

Iraq no longer about Iraqis but about Americans?

Coverage of the Iraqi conflict and analysis of media's rating of protagonists involved: 01-09/2003

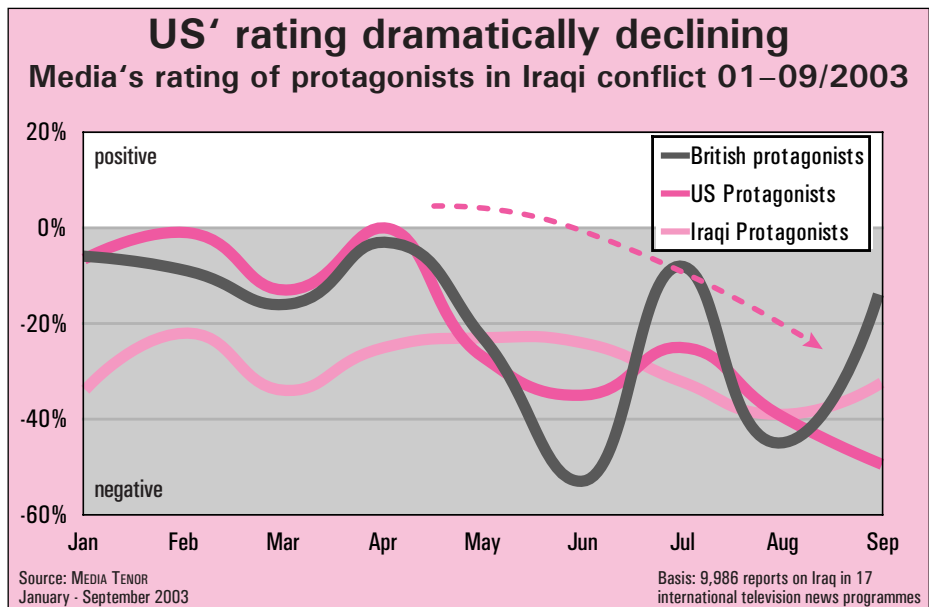
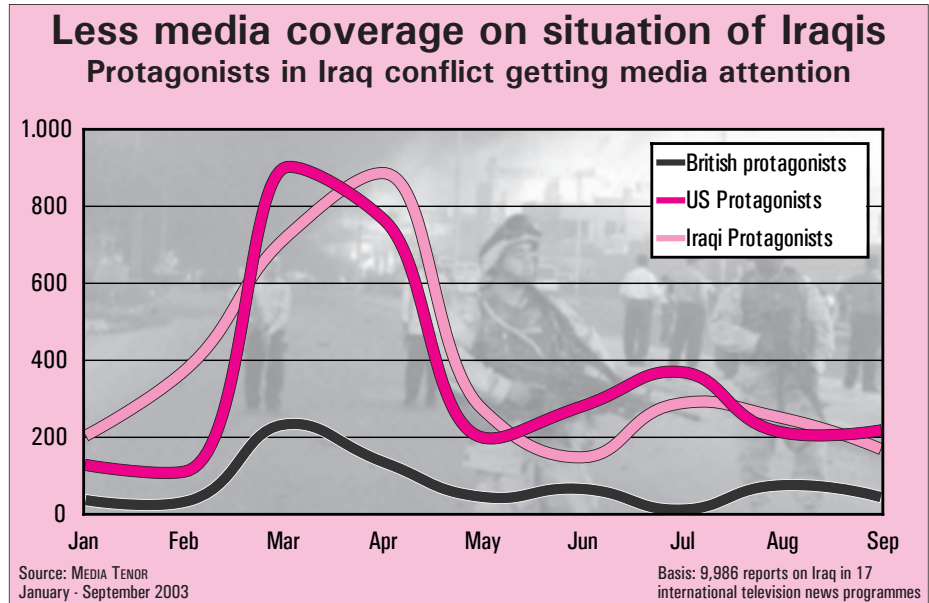
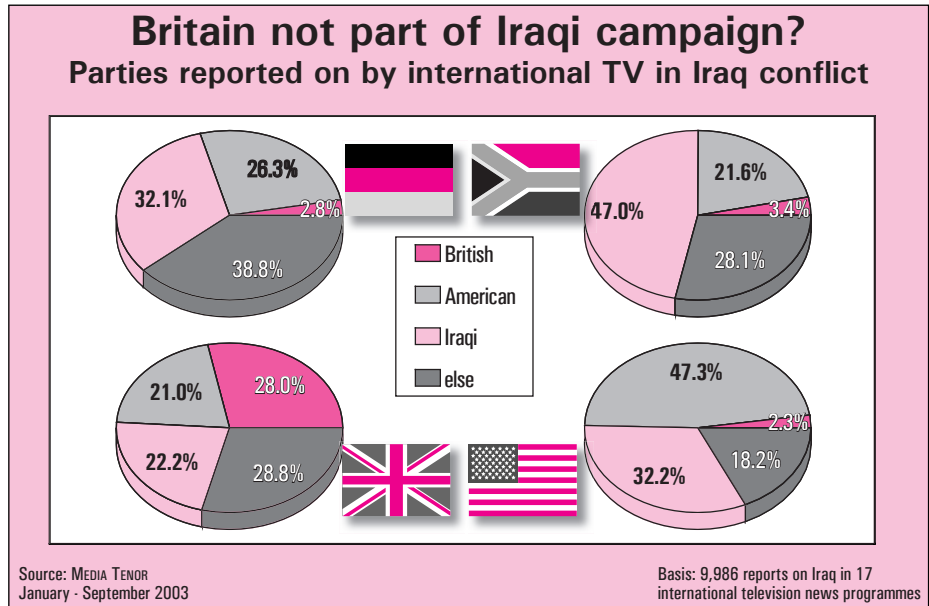
With the 2004 elections approaching, the unabating crisis in Iraq appears to have dealt Bush's popular support a heavy blow. As a recent poll (9/11/03) conducted by the WASHINGTON POST and ABC NEWS indicates, an unprecedented 42 percent of all respondents gave Bush 'the thumbs down.' Surprisingly almost half the respondents thought the war in Iraq was not worth fighting. The task of rebuilding Iraq was severely underestimated by the Americans. More than ever, the US needs to court the support of the international community to secure a successful outcome to the Iraqi crisis, which could ultimately influence the outcome of the US election. Analysis conducted by MEDIA TENOR INTERNATIONAL, over the period 1/1/2003 and 31/9/2003, of international news media, indicates that the US has certainly got a long way to go.

