

# Kofi who?

## The United Nation's disappearance act

Research Links:  
[www.rasmussenreports.com](http://www.rasmussenreports.com)  
[www.un.org/News/oss/sg/](http://www.un.org/News/press/docs/2004/20040101.unsg.html)  
[www.un.com](http://www.un.com)



In the year before its 60th birthday, the United Nations must urgently solve the crisis of its public image. This has worsened by the findings about the "Oil for Food" programme, picturing the UN as such and many of its leaders in a light of corruption, secrecy and lack of liability.

This scandal has been even more damaging as the UN has neglected the importance of image-building for a long time. Media Tenor's analysis of TV news coverage from January 2002 to May 2004 show the fragility of the UN's reputation in four countries: Irregular news flow, lack of representation, and deficient coverage of the UN activities hasn't helped in building a solid image of the organization which has many accomplishments to celebrate.

### UN missing in news media

One of Kofi Annan's priorities as Secretary-General has been, in his words, "bringing the United Nations closer to the people".

The UN is concerned about putting itself and its programs back in touch with the public, showing that its agenda deals with the issues people most care about. That is: The UN is responsible for infinite contributions to the world including preventing the propagation of nuclear weapons, promoting human rights, fighting poverty, and fostering democracy.

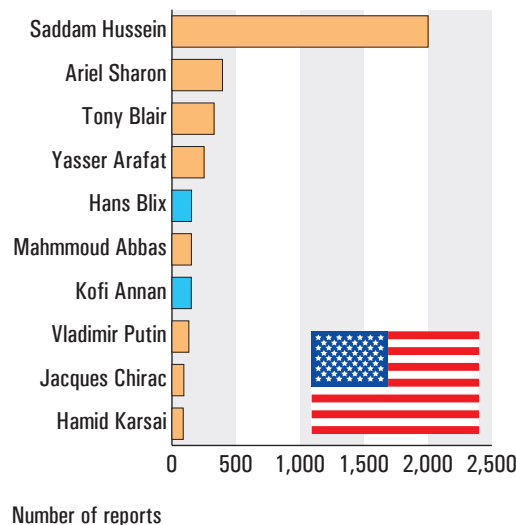
Taking a look at what people in Germany, UK, South Africa and U.S. have been seeing – or not seeing – about the UN on TV news shows he is late in addressing these issues in the media.

In the 4 countries analyzed, the UN has had insignificant space in TV news. In the 29 months of the analysis, the overall share of reports on UN was a mere 1%. It's important to remark that more information about UN programs would be more than welcome by the public of the countries analyzed. U.S., UK and Germany are among the countries that contribute most to the UN, while South Africa has hosted major summits promoted by the UN in the last years and has received extensive aid for programs, especially on prevention and treatment of AIDS.

Certainly Mr. Annan could drag more attention to his work. His coverage during the whole analyzed period was irrelevant, even in the heat of discussions that preceded the Iraq invasion. Comparing the presence of Annan with international leaders and personalities, it's made clear how his presence in the media has been deficient: In U.S. and UK he received less coverage than Hans Blix, even though the majority of reports on Blix aired during the three first months of 2003, and after that the top UN weapons inspector was rapidly forgotten. Image of the United Nations associated to war and conflicts.

Hardly any chance of understanding the UN perspective

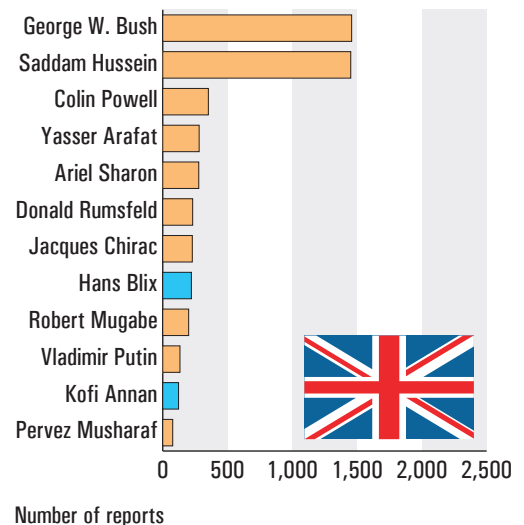
### Coverage of Kofi Annan and Hans Blix in US TV news



