

**Portrayal of the Iraqi Kurdistan Region in U.S. Newspapers: 2000-2010**

By

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## **Abstract**

The Iraqi Kurdistan region claims that it is a close ally of the United States and supports its agenda in the Middle East. Therefore, to know what issues, events and sources the U.S. mainstream newspapers use to portray the region is essential. It's important for the Kurdish people to know whether the coverage of the U.S. newspapers about the Kurdistan region is positive or negative. It's also important for the American academic field to know if the U.S. newspapers' coverage of Kurdistan mirrors the U.S. foreign policies. A content analysis of three U.S. newspapers from 2000 to 2010 was conducted. Besides the fact that 64.5 percent of the coverage is neutral about the Kurdistan region, the study found that the coverage reflected the U.S. agenda and policies in Iraq. The issues such as elections, Kurdish-Arab political strife and ethnic strife over lands the newspapers covered about Kurdistan also reflected the U.S. concerns over Iraq. Results also show that the U.S. newspapers frequently cover events, not issues and rely heavily on powerful sources, not ordinary citizens.

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This thesis is dedicated to my family, parents and friends in recognition of their love and support. It is also dedicated to those journalists who try to make unheard voices heard and invisible minorities visible.

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## **Introduction**

As a working journalist in the Kurdistan region of Iraq, I always noticed international correspondents flying overseas with a list of sources in their note book to cover the region. Almost everyone on the list was either Kurdish high ranking, Iraqi or American officials. International journalists come to Kurdistan, not Iraq, because it's safe, stable and a haven of hot stories about oil deals, democracy, free market and development, not about explosions, terrorist acts and tensions as they happen in Iraq. After the 2003 U.S.-Iraq war, international news organizations sent reporters in flow to know what's happening in the other Iraq; An Iraq that was completely different from the one which always topped the international news coverage of explosions and suicide bombings.

I've also noticed that some international reporters depend on local translators who often mislead them. The local translators often help the reporters to find sources, especially local sources, not officials as they are already on the list. The misleading comes when a local translator has no hint on the political process going on there and become the eyes and ears of the reporters. The report would come out to be good if the reporter's local translator is educated enough about what is going on and would not look good had the translator has a poor understanding on the issues or events the reporter writes. Therefore, the international reporters will learn from this study as it examines their work in terms of issues, events, sources and favorability.

Kurds in Iraq have achieved autonomy since 1991 with the support from the George H. W. Bush administration of the United States. Though the region has its own

government, parliament, language and constitution, it still depends on the United States and needs its protection (Hoshang, 2007). As a result, Kurdistan has been supporting the U.S. in the Middle East. American media's coverage of a country or region can influence foreign policies of the United States (Gilboa, 2005; Nacos, Shapiro, & Isernia, 2000). Therefore, an interesting research question is how U.S. newspapers cover the U.S. government's staunchest ally in the Middle East (Razaq, 2010). This study also presents an opportunity to examine the press-state relations in terms of whether U.S. media follow the American government's official position on Kurdistan which is to support democracy and peace in the region.

The present author could not locate any academic research about U.S. media framing of Iraqi Kurdistan. Therefore, the findings would be interesting to international communication scholars and policy makers. This research will examine how deep or shallow news coverage is. Do the journalists provide details or only simple facts taking from local sources? Do they use different sources or not? What issues and events about the region do they cover? Answering these questions would contribute to international communication and state-press relations literature. Through the findings of this study, we understand to what extent media reflects the foreign policies of the state. We also understand how journalists do their job and what do they need to do their jobs better?

## **Background information about Kurdistan**

The Kurds are the largest minority in Iraq, making up six million of Iraq's 31 million people. They are an ethno-linguistic group that has been divided among four countries, Turkey, Iraq, Syria and Iran after the collapse of Ottoman Empire in World War I. The Kurds also exist in Lebanon and Russia in smaller numbers. There are at least 25 million Kurds around the world, making them the largest nation in the world without a state (O'Leary, 2002). After the World War I, the Kurds of Iraq were very close to having their own country as a result of the 1920 Treaty of Sevres between the Ottoman Empire and the Allies. But that was rescinded in the Treaty of Lausanne in 1923 (O'Leary, 2002). The reason behind that was the Allies stopped backing the establishment of Turkish Kurdistan. This was due to Turkish concessions to stop claiming former Arab provinces and recognize of the British possession of Cyprus (Britannica academic edition, n.d.).

The area of the Iraqi Kurdistan region is about 83,000 square kilometers, nearly the same size of Austria. Other minorities live within the region such as Assyria-Chaldeans, Turkmen, Arabs and Armenians (Khalat, 2010). The region includes three provinces: Erbil, Duhok and Slemani. Erbil, also known as Arbil, is the capital of the Kurdistan Region. The majority of Iraqi Kurds are Sunni Muslims with a few Shiites, Yezidis, Shabaks and Christians who identify themselves as Kurds (Bruinessen, 1992 & McDowall, 2000). Kurds in Iraq speak Kurdish, which is their mother tongue, and have culture and traditions of their own.

