



Arab Media Watch
for objective British coverage of Arab issues

Monitoring Study:

British Media Coverage of the 'Iraqi Shoe Journalist'

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Introduction

On 14 December 2008, Iraqi journalist Muntadher al-Zaidi threw his shoes at President George Bush, uttering the words:

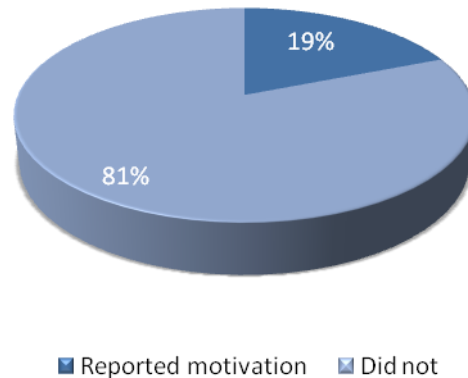
"This is a farewell kiss, you dog! This is from the widows, the orphans and those who were killed in Iraq."

This act, and his ongoing trial, have generated significant media interest around the world. However, analysis of British media reaction reveals that far more emphasis was placed on the action (throwing the shoe) than the motivation ("the widows, the orphans and those who were killed in Iraq.")

Arab Media Watch analysed news articles and opinion pieces from 14 December 2008 to 28 February 2009. Only those whose headline and / or first paragraph mentioned the journalist were deemed relevant for this study. The reason for this was to include only those pieces with this subject as the primary focus (i.e. those that could reasonably be expected to mention the motivation as well as the act).

Summary

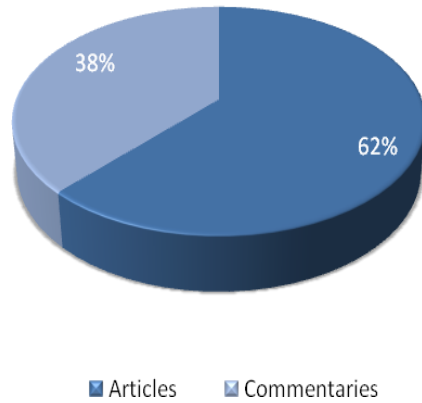
Out of 81 items published, just 15 (19%) reported the motivation as well as the act.



The result of this imbalance gives excessive credence to the assertion by Hugo Rifkind in the Times (16 December): "Who throws a shoe? Arabs do." In reality, this was not a seemingly temperamental and inexplicable act, but one motivated by the deaths of hundreds and thousands due to the US-led invasion and occupation of Iraq.

- Of newspapers that published more than three articles, the Independent reported the motive most frequently, with one in three articles reporting it.
- Of newspapers that published more than three articles, the Guardian and Daily Mail reported the motive least frequently, with one in seven articles reporting it.
- The Independent on Sunday published one article, but also mentioned the motive.
- The Daily Telegraph published five articles and commentaries, with no mention of the motive at all. The same is true of the Daily Star and Observer (which published two articles each), as well as the Mail on Sunday, Sunday Express and Sunday Telegraph (which published one article each).

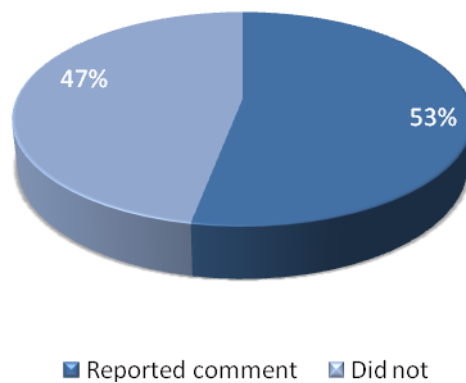
Of the 81 items published on the subject, 50 (62%) were news articles, with the remainder being opinion pieces.