Source: Media Tenor  
01/01/2002 – 02/29/2004

Basis: 479,244 mentions overall on international TV

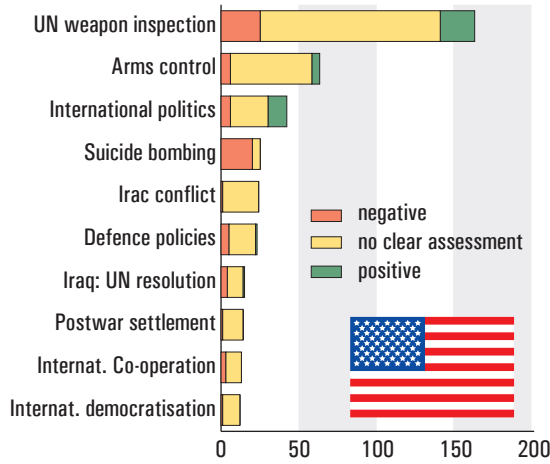
### Coverage of Kofi Annan and Hans Blix in British TV news



Source: Media Tenor  
01/01/2002 – 02/29/2004

Basis: 479,244 mentions overall on international TV

**Were are all the constant UN activities? UN topics on US TV**

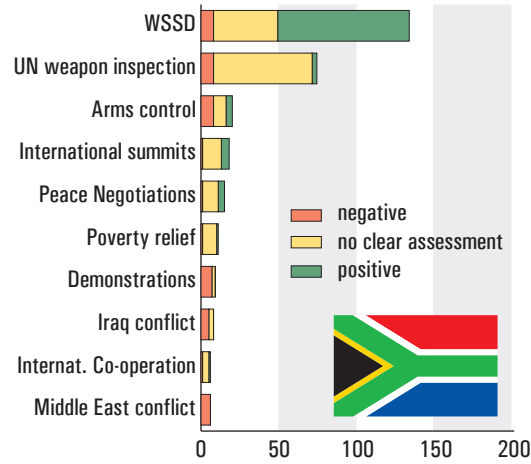


Number of reports (negative/unclear assessment/positive)

Source: Media Tenor  
01/01/2002 – 05/31/2004

Basis: 296,465 reports overall on international TV

**Most diverse selection of topics: UN coverage on South African TV**



Number of reports (negative/unclear assessment/positive)

Source: Media Tenor  
01/01/2002 – 05/31/2004

Basis: 296,465 reports overall on international TV

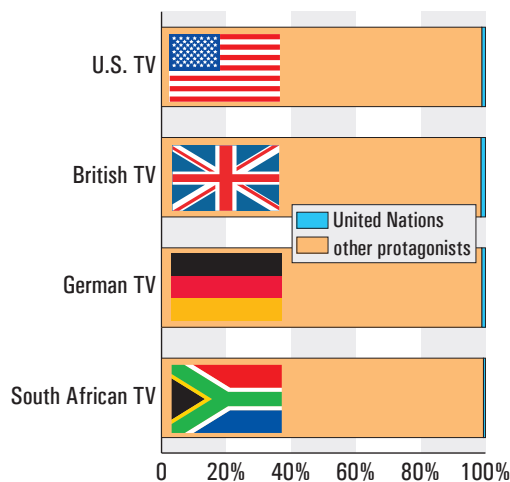
In South Africa, the media reported on the UN with the most diverse selection of topics. The World Summit on Sustainable Development, which received extremely positive coverage, was the most frequent subject in TV news.

The vast majority of the UN funds are dedicated to economic, social and sustainable development. These programs focus on issues such as the environment, refugees, drug trafficking and health-care. Although, most people have been linking the UN exclusively with politics related to the Iraq war and other conflicts in general.

In South Africa, the media reported on the UN with the most diverse selection of topics. The

World Summit on Sustainable Development, which received extremely positive coverage, was the most frequent subject in TV news. South African media also covered international summits promoted by the UN and poverty relief programs, being an exception among the countries analyzed. Germany, UK, and the U.S. presented extensive coverage related to political conflicts and diplomatic efforts.

**United Nations with little coverage on international television**



Share of reports, 100%: All protagonists

Source: Media Tenor  
01/01/2002 – 05/31/2004

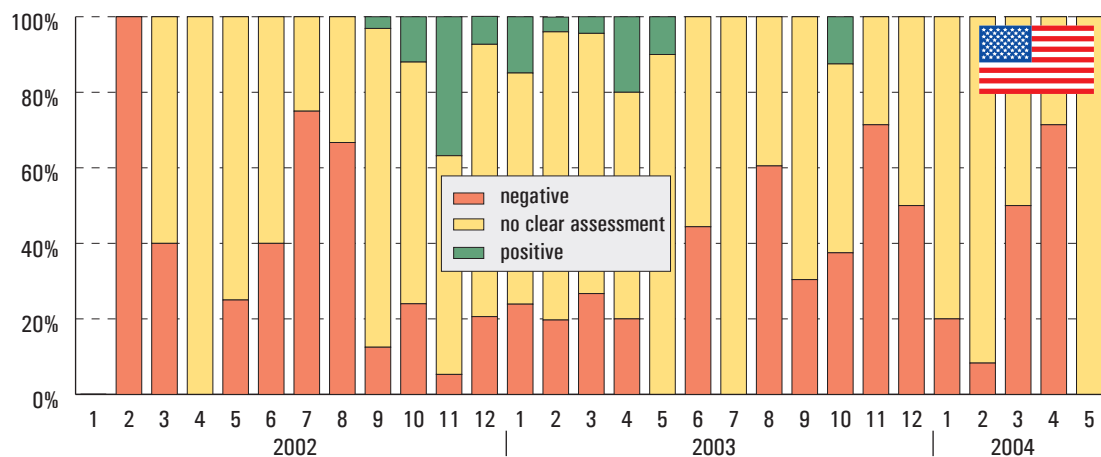
Basis: 296,465 reports overall on international TV