Throughout the history of Iraq, the Kurds were subject to cultural and political suppression, destruction of property, ethnic cleansing and genocide (Makiya, 1989, 1993; Rabil, 2002; Hardi, 2010). 5,000 Kurdish people were killed on March 16, 1988, in a chemical gas attack by the then Iraqi regime and 180,000 more were killed, buried alive or have disappeared in a series of military operations called the “Anfal Campaign” in the 1980s (O’Leary, 2002). The then Iraqi regime, conducted those operations because the Kurds sought to exercise rights of self-determination. During the reign of the Baath Party, which seized power in 1963, “more than 4,000 villages in rural Kurdistan were destroyed and perhaps 300,000 (Kurdish) people perished” (O’Leary, 2002, p. 18).

The Kurds held an uprising in March 1991 against the then Iraqi president Saddam Hussein’s regime (news.bbc.co.uk). Shortly afterward, with support of U.N. Security Council Resolution 688 and the U.S. forces, the Kurdistan region was protected under the no-fly zone in the north of Iraq. Then in October 1991, the Iraqi government withdrew from the region and the Kurds began enjoying self-rule government. The first free and fair elections were held in May 1992, which created a Kurdish parliament and government known for Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG). Both Kurdish major political parties Kurdistan Democratic Party (KDP) headed by the current Kurdish president Massoud Barzani, and Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), headed by the current Iraqi president Jalal Talabani, went for a 50-50 power sharing scale with five seats for minorities like Assyrian-Chaldean Christian community (Rasti, 2010).

Both KDP and PUK fought over power for four years (1994-1998). They divided the region into two parts. Each ruled one part with different rules and government. They reconciled in 1998 by the Washington Agreement. Efforts continued to merge both PUK

and KDP administrations until the parliament convened on October 4, 2002. The Kurdish government ran by KDP and PUK developed relations with the George W. Bush administration and Europe. The unification was to strive together for a better region in the new democratic Iraq (O'Leary, 2002). O'Leary (2002) writes "the liberated part of Iraqi Kurdistan has become a refuge for all Iraqis seeking freedom and democracy" (p. 19). Thousands of Iraqis returned from Iran, and many more came to the region from south and central parts of Iraq. Since its liberation, despite various issues, citizens of the Kurdistan region in Iraq enjoyed freedom of speech and their basic rights were promoted and protected. It has become a model of democracy for the rest of Iraq (O'Leary, 2002).

The Iraqi Kurdistan region welcomed the U.S. toppling of Saddam Hussein's regime in April 2003 and called the war "Operation Iraqi Freedom." The Kurdish mass media described the war, following the Bush administration. The region remained safe and stable and no U.S. soldier has been kidnapped and/or killed since the war started (Karzan, 2007). The Kurds of Iraq consider themselves as the most friendly allies and partners of the U.S. government in the Middle East (Rasti, 2010). And the U.S. government recognized that recently when the U.S. Representative Lincoln Davis and Representative Brian Baird met Kurdish president Massoud Barzani on May 31, 2010. In a press release on the same date, the official website of the Kurdish presidency wrote:

The two Congressmen, accompanied by Senior Advisor to the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad Alan Misenhiemer, said they are in the Kurdistan region in recognition and appreciation for the friendship of the people of the Kurdistan region toward the U.S. government and people" ...the Kurds of Iraq have been willing partners with the U.S. in the democratic

transition in Iraq since 2003, and the Kurdistan region has served as a model of Iraq's democratization since Operation Iraqi Freedom. The establishment of a United States consulate in the Kurdistan region will demonstrate a U.S. commitment to maintaining and building upon the success and stability of this prosperous and democratic Iraqi region ([www.krp.org](http://www.krp.org)).

The Kurds participated very actively in the Iraqi political and democratic process and in rebuilding the country. "The extensive and high-level Kurdish participation marked the first time in Iraq's history that the Kurds had entered national politics in Baghdad on an equal footing with Iraq's Arab majority" (Katzman & Prados, 2005, p.4). The Kurdish military forces, which are called "Peshmarga" and means "Challenging death" in the Kurdish language, fought with the U.S. forces against insurgency. Kurdish leaders supported the idea of recruiting some Peshmarga into the national security forces to help protect Iraq from insurgents (Ashad, 2005).

The U.S. government considers the Iraqi Kurdistan region as a friend because the region supports the agenda of the U.S. government in building a democratic and federal Iraq. Beyond that, the region is applying the principles of democracy in the new Iraq, something the U.S. government claims it will bring to Iraq and the Middle East (Karzan, 2007). The Kurdistan region experienced a democratic year as for the first time an opposition as the third party came up and participated in the July 25 elections in which it won 25 seats. The election hailed by the international electoral sponsors as a big victory of democracy (Omer, 2009). The U.S. newspapers focused on the region in 2009 to cover the democratic elections.

The opposition group called Gorran, which means “Change” in English, derived from the PUK. Gorran was born from PUK for tensions over money and power (Razaq, 2010). For the elections, Gorran ran campaigns against PUK and KDP’s alliance accusing them of poor management, corruption and having a power monopoly (Ali, 2009).

