



Arab Media Watch
for objective British coverage of Arab issues

Monitoring Study:

British Media Coverage of the US Raid on Syria

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Introduction

On 26 October 2008, the US military mounted a raid inside Syrian territory near the border with Iraq, in which eight people were killed. Arab Media Watch monitored subsequent press coverage, analysing news articles for the number of sources quoted on each side, and the amount of word space given to each.

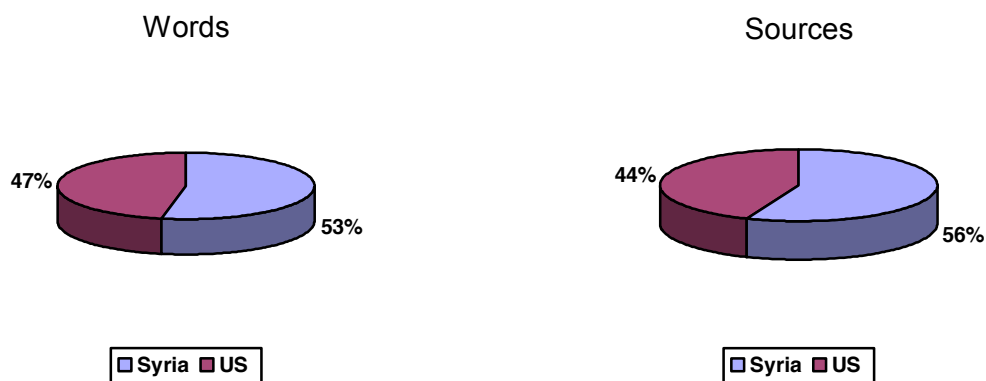
A total of 21 articles about the raid were published in the British mainstream press.¹ Of those monitored, the Daily Star was the only newspaper not to report the story. While most of the articles appeared on 27 and 28 October 2008, the Times, Independent and Guardian published a further relevant article on 29 October.

The overall balance of word count and number of sources lies marginally in Syria's favour, though any consideration of these statistics must take account of the fact that the US made no official statement about the raid.

This represents an improvement on the findings of an [AMW study](#) on coverage of the Israeli bombing of Syria last year, which found that US sources accounted for almost three-quarters of words given to sources.

Summary of Statistics

In terms of words and sources, the balance (%) over the total of 21 articles is:



- Only the Daily Mail and Sun devoted more words to US sources than Syrian.
- Only the Independent and Daily Telegraph used more US sources than Syrian.
- In terms of word count, the Evening Standard was most in favour of Syria (86%), while the Guardian was closest to an even balance (52% to Syria).
- In terms of the number of sources, the Evening Standard was most in favour of Syria (75%), while the Financial Times attained 50% for each side.

¹ Media outlets monitored were: Evening Standard, Financial Times, Guardian, Independent, Daily Mail, Daily Mirror, Daily Star, Sun, Daily Telegraph, Times. The Daily Express was excluded.

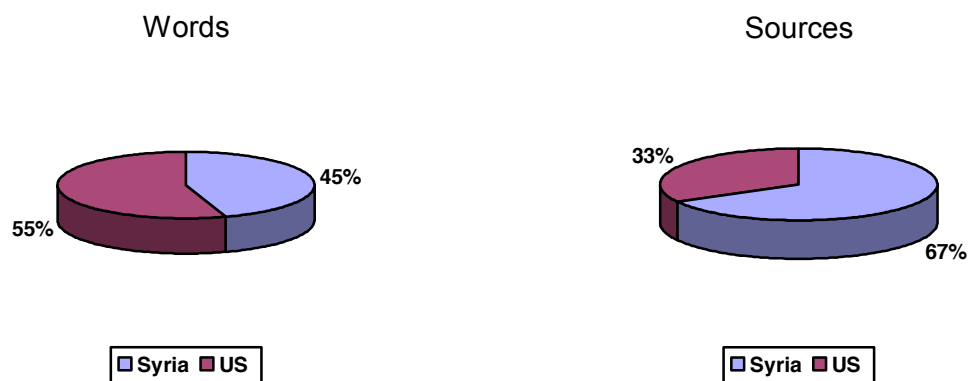
Table showing number of words and sources per newspaper:

Newspaper	No. articles	Words		Sources	
		Syria	US	Syria	US
<i>Daily Mail</i>	2	155	189	6	3
<i>Evening Standard</i>	2	119	20	3	1
<i>Financial Times</i>	2	179	55	3	3
<i>Guardian</i>	3	251	236	11	7
<i>Independent</i>	3	225	203	7	10
<i>Mirror</i>	2	114	57	4	2
<i>Sun</i>	2	57	69	6	4
<i>Telegraph</i>	2	204	146	4	5
<i>Times</i>	3	432	352	9	6
Total	21	1,736	1,327	53	41

Breakdown by Newspaper

Daily Mail

The breakdown of word count and number of sources given to each side is:

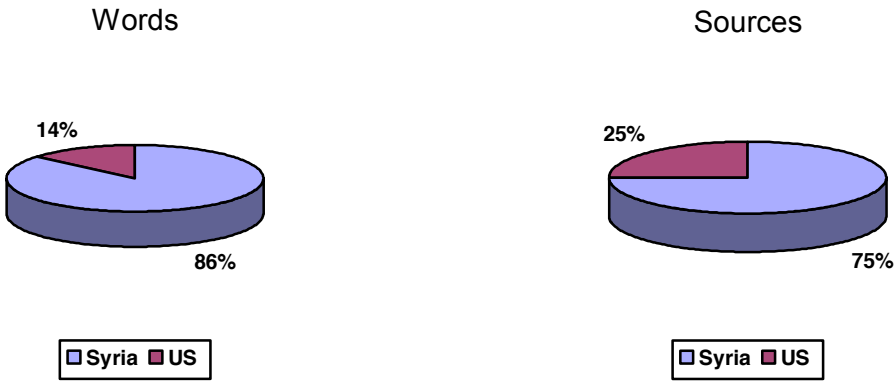


The Daily Mail is notable for being one of only two newspapers to devote more words to US sources (55%), the same percentage as the other paper, the Sun.

In terms of number of sources used, the figure of 67% in favour of Syria is 11 percentage points greater than the total average.

Evening Standard

The breakdown of word count and number of sources given to each side is:

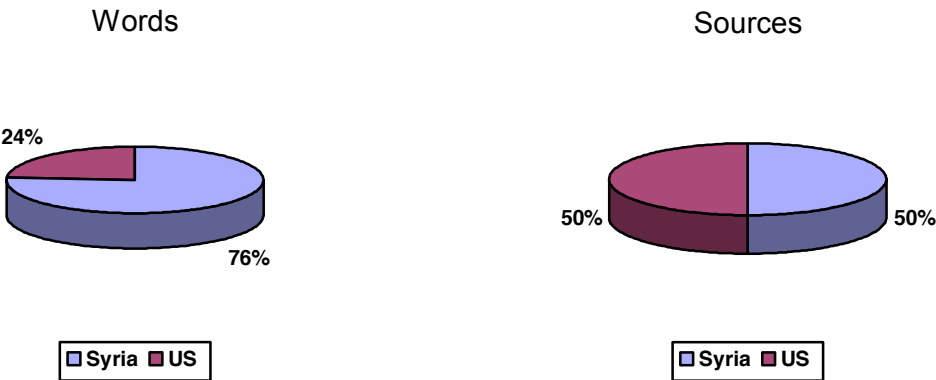


The Evening Standard is notable for devoting the greatest percentage of words to Syrian sources (86%), which is 33 percentage points higher than the average. However, a total of 139 words (5% of the overall total) is the second lowest for any newspaper after the Sun.

The Standard used the fewest total sources: four, or 4% of the total.