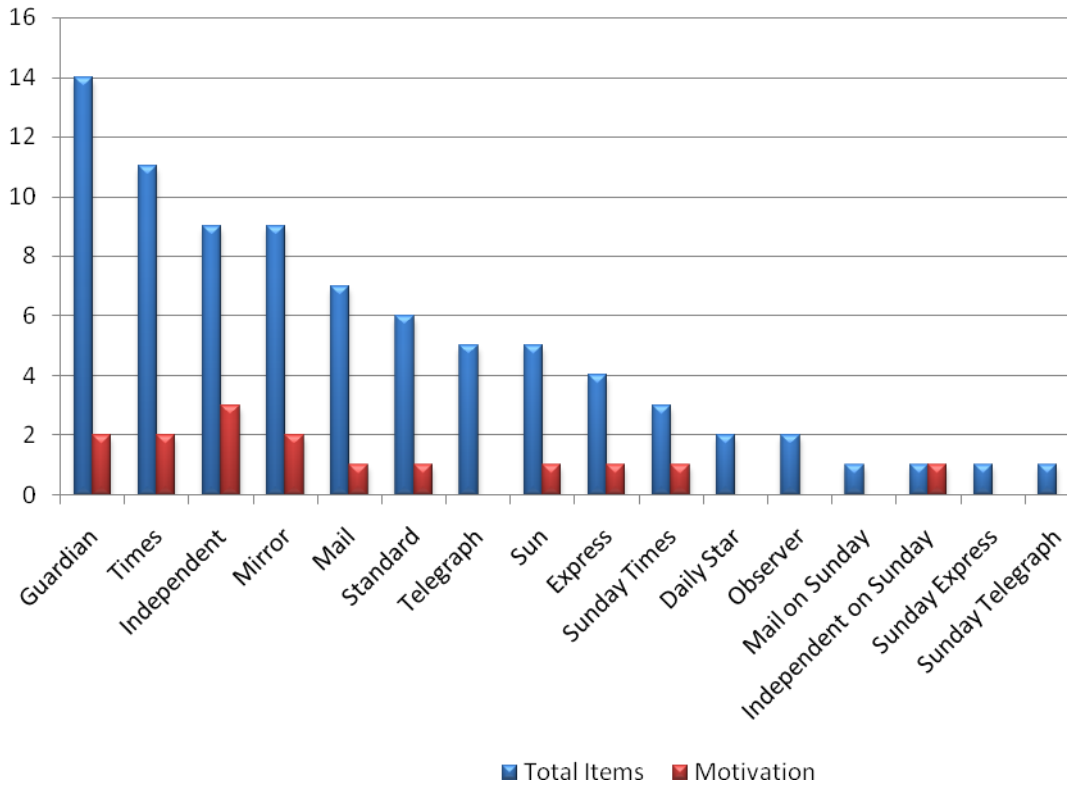
Only the Daily Express and Sunday Express published no commentaries on the subject. The Guardian (seven), Independent (four), Mail (four), Times (four) and Daily Mirror (three) published more than one.

Of the 81 items, 31 (38%) reported the comment: "This is a farewell kiss, you dog!"

Only the Mail on Sunday, Evening Standard and Telegraph did not report the comment at all.



The following chart shows a breakdown by newspaper of the number of items published, and the number of times the motivation was reported.



Explanation

What could explain the predominant trend of reporting the act without the motivation? AMW contacted the journalists who reported the motivation to find out their views. Sami Ramadani responded thus:

"It was inconceivable for me to write (in the [Guardian](#)) or talk (BBC Radio 2, Jeremy Vine show) without mentioning Muntadher's motive. His was a political act, and to report the incident without the motive reduces him to a prankster or even a common criminal.

"I was aware that most of the reports avoided mentioning his emotive words, which captured people's attention in Iraq and much of the world. As I watched live coverage of various Arab and Iraqi satellite broadcasts during and immediately after the incident, it was plain that it was those words, coupled with his daring act, that attracted people's attention and massive show of support.

"I could think of at least two reasons why much of the media did not report his words (except calling Bush 'you dog', thus upsetting Britain's animal lovers). First, there is a general tendency to truncate and sensationalise the news. Reporting all his words would have had to be coupled with an explanation about US-led war crimes in Iraq. That, of course, is too much to expect from most of our editors, who live or die by sound-bites or clever headlines.

"The second, and perhaps more important reason in this case, is that most of the mainstream media have self-imposed censorship regarding the occupation's war crimes against the civilian population of Iraq. Civilian deaths are reported only if the incident involves an act of mindless terrorism, which could be instantly pinned on Al-Qaida, 'Sunni extremists' or 'remnants of Saddam's regime'.

"The terrorists then become the unacceptable face of the resistance to occupation in Iraq. This type of reporting also provides implicit support for the US and British officials who argue that they are in Iraq to fight terrorism and support the Iraqi people.

"So, a dramatic incident like Muntadher throwing a shoe at Bush, in the name of the orphans and widows of Iraq, could only hit the headlines after some careful editing. Otherwise it would, if his words were reported, contradict most previous reporting and accepted wisdom on Iraq."

Journalist Breakdown

The following series of tables includes journalist information for each newspaper.