### **Media Content**

Many layers of factors influence media content (Shoemaker & Reese, 1996). Expanding on Shoemaker and Reese’s research, Malinkina and McLeod (2000) identified the following layers of influence:

(a) individual influences on media content such as the education, ethnicity, personal values and beliefs, and the political orientation of individual media workers; (b) media routines that constrain individual media workers and affect "what gets defined as news" and portrayed as social reality; (c) organizational influences, which include differences in the organization's internal structure, policies, goals, projected markets, and policies set by the individuals that control the media organizations; (d) extra-media forces such as sources of information and revenue, government, various powerful social institutions, the utilization of technology, and the economic environment; and (e) ideology, which is defined as a symbolic mechanism that serves as a cohesive and integrating force in a society (p. 38).

Governments often try to influence the news media to support their policies and plans. In the United States, there are several ways to do that: media ownership, major revenue source (advertising), official sources of information, and criticism by officials (Herman & Chomesky, 1988). As a result, according to Herman and Chomsky, media coverage often backs the interests or official foreign policies of the American government.

Newsmakers work according to cultural assumptions their departments set for writing news (Avraham, Wolfsfeld & Aburaiya, 2000). One of the assumptions is the majority's perspective toward other groups in and outside the country. Scholars find that those perspectives reflect in the journalists' works (Croteau and Hoynes 1997; Davis 1990; Gamson et al, 1992). Most editors presume that majority pay little attention to minorities "unless such groups represent a threat to social order" (Avraham et al. 2000, p. 118).

Avraham et al. (2000) argue that all the groups are not dealt with equally. The minority groups that are closer than others to a country in terms of interests get more positive media coverage in that country (Avraham, 1998). The more values of a minority group are compatible with the values of a country, the more attention that groups will get in the media in that country (Gill, 1987). And Wolfsfeld (1997) argued that those groups that want to be covered by the media of the other countries far from their voice will not get positive coverage.

## **The U.S. Media's International Coverage**

Countries in the developing world are covered by Western media only during crises or disasters (Riffe & Shaw, 1982). According to Gerbner and Marvanyi (1977), American media have biased coverage in terms of international news. U.S. media pay more attention to the Middle East, Western Europe and North America than Eastern Europe, South East Asia and African countries (McNelly & Izcaray, 1986).

Studies argue that gatekeepers select news based on prominence, cultural aspects, and relevance and that these factors determine which foreign country is covered (K. Chang & Lee, 2009; T. Chang, Shoemaker, & Brendlinger, 1987; Wu, 2000). Golan (2008) stated that coverage influences the knowledge people get about the nations. And scholars such as Anash (1984) and Shoemaker, Danielian, & Brendlinger (1991) have accused the U.S. media of creating a negative picture for audiences about developing countries by ignoring or hastily covering and distorting the images in those countries. They conclude that powerful countries can use media as another source of power to spread their presence and positions throughout the world. And with the concept of the cultural imperialism in mind, the U.S. government has aggressively sought to expand its political and cultural powers across the world starting from 1970s and 1980s (Tomlinson, 1991). Researchers argue that the media follow the state agenda to support the goal of the country (Entman, 2004). Foreign news reporters rely on official sources for their stories (Zaller & Chiu, 1996). And Bennett (1990) said media coverage of foreign affairs is often supports the government's position.

## **Media Framing**

Frames tell the audience what to see and what not to see, to understand and what not to understand, to know and what not to know. “Frames guide our senses so that we see, hear, taste, smell certain things and not others” (Davis & Kent, 2006, p. 3). Meaning comes into being within the context of daily life (Davis & Kent, 2009; Goffman, 1959). Goffman (1974) talked about the application of framing in everyday life. He then applied this theory to mass media content in 1979.

After Goffman developed the theory, other researchers such as Gitlin (1980) and Tuchman (1978) used it to assess news coverage (Davis & Kent, 2009). The former centers his study on news coverage of radical political groups and the latter focused on the limitations of event coverage through news production. Then Gamson (1989,1992) examined how social events are framed and impact on society. Gamson learned that the audience knows the impact through framing. Entman (2004) argued that government uses frames to control the social world better. Entman concludes that media have a strong power through framing and that government can use that power for the interest of its policies.

Scholars have defined framing in various ways. For example, “A frame is a central organizing idea for making sense of relevant events and suggesting what is at issue” (Gamson,1989, p. 157). Entman (1993) stated:

To frame is to select some aspects of a perceived reality and make them more salient in a communication text, in such a way as to promote a

particular problem definition, causal interpretation, moral evaluation, and/or treatment recommendation for the item described (p.52).

Many researchers have studied framing the “other” in media. Scholars (e.g. Campbell, 1995, Jakubowicz et al, 1994; Ross, 1998, & van Dijk, 1988) have identified two ways in which minority groups are covered by media. The first way is media ignorance of issues of minorities, and the second is to focus on negative aspects of the minorities such as: violence, crime, extremism and subversion (Avraham, 1993; First, 1998; Gans, 1979; Wolfsfeld, 1997).