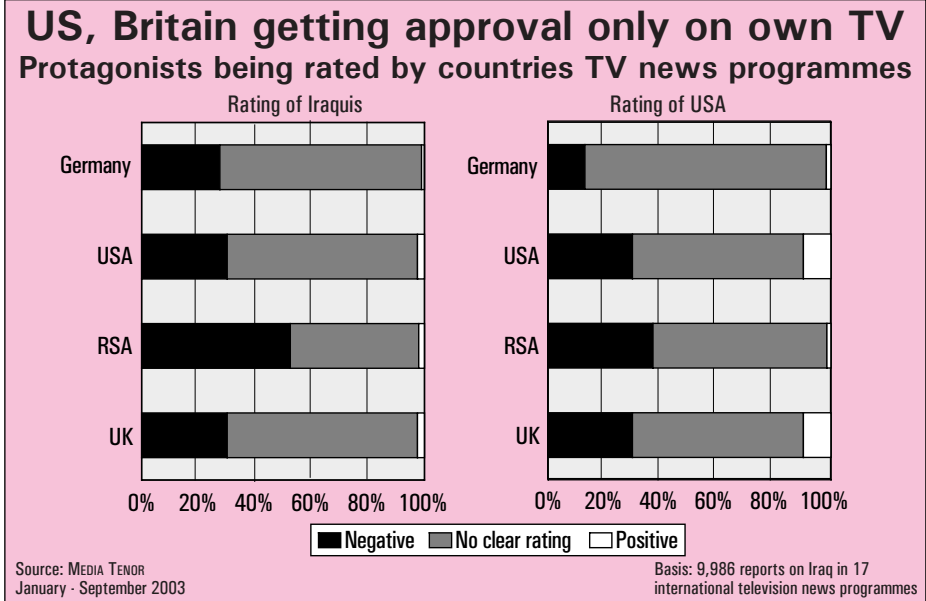
British role in Iraqi conflict ignored

A deepening humanitarian crisis and escalating instability in Iraq has forced the US to augment the coalition with willing nations and organizations. But it is possible that this call for assistance has come a little too late for alienated parties. If the American TV media's perception of the UK protagonists in Iraq, the US's principal ally, is in any way indicative of the government's approach, their task appears virtually insurmountable. American media has practically obscured the role of Britain to inconsequentiality in coverage on the Iraqi situation. US television has a severely imbalanced proportion on the US's role (47%) in the crisis, opposed to their negligible coverage of their chief ally (2.3%).

With British forces entrenched with the US forces and their own mounting casualties, support back home is waning. The British Government has been taken to task by its own impartial media for their role in the war. This objectivity is clearly shown in the UK's balanced reporting on the Iraqi conflict, with the involved protagonists (US, UK, Iraq), receiving an almost equal share of coverage.

