



Arab Media Watch
for objective British coverage of Arab issues

Monitoring Study:

British Media Portrayals of Yemen

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Introduction

Arab Media Watch monitored and analysed commentary on Yemen from the British national daily press (apart from the Financial Times) from June 2006 to October 2008 (excluding weekends and bank holidays).

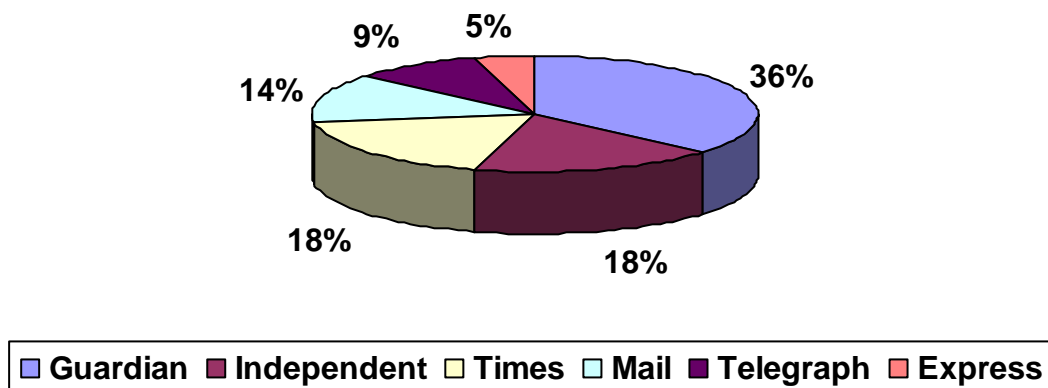
Two findings are particularly noteworthy. One is that almost all comment on Yemen is negative. The country is most often associated with various forms of violence, followed by poverty. Another is the lack of commentary. During a period of more than two years, fewer than two dozen pieces containing comment on Yemen were published, from even fewer authors, in six out of the nine newspapers monitored.

Only one comment appears from June to December 2006. The number rises considerably in the first 10 months of 2008, with 14 relevant pieces, twice the number for the whole of 2007.

The Guardian contains by far the most comment on Yemen, accounting for 36% of relevant pieces. Its Middle East editor Ian Black accounts for 62.5% of those in the Guardian, and 23% of total pieces. He has by far the most to say of all the relevant authors. The Sun, Daily Mirror and Daily Star contain no relevant comments.

<u>Newspaper</u>	<u>No. of articles per newspaper</u>	<u>Author</u>	<u>No. of articles per author</u>	
Guardian	8	Ian Black	5	
		Ewen MacAskill	1	
		Karma Nabulsi	1	
		Xan Rice	1	
Independent	4	Ahmed Al-Hajj	2	
		John Bulloch	1	
		Steve Bloomfield	1	
Times	4	Sonia Verma	1	
		Amir Taheri	1	
		Martin Fletcher	1	
		Thomas Catan	1	
Daily Mail	3	Max Hastings	1	
		Michael Burleigh	1	
		Ruth Dudley Edwards	1	
Daily Telegraph	2	Ahmed Rashid	1	
		Tim Butcher	1	
Daily Express	1	Andrew Roberts	1	
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<u>Total:</u>	6	22	17	22

Pie Chart showing distribution by newspaper



Violence

Yemen is most often associated with various forms of violence.

Al Qaeda

Al Qaeda is the most commented-on topic regarding Yemen. "Before the September 11 attacks, senior posts in al-Qa'eda were largely staffed by Saudis and Yemenis," writes Ahmed Rashid in the Daily Telegraph (9 March 2007).

Numerous writers describe the country as Osama bin Laden's "ancestral homeland," including the Guardian's Middle East editor Ian Black, Ahmed al-Hajj in the Independent, Thomas Catan and Sonia Verma in the Times, and the Telegraph's Middle East correspondent Tim Butcher.