Media hold minority groups responsible for not changing the reality through which their fate is shaped (First, 1998 & Wolfsfeld, 1997). As cited in Gans (1979) and Avraham (1993), the news coverage of minorities lacks background and reasons when it comes to discussion of the social, economic and political changes related to minority groups. As a result, according to Avraham, these groups feel ignored and irritated.

### **News Sources and Topics**

Journalists depend on routine definitions of news when they cover a region or city. Another factor journalists depend on is the news sources in the place on where they write stories. Journalists do not alone decide what region to cover or what news sources to use; news organizations make those decisions (Avraham, 2002). But what they consider to do is to focus on topics about which minorities are involved. Journalists search then for people of social, political, economic and cultural importance in such groups to use as

their news sources because such sources have impact on life of the public (Avraham, 2002; van Dijk, 1996).

When reporters go to cover minorities beyond their home borders, they search for topics that can attract the readers' attention. They focus more on topics that embrace conflicts, specifically conflicts that are matter for home readers of the reporters (Wolfsfeld, 1997).

According to Avraham (2002) what has been argued above by Wolfsfeld (1997) have tremendous effects on the coverage of minorities (Avraham, 2002). He then writes:

The news people's decisions to focus on powerful groups and conflicts result in the under-representation of less powerful minorities, who are covered only in relation to conflict, violence, law breaking and threats to the social order (p. 73).

Strong actors in minorities come into the media through the "front door" and the weak ones through the "back door"( Avraham, 2002, & Wolfsfeld, 1997). Researchers such as Gans (1979), Schulman (1990), Waitt (1995) and Avraham (2002) argue that journalists should go through a socialization process to find news coming from various places and groups. According to Waitt, the process means that journalists should interact with people, talk to them and socialize with them to have a better understating on the community.

Labeling, sites and areas also matter when it comes to coverage of minorities. Shield (1991) and Avraham (2002) claim that "labeling, sites and zones" make the way clear for

journalists to focus on specific activities. “By seeing what type of items make news from a particular place or group, journalists learn what their editors are looking for” (Avraham, 2002, p. 73). Avraham (2002) and Epstein (1973) stated that reporters do not totally change their way to make stories on minorities as they usually think of coverage before their news organization.

Avraham (2002) argued that types of sources push the reporters to shape their stories accordingly. He said the type of the activities happening in a city or a region influences reporters’ choice of news sources. He also states:

When a city is defined as a site of cultural events, tourism or national news, these are the main sources used by media organizations to learn about events taking place in that city and once a certain city is defined by the newspapers as a place of crime, violence and disorder, newspeople tend to use the police and courts as their main sources of information (p. 73).

Little research has been done on how the U.S. newspapers cover the minorities in foreign countries. This study focuses on Iraqi Kurdistan, and it poses four research questions about the U.S. newspaper coverage of Iraqi Kurds as the largest minority in the country.

RQ1: What are the issues in the U.S. newspapers’ coverage of Iraqi Kurds from 2000 to 2010?

RQ2: Who are the sources in the U.S. newspaper coverage of the Iraqi Kurds from 2000 to 2010?

RQ3: Is the U.S. newspapers' coverage in the decade of Iraqi Kurdistan region positive, negative or neutral?

RQ4: What are the events in the U.S. newspapers' coverage of Iraqi Kurds?

## **Method**

To answer these research questions, the researcher conducted a content analysis of U.S. newspapers. Content analysis is a “technique that is based on measuring the amount of something and ... it is a means of trying to learn something about people” (Berger, 1998, p. 23). Reinard (1994) said content analysis could be a quantitative study of articles, documents and pictures. Content analysis is used for the present study because it can quantify messages and gives the reader a summary as it is not limited to variables used (Neuendorf, 2002). Berger (1991) said “content analysis is a research technique that is based on measuring the amount of something in a representative sampling of some mass-mediated popular art form” (p.25). And Weber (1990) defines it as “a research method that uses a set of procedures to make valid inferences from text” (p. 9).

This study focuses on the last decade (2000-2010) to find out whether the U.S. newspaper coverage of Iraqi Kurdistan region was positive, negative or neutral. The

reason behind choosing that decade was that a good population, i.e. enough number of articles of U.S. newspapers, was available about the region.

The researcher chose four U.S. newspapers for this study: the New York Times, Washington Times, Washington Post and Christian Science Monitor. The selection of the newspapers are based on their high circulations and their focus on international coverage. After examining the articles, the researcher found that the articles of the Christian Science Monitor did not focus on Kurdistan Region and mostly were about Iraq. Therefore, that newspaper was excluded.

Phrases including “Kurdish people in Iraq, Iraqi Kurdistan Region, Kurdistan region of Iraq,” and “Iraqi Kurds” were searched in the Lexis Nexis Academic Source List. The word Iraq was used with all the phrases to avoid other articles on other parts of Kurdistan in Turkey, Syria, Iran and Lebanon. 158 articles were found in the decade from the three U.S. newspapers: The New York Times (N =53), Washington Post (N =50), Washington Times (N =55). The researcher discarded editorial and opinion pieces to examine and focus on the journalistic side of the coverage. The remaining 106 articles include news stories and features articles.