U.S. media presented the most negative coverage, what explains the drop in popularity of the organization among the American public. According to the Rasmussen Reports, an American independent polling firm, leading up to the War with Iraq, 48% of Americans had a favorable opinion of the UN and 31% unfavorable. From November 2002 to March 2003, American TV news featured the highest number of reports on the UN, in an average of 66.4 reports per month. The majority of it focused in the weapon inspections in Iraq, 18.37% of them negative. In the latest survey, released in April 2004, only 38% of American voters said to have a favorable opinion of the United Nations these days. Most concerning, the survey found out that 44% have an unfavorable view.

A very bad picture in the country that is the largest contributor to UN programs, being assessed with the largest share of contribution for the UN regular budget with 22% of the total of donations, the equivalent to 283.1 millions dollars in 2002 (following U.S. and Japan, Germany is the third

In the latest Rasmussen survey, released in April 2004, only 38% of American voters said to have a favorable opinion of the United Nations these days. Most concerning, the survey found out that 44% have an unfavorable view.

**United Nations often criticised in US TV news: Rating on ABC, NBC, CBS**



Share of negative/unclear/positive ratings of the United Nations

Source: Media Tenor  
01/01/2002 – 05/31/2004

Basis: 296,465 reports overall on international TV

biggest contributor to the UN, accounting for 9.8% of the funding and UK the fifth, providing 5.5% of the funds for regular budget).

**Fighting for popularity**

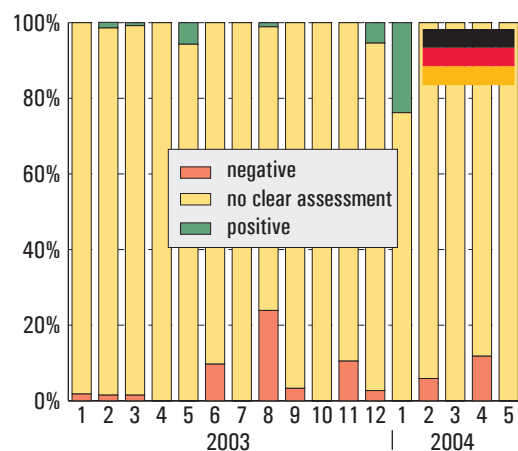
For the UN, strengthening leadership and mobilizing support is a matter of survival. The UN has newly recovered from an enormous financial crisis, caused by unpaid invoices from countries facing budgetary problems or poverty. Also, it may happen that countries exploit their positions as monetary donors, suspending payments in order to exert political pressure. It's imperative for

the UN to keep a good image, especially among countries that contribute to its cause.

The UN has a lot of house cleaning to do, but an important part of this work will be to communicate effectively with the media. Not only communicating about current problems, but also consistently build a more solid reputation – making it being less vulnerable to new crisis.

To recognize the media as a powerful source of influence among political and civil-society leaders and their publics would be a most vital decision for the UN. There's a lesson to be learned from the work that has – or has not – been done until now, and how the lack of representation in the media opened the door for a misrepresentation in the minds of the people. Rather than finger point, the UN should recognize the media as a powerful tool and use it to regain public support.

**German TV news with more balanced reports on the UN**



Share of negative/unclear/positive ratings

Source: Media Tenor  
01/01/2002 – 05/31/2004

Basis: 296,465 reports overall on international TV

**Basis**

**Media:** UK: BBC News at Six, BBC News at Ten, ITV News, ITV News at Ten;  
US: NBC Nightly News, ABC World News Tonight, CBC Evening News;  
SA: SABC Afrikaans News, English News, Sotho News and Zulu/Xhosa News, E-TV News;  
Germany: ARD Tagesschau and Tagesthemen, ZDF Heute and Heute Journal, RTL Aktuell, Sat.1 18:30, ProSieben Nachrichten-  
**Time:** 01/ 01/ 2002 – 05/ 31/ 2004

**Analysis:** All reports (296,465 overall) in 19 international TV news programmes