Michael Burleigh in the Daily Mail describes bin Laden's inner security cordon as "consisting of bodyguards from his personal Black Guard, many of them fanatics from the Hadramawt region of Yemen..." (13 September 2008).

Bin Laden's father was born in Yemen, and "the bin Laden clan still has deep roots in the country's arid, lawless hinterland," writes Butcher, who describes the September 2008 suicide attack on the US embassy there as "bearing the hallmarks of al-Qa'eda" (18 September 2008).

Several writers point out that Yemen has been frequently attacked by Al Qaeda in recent years. For example, Black writes of "a resurgent al-Qa'ida with a new strategy of repeated small-scale attacks" (30 July 2008). Verma writes of "a violent series of attacks against tourists, hospitals, oil companies and embassies" (18 September 2008).

This is because the country is "working with the west," and became "an uneasy partner in George Bush's 'war on terror' after 9/11, presaged by al-Qa'ida's bombing of the USS Cole in Aden in 2000," according to Black (30 July 2008).

Verma describes it as "a high profile, strategic partnership with the United States to combat terrorism" in the wake of the 9/11 attacks. "The alliance has triggered a backlash by jihadists aligned with Al-Qaeda."

"Some 140 members of al-Qaida in the Arabian peninsula have died in clashes with security forces since attacks began in May 2003," writes Black (2 April 2007).

Nonetheless, Yemen "has struggled to put down Islamic militants linked to al-Qa'ida, often to the frustration of US counter-terrorism officials," writes Ahmed Al-Hajj in the Independent (18 September 2008).

"The US, Britain and other western countries are concerned," adds Black (30 July 2008). "And so, closer to home, are the Saudis, who have largely succeeded in crushing their own al-Qaida militants and fret about a lawless route for arms, men and money across the long desert border with their neighbour."

He continues: "Suspicions of official complicity with jihadists grew when 23 al-Qaida prisoners managed to tunnel their way out of a Sana'a jail in 2006."

"Since the tide of the war turned last winter, thousands of al-Qaeda jihadists have fled Iraq," writes Amir Taheri in the Times (30 July 2008). Some, "looking for new places to pursue their holy war against 'Zionists and Crusaders,' ended up in Yemen," among other countries, "and helped to reignite the fires of jihad."

Ahmed Al-Hajj, writing in the Independent about the Yemeni province of Marib as a growing tourist destination (3 July 2007), warns that the area "is home to four powerful tribes with more than 70 branches," and it "has earned a reputation for being wild and has been known to be a hotbed of support for al-Qa'ida.

"About 100 foreigners have been kidnapped in this area since the 1990s. As a result, tourists were a rare site, and solo travelers who wanted to go to Marib had to drive there as part of a convoy escorted by armed soldiers."

Other Jihadist / Militant / Islamist Violence

Yemen is often associated with jihadist / militant / Islamist violence not directly attributed to Al Qaeda. Daily Mail columnist Max Hastings mentions "hate" being "unleashed in terrorist campaigns" in Aden, among other places (3 April 2007).

Also in the Mail, Ruth Dudley Edwards writes about Yasser Al-Sirri - who was "a leading figure in Islamic Jihad, a group that tried to overthrow Egypt's government by force and replace it with an Islamic state," and who is "wanted by Egypt for aiding an assassination attempt in 1993 of the then Prime Minister with a car bomb, which instead killed a young girl" - having lived in Yemen (3 September 2008).

"The president has links with, and debts to, some very radical Islamists: thousands of Yemeni mujahideen fought in Afghanistan and came home to help defeat southern rebels - billed as socialist 'infidels' - in 1994," writes the Guardian's Middle East editor Ian Black (30 July 2008). "Salafi militants have been used to fight Shia Houthi rebels in the north."

"The Yemeni regime's close links to the West, allowing US soldiers to train its security forces, has prompted numerous recriminatory attacks from the militant groups that enjoy strong support from the country's deeply conservative, tribal population," writes the Daily Telegraph's Middle East correspondent Tim Butcher (18 September 2008).