The researcher examined paragraphs (as the units of analysis) instead of articles because an article might talk about both the positive and negative aspects of Iraqi Kurdistan and thus balance each other out. Also, using individual articles as the units of analysis would produce a small sample. Therefore, a total of 2,540 paragraphs were analyzed through SPSS.

Using a carefully designed and pre-tested coding system (see Appendix 2 and 3), a trained primary coder, who is a graduate student in linguistics, evaluated each paragraph as being positive, negative or neutral about the Kurdistan Region. Examples of positive description include: democratic; an independent or autonomous region; model of democracy in the Middle East; stable; safe haven in Iraq; peaceful; economic booming; best place for investment; developing; plays as a broker; stateless; suppressed by Iraqi consecutive regimes; friendly with foreigners; like negotiations and talks; peace initiative; protect minorities' rights; kingmakers; positive influence on Iraqi political process; lenient on land conflict; help Iraqi government; contributes to rebuilding Iraq; model for democracy; safe for tourists; helps Christians and victims of terrorism.

A paragraph about Iraqi Kurdistan is coded as negative when it talks about corruption; lack of transparent; power monopolization; media suppression; journalists in danger; honor killing; certain cultural practices (such as circumcision); guerrilla; militia forces; torturing prisoners; tyranny; providing poor services; considered as a threat to Iraq; helping the Kurdish party in Turkey (known as P.K.K., which stands for Kurdistan Labor Party in Turkey); having no justice; violation of women rights; killing and arresting journalists and poor services. Other paragraphs were coded as neutral.

Examples of negative, positive and neutral paragraphs shown below:

### **The New York Times**

#### **Positive paragraph (July 25)**

“The play is only one sign of a growing restlessness and hunger for political change, despite the security and investments that have made the

Kurdish areas the most prosperous in Iraq, with manicured parks and shopping malls where even foreigners can walk openly and safely.”

**Negative paragraph (July 26)**

“The coalition of the Kurdistan Democratic Party, or K.D.P., and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, or P.U.K., formerly rivals, controls the region's government and economic resources, its armed forces and a vast patronage network. And the region's tense relations with the central government in Baghdad over boundaries and the division of energy revenues bolster a desire for internal unity that also favors the current government.”

**Neutral paragraph (July 10)**

Mr. Biden said he wanted to discuss the proposed constitution with the Kurdish leadership in person but could not fly to Kurdistan because of sandstorms. Instead he spoke to Kurdish leaders by telephone on Tuesday, and Christopher R. Hill, the new ambassador in Baghdad, met with them in Kurdistan on Wednesday.

**The Washington Post**

**Positive paragraph (Jan. 28)**

“Largely invisible to the provincial and central governments, the town has had only one reliable, undisputed authority since 2003: the church. Shortly after the war began, the Kurdistan Democratic Party opened an office here. A banner posted at the party's headquarters proclaimed, "Under the parliament and government of the Kurdistan region, the Assyrians, Chaldeans and Turkmens will enjoy their rights."

**Negative Paragraph (March 21)**

"The big problem is Talabani's family and Barzani's family," said Kamal Rahim, the editor of Hawlati, the region's largest independent newspaper.

"Both families have small groups that they trust. They are running everything for them and dealing for them. Some of the businessmen, they are not even members of the parties."

**Neutral paragraph (July 19)**

“Rasch is known to most people in the Kurdish region as Hallo Ibrahim Ahmed, after his father, Ibrahim Ahmed, a respected Kurdish thinker and a founder of the Kurdistan Democratic Party. Several years after its creation, Ahmed broke ranks with the party, joined by his son-in-law, Talabani, who would later form the Patriotic Union. Educated in England and Sweden, Rasch was a professor of computer sciences at the Royal Institute of Technology in Stockholm until 2000, when he moved back to Sulaymaniyah and started a group that worked with young people.”

## **The Washington Times**

### **Positive paragraph (Feb. 5)**

At the time, "Jews lived peaceably among Muslims and Christians," his son told me. "It was a place that when people did try to stir hatred between religions, the Kurds would not stand for it."

### **Negative paragraph (July 23)**

"Mr. Johnson's interest in civil rights will get quite a workout in northern Iraq. The news service Compass Direct just wrote about a hapless 16-year-old girl in the Kurdish city of Dohuk who converted to Christianity. Two years ago, when an uncle tried to kill her for converting, she defended herself with a knife. She killed him instead and was thrown into jail."

### **Neutral (April 17)**

"Under the Status of Forces Agreement approved by Iraq's parliament in November, all U.S. troops are supposed to withdraw from Iraq by the end of 2011. Nonetheless, the U.S. military has signed some contracts to sell Iraq helicopters, planes and tanks that would require training and delivery of equipment beyond that date."

To test the reliability of the coding system, a second coder, who was a male linguistics student in the same university, was given 12 percent of the sample. The

intercoder reliability was 79.8 using Chronbach's Alpha. Cohen's kappa was .93.

Analysis was based on the coding performed by the primary coder.