Financial Times

The breakdown of word count and number of sources given to each side is:

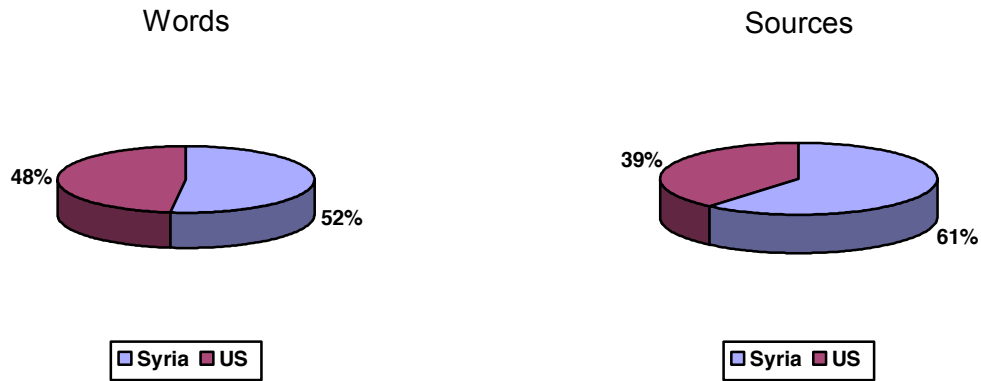


In terms of words devoted to sources, the Financial Times was 23 percentage points above average, devoting 76% to Syrian sources.

In terms of number of sources used, it was exactly balanced with three for each side.

Guardian

The breakdown of word count and number of sources given to each side is:



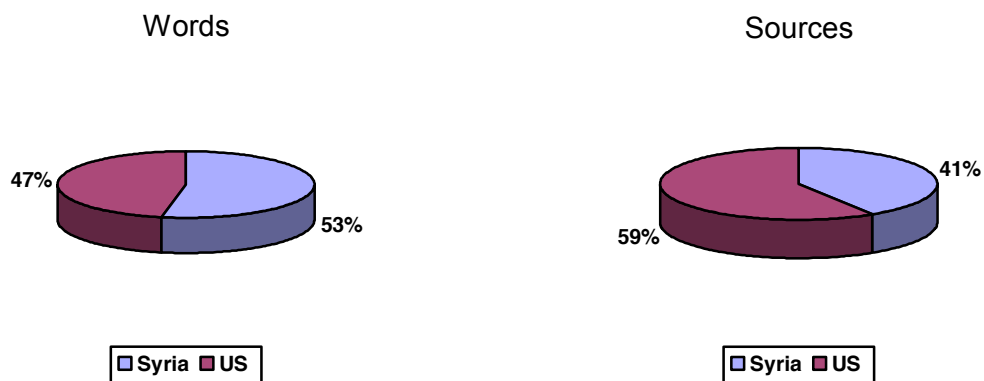
As a percentage, the Guardian devoted slightly fewer words for Syrian sources than average, while it used more Syrian sources than American, compared to the average.

The Guardian was the newspaper that most closely approached an even balance in terms of words for sources.

No other newspaper used as many sources as the Guardian (18, or 19% of the total).

Independent

The breakdown of word count and number of sources given to each side is:

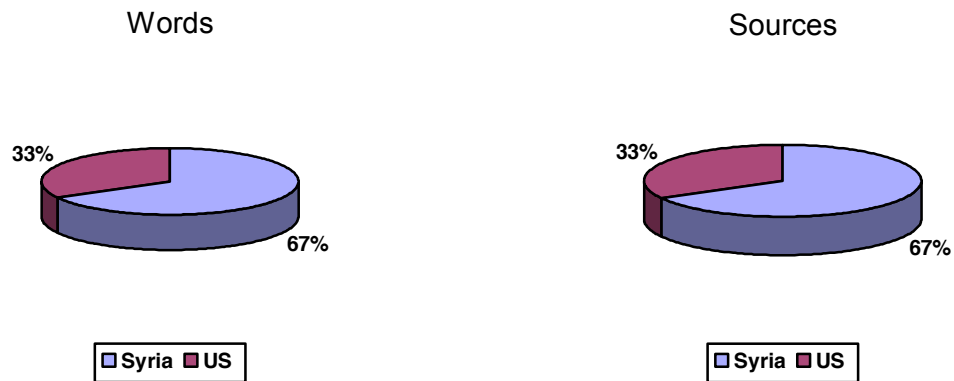


The Independent is notable for using a greater number of US sources than Syrian. Its total number of sources used (17, or 18% of the total) is second only to the Guardian.

