conservative conference...Analysts say today's news is simply confirmation of a plan already under way."

This view dominated the Channel 5 report, with Brown given 11 seconds of airtime, while opposing views - expressed by Shadow Defence Secretary Liam Fox MP and Amyas Godfrey from the Royal United Services Institute - were given almost four times more airtime: 42 seconds.

Scepticism expressed by Suchet and Bell together account for almost double the airtime given to Fox and Godfrey, so Brown's line is dwarfed in this report.

8 October 2007

Brown announced that the number of British troops in Iraq would be halved by spring to 2,500. Bell brought up the "disputed" figure of a reduction of 1,000 by Christmas, made in Brown's announcement a week earlier, and said this new announcement caused Conservative leader David Cameron to accuse Brown of "playing politics with Iraq."

Bell ended his report: "It should've felt like a good day for Gordon Brown on the back of the Iraq announcement, but it hasn't worked out that way."

Brown was given 10 seconds of airtime, while Cameron was given more than twice that: 23 seconds.

9 October 2007

Channel 5 correspondent David Bowden spoke to four British soldiers about their views on Brown's announcement that 3,000 of them will leave Iraq by spring. At two minutes and 48 seconds, this was the second-longest Iraq-related item, and the third-longest Arab-related item.

The newsreader began the report by saying the announcement "didn't quite get Gordon Brown the fanfare he might've hoped for. His announcements had a mixed reception from the people that really matter, too: the soldiers risking their lives in Basra every day."

This was reflected in the views of the four soldiers interviewed. "I don't want to be hear," said Lance Corporal David Rees, who was given 12 seconds of airtime. "I think that's good news for both sides...For us it means we get to go home, and for the Iraqis it means they're more independent," said Lance Corporal Neil Hughes, who was given 10 seconds.

"Hopefully there'll still be tanks here, there'll still be armour, and there'll still be all sorts of forces...ready to deal with whatever situation should arise," said Major Matt Smith, who was given 15 seconds. Major Zac Stenning, given 21 seconds, said the possibility of further withdrawals is "conditions-based," and that "those conditions are very hard...to define in detail."

In total, the two soldiers expressing unequivocal support for withdrawing troops were given 22 seconds of airtime, 39% less than the 36 seconds of airtime given to the other two.

YAZIDI ATTACK

The aforementioned Yazidi attack was aptly described as "one of the most lethal attacks since the invasion of Iraq," and "one of the bloodiest days in Iraq since the troop surge began."

Reporter Leyla Hayes said: "It's hard to imagine that Iraq's madness will ever end on days like this...Time and again the bombers are slipping through the net, apparently free to move at will and time is running out for the Americans to stop them."

However, she added that "bloodshed and violence usually seen in Baghdad" is "now hitting the north of the country...Military analysts say the American troop surge in Baghdad is simply pushing insurgents into new areas."

This gives the misleading impression that there were no "insurgents", "bloodshed" or "violence" in northern Iraq before this attack.

Two sources were used to comment on the effectiveness of the US surge in Iraq in light of this attack: a supportive US army spokesman, and a sceptical military analyst. However, the report as a whole had a sceptical tone, with 32 seconds devoted to the view that, in Hayes's words, "it's simply pushing insurgents into new areas," and 11 seconds devoted to the view that the surge is working.

PROGRESS?

The Yazidi attack, the deaths of British soldiers, and the sceptical reporting of Gordon Brown's announcements regarding their withdrawal, are part of Channel 5 coverage that can be seen as casting doubt on the idea that things are getting better in Iraq. Other items that form part of this trend include:

- A report on US General David Petraeus being "expected to tell Congress that not enough is being done to help bring together rival Muslim factions in the country."
- An interview with Iran's president, in which he talks of "the problems...the Americans have...in Iraq."
- A report on Turkish-Kurdish tensions in northern Iraq driving up oil prices to "record highs."
- A report on Turkish attempts to end attacks by Kurds in northern Iraq, Turkish-Kurdish clashes that killed 12 Turkish soldiers and left eight missing, and Turkey "threatening to send troops into Iraq to destroy Kurdish bases."
- A report on the poppy appeal which focuses on a British soldier who was blinded in an attack in Basra. "With British military commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, the [Royal British Legion] say the poppy appeal is now more vital than ever," said reporter Leyla Hayes.

UNITED ARAB EMIRATES

An item on the "ugly reality" and "murky side of Dubai" - the "awful conditions" of migrant workers there, "described as modern-day slavery" - was broadcast on 28 August 2007. At six minutes and 39 seconds, it was more than twice as long as the next-longest Arab-related item. The British angle provided - that Dubai is a holiday destination for British tourists and Premiership footballers - is tenuous.

While it is commendable that human rights issues are aired, Channel 5 ignored the large amount of business news relating to the UAE that was covered by other mainstream British media outlets. Such news provides a more positive image of the country, and some of it had a direct British angle.

MOROCCO

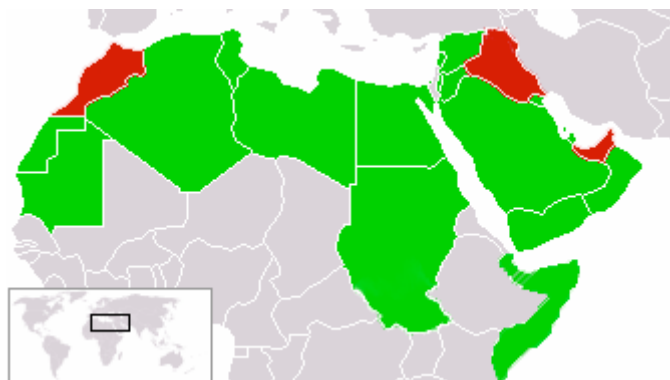
Morocco was mentioned in one item about missing British girl Madeleine McCann.

MISSED NEWS

During the monitoring period, Channel 5 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:

- Preparations were made for a Middle East summit in Annapolis, 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, Tunisia and Yemen acted in various ways - including killing, trial and imprisonment - against Islamists and alleged Al Qaeda members.
- The US signed a \$30 billion arms deal with Saudi Arabia.
- 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



Arab world (in green). Arab countries covered (in red)

- Channel 5 should increase coverage of the Arab world, in terms of number of items and countries, as well as airtime. Eighteen items totalling less than 25 minutes over three months is inadequate, especially since one month consisted of just three items totalling less than three minutes.

Channel 5 focused almost exclusively on just one country, when the Arab world consists of 21 states (as well as the occupied Palestinian territories), spanning 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.

- Channel 5 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 almost triple the airtime. Individually, there was no coverage of Morocco and the United Arab Emirates without a British angle, and 69% of items and 82% of airtime on Iraq had a British angle.

While AMW recognises that this may attract more interest from British viewers, Channel 5 coverage 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 minority of Iraq coverage without a British angle, 60% of items and 75% of airtime had a specifically Kurdish angle, despite the fact that Kurds make up just 15-20% of Iraq's population. Coverage of Iraq should be broader and more representative of the country's other communities.

- While AMW recognises that there are too many Iraq deaths and violent incidents to report individually and at length, and that British deaths will be of particular concern to its viewers, Channel 5 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 (200 out of several thousand), in just one incident (out of more than 1,000). On the other hand, British deaths were reported in several items; they were given more airtime; and most were humanised with names, pictures and descriptions, unlike the reported Iraqi fatalities. This gives the impression that Iraqi life is of less news value.