## Results

RQ1 asks about the Iraqi Kurds issue covered by U.S. newspapers? As shown in Table 1, The New York Times, Washington Post and Washington Times covered these issues: Kurdish elections, services, oil contracts, political conflicts between Arabs and Kurds, ethnic strife, corruption, Kurdish-Arab conflicts on land, conflicts between Kurdish political parties, linkage between Kurdistan and Israel, Kurds' anxiety over U.S. pullout in Iraq, Kurdish culture, the U.S. promises for Kurdish people, democracy, Kurdish independence, stability, issues of Iraqi elections related to Kurds, Kirkuk issue, Kurds' influence on Iraqi political process, and freedom of speech. Out of the whole coverage conflicts between Kurdish government and Iraqi government was the biggest issue which is 16.4 percent. Second biggest issue covered by the newspapers is the issue of independence demanded by the Kurds which is 14.2 percent. Other issues like oil and Kurdish elections come third and fourth with 11.9 percent and 11.5 percent. For the frequencies and percentage of the rest of issues see Table 1.

**Table 1 issues covered in the three newspapers**

	Frequency	Percent
Conflicts/Baghdad	206	16.4
Independence	178	14.2
Oil/Baghdad	150	11.9
Valid Elections	144	11.5
Services	113	9

Kurd conflict	77	6.1
development	72	5.7
Ethnic strife	63	5
Kirkuk	43	3.4
Democracy	42	3.3
US promises	38	3
Iraqi election		
issues	25	2
Christian security	24	1.9
Stability	21	1.7
Kurds form govt.	21	1.7
Free speech	20	1.6
Kurds influence	19	1.5
Total	1,256	100

Table 2 shows the percentages and frequencies of issues reported in The New York Times. The newspaper focused mostly on the Kurdish elections in the coverage of issues which is 23.7 percent. The second largest issue covered by the paper is conflicts between Kurdish government with Baghdad government which is 14.4 percent. Then comes issues such as oil, 13.2 percent, ethnic strife between Kurds and Arabs, 10 percent and Kurds amongst themselves which is 9.8 percent . The New York Times did not cover issues such as the U.S. promises towards Kurdish people, Kurdish government formation, independence and development. However, it did mention all these issues in paragraphs within articles, not devoted an entire article for each.

**Table 2 shows issues covered by The New York Times.**

	Frequency	Percent
Elections	97	23.7
Conflict/Baghdad	59	14.4
Oil/Baghdad	54	13.2
Ethnic strife	41	10

Kurd conflict	40	9.8
Services	29	7.1
Iraqi elections	25	6.1
Christian security	24	5.9
Stability	21	5.1
Free speech	20	4.9
Total	410	100

Table 3 shows that 24.1 percent of The Washington Post’s coverage of issues is about wishes and concerns of Kurdish people for an independent state of their own. The second largest area of issues in the newspaper makes 15.4 percent of the coverage which is, similar to The New York Times’, conflicts between Kurdish and Iraqi governments. The third biggest issue covered by the paper is oil issues which is 12.8 percent. The paper also focuses on other issues such as Kirkuk city, which is a disputed area between Kurds and Arabs, democracy and provision of poor services by the Kurdish government. The newspaper did not include issues such as the safety and security of the Christians, freedom of speech, development and Kurds in relation to the Iraqi elections in full articles. However, it did address these issues in paragraphs with the full news stories.

**Table 3 shows issues covered by The Washington Post**

	Frequency	Percent
Independence	119	24.1
Conflict/Baghdad	76	15.4
Oil/Baghdad	63	12.8
Kirkuk	43	8.7
Democracy	42	8.5
Services	40	8.1
Elections	32	6.5
Ethnic strife	22	4.5
Kurds form govt.	21	4.3

Kurds influence	19	3.8
Kurd conflict	17	3.4
Total	494	100

Table 4 shows the percentage and frequencies of issues reported in The Washington Times. The number one issue in the coverage is development undergoing in the Kurdistan region which is 20.5 percent. The same as the other two newspapers, the paper's second largest area of issues is conflicts between Kurdish and Iraqi governments which makes 20.2 of the whole coverage. Issues such as Kurds' demands for independence, 16.8 percent, provision of poor service by the Kurdish government, 12.5 percent and the U.S. promises for the Kurdish people, 10.8 percent come with significant percentages. The Washington Times did not have full articles focusing on only democracy, Kurdish government formation, and Kurdish influence in Baghdad and Kirkuk city. However, it did address them in paragraphs within full news stories.

**Table 4 shows issues covered by The Washington Times**

	Frequency	Percent
Development	72	20.5
Conflict/Baghdad	71	20.2
Independence	59	16.8
Services	44	12.5
US promises	38	10.8
Oil/Baghdad	33	9.4

Kurd conflict	20	5.7
Elections	15	4.3
Total	352	100

RQ2 asks about the sources in U.S. newspaper coverage of the Iraqi Kurds. The three newspapers used these sources: journalist’s own writing, local independent, international independent, citizens, U.S. officials, Kurdish opposition, Kurdish officials, and Iraqi officials. Table 5 shows the sources of the three newspapers in percentages including the reporters own words, which makes 54.8 percent of the entire sources used. After the reporters’ words, the second biggest source is Kurdish officials which make 23.1 percent. Citizens, as sources, make only 6.1 percent and the U.S. officials make 5.3 percent. It’s obvious that the reporters make more than have of the sources.