The number of words used for sources in the Independent is exactly average, and slightly in Syria's favour.

Daily Mirror

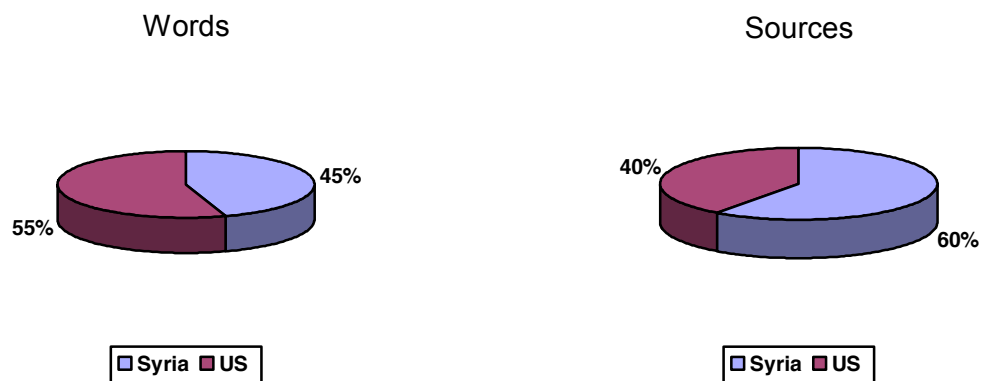
The breakdown of word count and number of sources given to each side is:



In terms of word count per source and number of sources used, the Daily Mirror was over 10 percentage points above average in Syria's favour, although the total number of words used by sources represents just 6% (171 words) of the total.

Sun

The breakdown of word count and number of sources given to each side is:

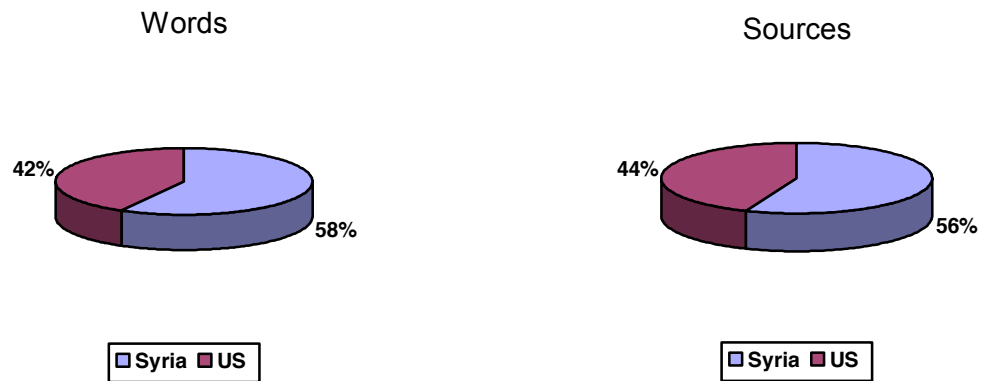


The Sun is notable for being one of only two newspapers that devoted a greater word count to US sources than to Syrian, although its total number of words used by sources is the lowest for any paper (126, or 4% of total).

The Sun devoted a marginally above-average number of sources to the Syrian side.

