



## TWO DIFFERENT WARS: COMPARING ARAB AND U.S. COVERAGE OF THE IRAQ WAR

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***Media in the U.S. and in the Arab world have provided two very different perspectives of the war, from the language used to describe events to the footage shown on television broadcasts.***

Although the Arabic-speaking world is incredibly diverse, and each media outlet has its own voice, there are general differences between the way the Arab media is reporting this war and the way it is covered by U.S. media organizations.

### **Two different views of the war**

On the first day of war, U.S. newspaper printed headlines like: "Bush Orders Start of War on Iraq; Missiles Apparently Miss Hussein" (The New York Times); "U.S. Opens War with Strikes on Baghdad; Aimed at Hussein" (The Washington Post).

But in Arab newspapers, it was vastly different, with headlines like "Baghdad Set Ablaze" (Arab News) and "U.S. Unleashes Massive Air War on Iraq" (Gulf Times).

While most U.S. media sources use the term "coalition forces" to describe the troops, many Arab media outlets instead choose the word "invaders." On television broadcasts, CNN labeled the conflict, the "War in Iraq." **Al Jazeera**, an Arab-language satellite channel with more than 35 million viewers, calls it the "War on Iraq."

### **Changes in the media since the Gulf War**

Times have dramatically changed since the Gulf War in 1991 when CNN was the only station to provide 24-hour news coverage. Today, more stations are able to provide 24-hour coverage, which is frequently updated by reports from so-called **embedded journalists** who are traveling with American and British troops.

And though very few Arab households had access to satellite broadcasts in 1991, there are now twelve Arab networks, including Al Jazeera, Abu Dhabi, and al-Arabiya broadcasting, many owned or supported by Arab governments.

Arab newscasts have often contained more graphic images of civilian casualties and soldiers, bombed out buildings and homes, and continuing anti-war protests in Arab countries. Al-Jazeera was one of the first to broadcast footage of the American **POWs**, a move criticized by American government officials as a violation of **Geneva Convention** rules.

The Arab newscasts are popular with Arab-Americans, many of whom have bought satellite TV systems to watch these news reports.

Muhammad al-Sayed, who installs reception equipment for the Arabic television stations in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, says the war caused a surge of business.

"For the past two weeks, I am working 18 hours a day. Before the war it was the normal eight or nine hours," Sayed, a Lebanese-American, told Reuters News. "The people want to hear the other side."

## Reactions to the coverage

Criticism of the Arab media's war coverage has streamed in from American and British officials. British Prime Minister Tony Blair ordered a campaign last week to counteract what he calls negative coverage of war in the Arab media. American officials called the coverage of the war **inflammatory**.

"I am afraid many in the Arab press have been **misconstruing** things and inflaming things. All we ask is that ... we get a fair hearing, that they look at the facts, that they not jump to conclusions," said the U.S. State Department spokesman Richard Boucher.

On the other side, some Arab-Americans have criticized American coverage for being too sanitized.

"There is a feeling in our newsroom that you need to be as realistic as possible and carry the images of war and the effect that war has on people," said Hafez Mirazi, Washington bureau chief of al-Jazeera. "If you are in a war, your population shouldn't just eat their dinner and watch sanitized images on TV and video games produced by the technological whizzes in the Pentagon and say, 'This is war.'"

Hussein Amin, head of the journalism department at Cairo's American University, agrees that both sides have provided biases and slanted coverage, but he adds, "The fact that the common man has access to different sources today means that its harder for one source to get away with showing only one side of the story. You can piece together a broader, more accurate story yourself."

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## Vocabulary

**Al-Jazeera** - (n.) ("*The Island*" in Arabic) pan-Arab satellite television news station based in Qatar (*The Christian Science Monitor*)

**embedded journalist** – (n) news correspondent who is reporting from within a coalition military unit and must agree to follow certain rules regarding what and when he or she can release information

**POW** - (n.) prisoner of war

**Geneva Convention** - (n) any of a series of international treaties concluded in Geneva, Switzerland, between 1864 and 1949, for the purpose of improving the effects of war on soldiers and civilians. (Encyclopedia Britannica)

**inflammatory** - (adj.) 1. tending to excite anger, disorder, or tumult 2. tending to inflame or excite the senses (Merriam-Webster)

**misconstruing** - (v.) 1. to misinterpret; to not translate correctly 2. to incorrectly analyze the arrangement and connection of words in (a sentence or sentence part) (Merriam-Webster)