**Table 5 shows sources used by the three U.S. newspapers including reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Reporter	1,365	54.8
Kurdish officials	576	23.1
Citizens	151	6.1
US officials	132	5.3
Iraqi officials	123	4.9
Kurd opposition	63	2.5
International source	44	1.8
Local independent	38	1.5
Total	2492	100

Table 6 shows frequencies and percentages of the sources in the three newspapers without the reporters. The researcher wanted to have a different table excluding reporters' own take to see only the percentage and frequencies. The table shows that the Kurdish officials have the lion share which is 51.1 percent. It's more than half of all the sources used by the three newspapers. Citizens make 13.4 percent, the U.S. officials make 11.7 percent and the Iraqi officials make 10.9 percent.

**Table 6 shows sources used by the three U.S. newspapers without reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Kurdish officials	576	51.1
Citizens	151	13.4
US officials	132	11.7
Iraqi officials	123	10.9
Kurd opposition	63	5.6
International source	44	3.9
Local independent	38	3.4
Total	1127	100

Table 7 shows the frequencies and percentages of the sources used by The New York Times including the reporters' take and Table 8 shows the frequencies and percentages of the sources excluding the words of reporters. Table 7 demonstrates that reporters have written more than half of the whole stories by their own words which make 55.2 percent. In that Table, Kurdish officials make 24.7 percent, citizens 6.2 percent and the fourth biggest source is Iraqi officials making 5.3 percent. However Table 8 in which the words of reporters are excluded shows that the biggest portion of the

sources is the Kurdish officials who make 55.2 percent and second biggest source is citizens who make 13.8 percent.

**Table 7 shows percentage of sources used by The New York Times including reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Reporters	501	55.2
Kurdish officials	224	24.7
Citizens	56	6.2
Iraqi officials	48	5.3
Kurd opposition	40	4.4
US officials	16	1.8
International source	12	1.3
Local independent	10	1.1
Total	907	100

**Table 8 shows percentage of sources used by The New York Times excluding reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Kurdish officials	224	55.2
Citizens	56	13.8
Iraqi officials	48	11.8
Kurd opposition	40	9.9
US officials	16	3.9
Int. independent	12	3
Local independent	10	2.5
Total	406	100

Tables 9 and 10 show frequencies and percentages of sources used by The Washington Post with and without reporters own words. Reporters of The Washington Post, similar to The New York Time’s, take the biggest portion which is 48.7 percent. The reporters mostly relied on the Kurdish and U.S. officials both of which make 32.2 percent of the entire sources used. However, Table 10 shows that reporters of the newspaper used and relied on mostly on the Kurdish, U.S. and Iraqi officials who make 73.3 percent overall. Citizens make only 12.9 percent.

**Table 9 shows frequencies and percentages of sources used by The Washington Times including the words of reporters.**

	Frequency	Percent
Reporters	404	48.7
Kurdish officials	207	25
US officials	60	7.2
Citizens	55	6.6
Iraqi officials	45	5.4
Local independent	23	2.8
Kurd opposition	22	2.7
Int. independent	13	1.6
Total	829	100

**Table 10 shows frequencies and percentages of sources used by The Washington Times excluding the words of reporters.**

Frequency    Percent

Kurdish officials	207	48.7
US officials	60	14.1
Citizens	55	12.9
Iraqi officials	45	10.6
Local independent	23	5.4
Kurd opposition	22	5.2
Int. independent	13	3.1
Total	425	100

Tables 11 and 12 show the frequencies and percentages of sources reporters of The Washington Times used in the whole decade 2000-2010 with and without reporters. Table 11 shows that reporters have used their own words more than half of the whole coverage which is 60.8 percent. Kurdish officials make 19.2 as the second biggest source and the third biggest is the U.S. officials who make 7.4 percent. However, Table 12 shows different percentages excluding the words of the reporters. It shows that the reporters heavily depended on Kurdish officials, 49 percent, the U.S. officials, 18.9 percent and Iraqi officials, 10.1 percent. It also shows that the reporters used citizens who make 13.5 percent of the whole sources used.

**Table 11 shows sources used by The Washington Times including reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Reporters	460	60.8
Kurdish officials	145	19.2
US officials	56	7.4
Citizens	40	5.3
Iraqi officials	30	4
Int. independent	19	2.5
Local independent	5	0.7
Kurd opposition	1	0.1
Total	756	100

**Table 12 shows sources used by The Washington Times excluding reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Kurdish officials	145	49
US officials	56	18.9
Citizens	40	13.5
Iraqi officials	30	10.1
Int. independent	19	6.4
Local independent	5	1.7
Kurd opposition	1	0.3
Total	296	100

RQ3 asks whether the U.S. newspapers' coverage in the last decade (2000-2010) of Iraqi Kurdistan region is positive, negative, or neutral overall. The results show that the 64.5 percent of the coverage of the three newspapers was neutral and 26.23 percent of the coverage was positive and 9.2 percent was negative. Table 13 shows the frequencies and the percentages.