The attack outside the US embassy in Sana in September 2008 "was the deadliest attack on an American target in several years, highlighting an increasingly bloody campaign waged by jihadist groups against Western institutions inside the Muslim country," writes Times reporter Sonia Verma (18 September 2008).

Yemen "has long been considered a haven for jihadists, particularly those returning from fighting in Afghanistan," she adds.

Miscellaneous

Yemen is mentioned in two obituaries about Palestinian militant leader George Habash. "By founding the anti-colonial Arab Nationalist Movement, he lit a fuse throughout the region," including Yemen, writes Karma Nabulsi in the Guardian (29 January 2008).

However, Habash "succeeded only in far-off South Yemen, where he helped the nationalists to force the British out," writes John Bulloch in the Independent (28 January 2008).

"A war between Muslim Somalia and Christian-ruled Ethiopia could rapidly engulf the entire Horn of Africa...and even Yemen," writes Times reporter and associate editor Martin Fletcher (18 December 2006).

"From Morocco to Afghanistan, from the Caspian Sea to Aden," the "Jews of the Holy Land are...surrounded by hostile states 650 times their size and 60 times their population," writes Andrew Roberts in the Daily Express (8 May 2008).

"Yet the state of Israel - their last, best hope of ending two millennia of international persecution - has somehow survived," he adds. This is the only Yemen-related comment in the Express during the monitoring period.

Yemen's government "now faces security threats on several fronts - a war with northern Shia rebels has spread to the outskirts of the capital, and in the south, a separate insurrection is simmering," writes Times reporter Sonia Verma (18 September 2008).

"The turmoil has led embassies and companies to pull their staff out of the country," she adds. "Washington had already ordered non-essential staff to leave Yemen in April, a day after an attack on a residential compound."

In discussing movies about recent US involvement in the Middle East, the Guardian's Washington DC bureau chief Ewen MacAskill describes Rules of Engagement as "an Alamo-like siege in the US embassy in Yemen," that "mainly involved shooting lots of Arabs" (14 August 2007).

Poverty

After the overall topic of violence, poverty in Yemen is the next most common point of comment. The Guardian's Middle East editor Ian Black (17 June 2008), and Times reporter Sonia Verma (18 September 2008), describe the country as "impoverished."

Yemen does not have "any real income of its own," writes the Independent's Africa correspondent Steve Bloomfield (13 August 2008).

The Guardian's East Africa correspondent Xan Rice describes it as the "poorest of the Gulf states" (21 April 2008), though it is not usually considered part of the Gulf.

Other Negative Commentary

"In Yemen, the nation's addiction to chewing qat is the source of both its social and sporting malaise," writes David Goldblatt in the Independent (7 October 2008).

The country has an embassy in Baghdad but not an ambassador, writes the Guardian's Middle East editor Ian Black, contrasting this with the fact that Iran has had an "active" embassy there since 2003 (2 July 2008).

Positive Commentary

There are only a few positive comments on Yemen. The Guardian's East Africa correspondent Xan Rice, in an article on Somalis fleeing their war-torn country to Yemen, says the country's "policy of offering Somalis automatic asylum makes it the most attractive destination" (21 April 2008).

Jihadists are "rehabilitated" in Yemen, where a "'dialogue committee' sends Muslim scholars into prisons," notes the paper's Middle East editor Ian Black (27 July 2007).

In recent years, "tourists looking for an off-the-beaten path adventure" have begun to travel more frequently to the Yemeni province of Marib, which was the capital of Saba, or Sheba, "the mightiest kingdom of ancient Arabia," writes Ahmed Al-Hajj in the Independent (3 July 2007).

"Yemen has been trying to make the Queen of Sheba temple, known for its columns marking the entrance, a major tourist attraction, especially after it was renovated several years ago."