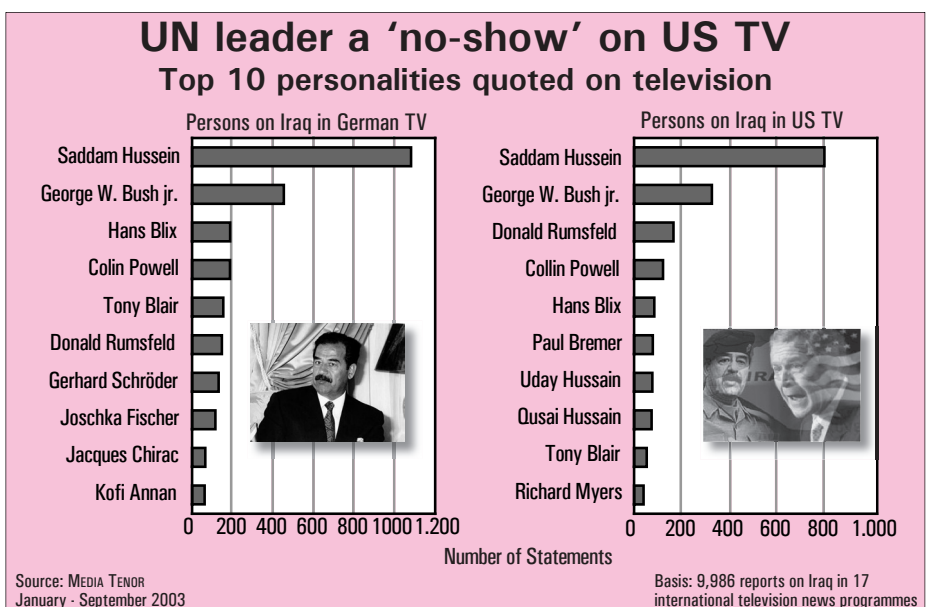
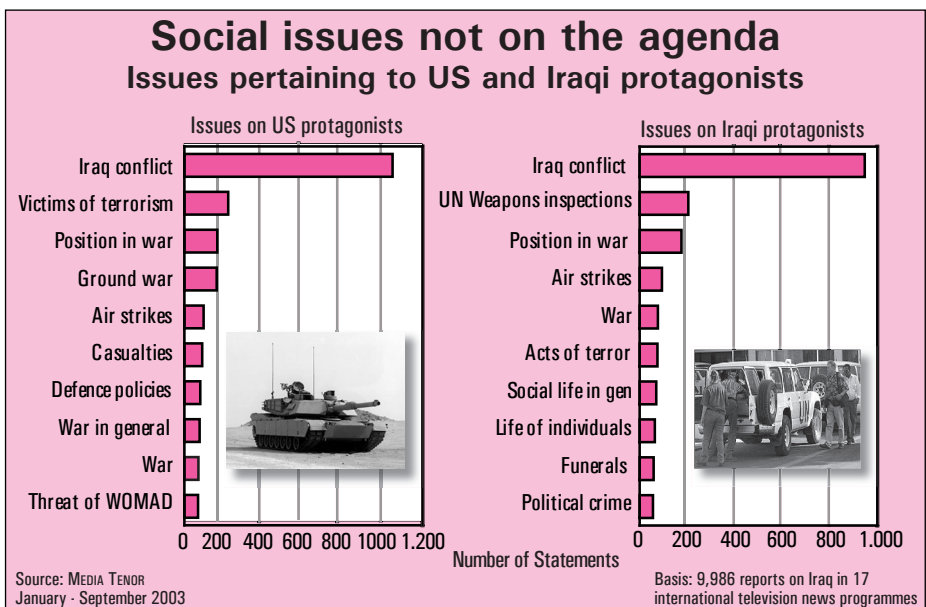
This approach in reporting has left the Blair camp with their back up against the wall – in search of an ally – if US media is anything to go by. And it does not further Blair's cause that the UK media has taken the humanitarian and social aspects of the conflict into account, contrary to its American counterpart.





Post-War shift in coverage

Since the onset of the guerilla warfare and the mounting American casualties, there has been a visible post-war shift in American media's coverage of US involvement in Iraq. Coverage, in terms of volume, has moved its focus away from Iraq, focusing instead on the US's role. This change in focal point has been detrimental to the ratings of the US position, by not only international news media, but American as well. Since the end of the war the rating of the US protagonists in Iraq by the combined American, UK, German and South African TV news broadcasts, has dropped a staggering 50 percentile points. The growing unpopularity of the war in the US, accentuated by the sombre return of soldiers in body bags, is reflected in the American media's 30% negative rating on their own involvement in Iraq. This underlines recent polls which show sagging support for the US involvement which has left 'the Bush administration struggling to cast dismaying events in a hopeful light' (TIME, 10/11/2003). This same trend is evident in an ever-increasing international disapproval, with South African news media topping the charts, with an almost 40% negative rating. The images of defiant Iraqis and the rough handling of many of the populace by culturally inexperienced US forces have no doubt influenced international news media.



Iraqi coverage with impact on elections?

The colossal 80 billion dollars which the US now needs to collect for the rebuilding of Iraq, has only served to further damage the US's image. Compounding matters, the gross miscalculation, by pro-consul Bremer, to disband the Iraqi army has further exasperated an already precarious situation, 'which [has] put thousands of armed men on the streets with no pay and no reason to support the Americans' (TIME, 6/10/03). The economical impact, as well as the growing military conflict on US soldiers in Iraq has on Bush's re-election campaign will remain to be seen in the next few months.

Basis
Media: Germany: ARD, ZDF, RTL, SAT.1, PROSIEBEN; UK: BBC, ITV ; South Africa: SABC ENGLISH NEWS, E-TV NEWS; USA: ABC, CBS, NBC
Time: 1 January 2003 – 30 September 2003
Analysis: All reports focusing on US, British or Iraqi protagonists in the context of reporting on Iraq.