Daily Telegraph

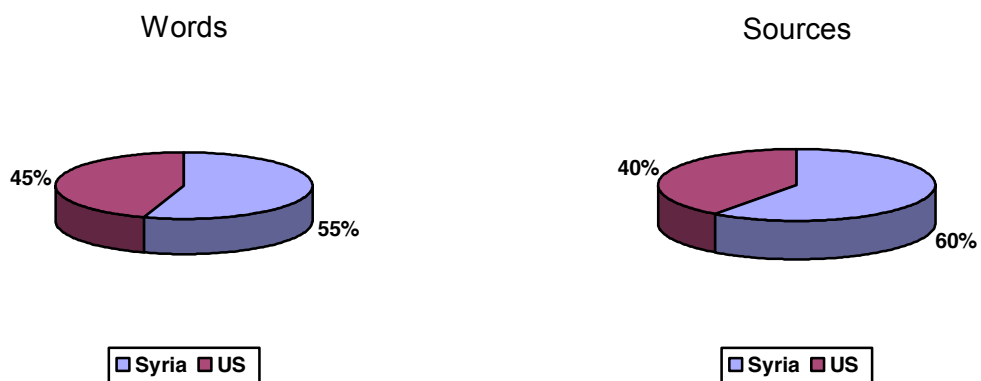
The breakdown of word count and number of sources given to each side is:



The Daily Telegraph devoted marginally above-average word space for the Syrian side, while for the number of sources used, it was exactly average.

Times

The breakdown of word count and number of sources given to each side is:



The Times devoted the greatest total number of words to sources (784, or 26%), just fewer than 300 words more than the next nearest newspaper.

The Times devoted marginally above-average space to words and number of sources for the Syrian side.

Breakdown by Journalist

Of the 21 articles, 13 journalists are named as authors of 13 articles. The remaining eight articles were published anonymously (two each in the Daily Mail, Daily Mirror and Sun, and one each in the Evening Standard and Independent).

The statistics are as follows:

Journalist	Paper	Date (October)	Words (%)		Sources (%)	
			Syria	US	Syria	US
<i>Anna Fifield & Daniel Dombey</i>	FT	27	93	7	67	33
<i>Ian Black & Ewen Macaskill</i>	Guardian	27	51	49	60	40
<i>Alex Spillius</i>	Telegraph	27	59	41	50	50
<i>Deborah Haynes</i>	Times	27	66	34	71	29
<i>Ed Harris</i>	Standard	28	82	18	67	33
<i>James Blitz</i>	FT	28	61	39	33	67
<i>Ian Black, Martin Chulov & Julian Borger</i>	Guardian	28	63	37	67	33
<i>Patrick Cockburn</i>	Ind.	28 & 29	47	53	42	58
<i>David Blair</i>	Telegraph	28	57	43	40	60
<i>Catherine Philp</i>	Times	28 & 29	48	52	50	50
<i>Martin Chulov</i>	Guardian	29	40	60	60	40

As can be seen from the above table, most of the journalists devoted more word space to Syrian sources, and used more Syrian sources than American.

In terms of word space, those most favourable to Syria were Anna Fifield and Daniel Dombey in the Financial Times (93%), Ed Harris in the Standard (82%) and Deborah Haynes in the Times (66%). The only journalists to devote more words to US sources were Martin Chulov in the Guardian (60%), Patrick Cockburn in the Independent (53%) and Catherine Philp in the Times (52%).

In terms of number of sources used, those most favourable to Syria were Haynes (71%), followed by Fifield and Dombey, Harris, and an article by Chulov, Ian Black and Julian Borger (67% each). The only journalists to use more US sources were James Blitz in the FT (67%), David Blair in the Daily Telegraph (60%) and Cockburn (58%).

Breakdown by Date

All the relevant newspapers reported the story on 27 and 28 October 2008, with the Times, Independent and Guardian publishing a further article on 29 October.

As the story progressed along these three days, the percentage of words used for sources (64% to 58% to 18%) and the number of sources (62% to 54% to 42%) for the Syrian declined.

For the US, the number of words for sources increased (36% to 42% to 82%), as did the percentage of total sources used (38% to 46% to 58%).