Guardian

The Guardian published a total of 14 items by 13 journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
15 December	Ed Pilkington	✓	✗
16 December	Simon Tisdall	✓	✗
16 December	Julian Borger	✓	✗
16 December	Emine Saner	✗	✗
16 December	Simon Hoggart	✓	✗
17 December	Mark Tran	✓	✓
17 December	Sami Ramadani	✓	✓
17 December	Hugh Muir	✗	✗
19 December	Mark Tran	✓	✗
20 December	Terry Jones	✗	✗
20 December	Ian Black	✓	✗
22 December	Robert Tait	✗	✗
10 February	Helena Pidd / Agencies	✗	✗
20 February	Michele Hanson	✓	✗
Total		9	2

Times

The Times published a total of 11 items by eight journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
15 December	Deborah Haynes	✓	✗
16 December	Oliver August	✓	✗
16 December	Editorial	✓	✗
16 December	Hugo Rifkind	✓	✓
16 December	Anon	✗	✗
17 December	Oliver August	✗	✗
18 December	Catherine Philp	✓	✗
23 December	David Aaronovitch	✗	✗
5 February	Ben McIntyre	✗	✗
9 February	Anon	✓	✗
20 February	Catherine Philp	✓	✓
Total		7	2

Independent

The Independent published a total of nine items by seven journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
15 December	Guy Adams	✓	✗
15 December	Tom Sutcliffe	✗	✗
16 December	Patrick Cockburn	✓	✓
16 December	Patrick Cockburn	✓	✓
17 December	Patrick Cockburn	✗	✗
17 December	Mark Steel	✓	✗
18 December	Matthew Norman	✗	✗
24 December	Anon	✗	✗
20 February	Sinan Salaheddin	✓	✓
Total		5	3

Daily Mirror

The Mirror published a total of nine items by at least six journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
15 December	Stephen White	✓	✗
16 December	Adrian Shaw	✓	✗
17 December	Anon	✓	✗
17 December	Kevin Maguire	✓	✗
19 December	Paul Routledge	✗	✗
19 December	Anon	✗	✗
20 December	Tony Parsons	✗	✗
23 December	Anon	✗	✓
20 February	Anon	✗	✓
Total		4	2

Daily Mail

The Mail published a total of seven items by at least four journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
15 December	Anon	✓	✗
16 December	Anon	✓	✓
16 December	Richard Littlejohn	✗	✗
17 December	Ephraim Hardcastle	✗	✗
17 December	Anon	✓	✗
20 December	Clement Crabbe	✗	✗
23 December	Ephraim Hardcastle	✗	✗
Total		3	1

Evening Standard

The Standard published a total of six items by at least three journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
15 December	Jamal Dajani	✗	✗
15 December	Ed Harris	✗	✗
18 December	Anon	✗	✗
19 December	Anon	✗	✗
22 December	Anon	✗	✗
19 January	Anon	✗	✓
Total		0	1

Daily Telegraph

The Telegraph published a total of five items by four journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
15 December	Alex Spillius	✓	✗
16 December	Caroline Gammell	✓	✗
16 December	Caroline Gammell	✗	✗
18 December	Tim Butcher	✗	✗
19 December	Con Coughlin	✗	✗
Total		2	0

Sun

The Sun published a total of five items by at least three journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
15 December	Philip Case	✓	✗
16 December	Philip Case	✓	✓
16 December	Fergus Shanahan	✗	✗
17 December	Anon	✗	✗
23 December	Anon	✓	✗
Total		3	1

Daily Express

The Express published a total of four items by at least two journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
15 December	Natalie Chalk	✓	✗
16 December	Anon	✓	✓
23 December	Anon	✓	✗
20 January	Anon	✗	✗
Total		3	1

Daily Star

The Star published a total of two items by two journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
15 December	Ross Kaniuk	✓	✗
18 December	Paul Vale	✗	✗
Total		1	0

Sunday Times

The Sunday Times published a total of three items by at least two journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
21 December	Marie Colvin & Ali Rifat	✓	✓
21 December	Anon	✓	✗
28 December	Anon	✓	✗
Total		3	1

Observer

The Observer published a total of two items by two journalists.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
21 December	Afif Sarhan	✓	✗
21 December	Toby Dodge	✗	✗
Total		1	0

Mail on Sunday

The Mail on Sunday published one item by one journalist.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
21 December	Peter Hitchens	✗	✗
Total		1	1

Independent on Sunday

The Independent on Sunday published one item by one journalist.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
21 December	Raymond Whitaker	✓	✓
Total		1	1

Sunday Express

The Sunday Express published one item by one journalist.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
21 December	Anon	✓	✗
Total		1	0

Sunday Telegraph

The Sunday Telegraph published one item by one journalist.

Date	Journalist	Comment	Motive
28 December	Tim Shipman	✗	✗
Total		0	0