**Table 13 shows percentage of favorability of the three newspapers**

	Frequency	Percent
Neutral	1,611	64.5
Positive	658	26.3
Negative	229	9.2
Total	2498	100

Tables 14, 15, and 16 show the frequencies of the favorability of the coverage of each newspaper. Results show that 62.2 percent of The New York Times' coverage is neutral, 27.2 percent is positive and 10 percent is negative. 61.4 percent of The

Washington Times' coverage is neutral, 25.6 of the coverage is positive and 13 is negative. The coverage of The Washington Times: 70 percent of the coverage is neutral, 26.1 is positive and 4 percent is negative.

**Table 14 shows favorability in percentage by The New York Times**

	Frequency	Percent
Neutral	569	62.7
Positive	247	27.2
Negative	91	10
Total	907	100

**Table 15 shows favorability in percentage by Washington Post**

	Frequency	Percent
Neutral	511	61.4
Positive	213	25.6
Negative	108	13
Total	832	100

**Table 16 shows favorability in percentage by The Washington Times**

	Frequency	Percent
Neutral	531	70
Positive	198	26.1
Negative	30	4
Total	759	100

The means of favorability of the three newspapers were compared (positive = 1, neutral = 0, and negative = 2). The Washington Times (M = 1.13 SD = .438) was more favorable than The New York Times (M = 1.27, SD = .444) and Washington Post (M = 1.34, SD = .473). An ANOVA test showed that the differences were statistically significant;  $F(15,240) = 2.831, p < .000$ . Post-hoc Games-Howell tests did not show significant differences in terms of favorability between the New York Times and the Washington Post. However, there was a difference between the New York Times and Washington Times, and between the Washington Post and Washington Times.

RQ4 asks about the Iraqi Kurds events covered by U.S. newspapers. As shown in table 17 the U.S. newspapers covered these events between 2000 and 2010: U.S.-Iraq 2003 war; Terrorist acts; Agreement meeting between KDP and PUK; Unity Government between KDP and PUK; Explosions; Beheading Kurds; Iraqi president elected; Saddam Hussein trial; Bombing Kurdish borders by Turkey and Iraq; Kurdish MP killed; Turkish intervention into Kurdistan; Iraqi provincial elections; Tourism in Kurdistan; Oil deals; “Chemical Ali” execution; Killing journalists; Constitution rejection; U.N. office opened in Kurdistan; Referendum on Kirkuk city; Journalist arrest; Kurdish forces in Baghdad; Kurd-U.S. meeting on oil; Kurds buying arms; Kurds attack Islamists; Americans visit Halabja town; Kurds flee Arab areas; UN resolution; Kurds-Arab agreement; Kurds help PKK and Textile business.

Results show that the three papers mostly covered the event of the U.S.-Iraq war in 2003, that makes up 24.9 percent. Eight percent is about Turkish intervention into Kurdistan Region and 6.4 percent is about terrorist acts.

**Table 17 shows events reported by the three newspapers in percentages**

	Frequency	Percent
US-Iraq 2003 war	309	24.9
Turkish intervention	99	8
Terrorist acts	80	6.4
Kurd tourism	59	4.8
Explosions	55	4.4
Iraqi president elect	43	3.5
Oil deals	38	3.1
Killing journalists	38	3.1
Constitution rejection	30	2.4
American visit Halabja	29	2.3
Kurds flee Arab Areas	28	2.3
Referendum	26	2.1
Kurds buy arms	26	2.1
Kurd border bombings	25	2
Iraqi local elections	24	1.9
Kurds/Arab agreement	23	1.9
Saddam Trial	20	1.6
Chemical Ali execution	20	1.6
Kurds attack Islamists	19	1.5
Beheading Kurds	18	1.4
UN office	18	1.4
Kurd forces Baghdad	18	1.4
UN resolution	18	1.4
KDP/PUK unity govt.	16	1.3
Kurd MP killed	16	1.3
Journalist arrest	16	1.3
Kurds help PKK	14	1.1
Kurd-US oil meeting	13	1
KDP/PUK agreement	8	0.6

Tables 18, 19, and 20 show the frequencies of the events of the coverage of each newspaper. Results show that 21.1 percent of The New York Times' coverage is about the event of the U.S.-Iraq war and 6.0 percent is about terrorist acts happened in the region. Table 18 shows that The New York Times did not cover the events such as Constitution rejection; U.N. office opened in Kurdistan; Referendum on Kirkuk city; Journalist arrest; Kurdish forces in Baghdad; Kurd-U.S. meeting on oil; Kurds buying arms; Kurds attack Islamists; Americans visit Halabja town; Kurds flee Arab areas; UN resolution; Kurds-Arab agreement; Kurds help PKK and Textile business.

**Table 18 shows percentage and frequencies of events reported in The NYT**

	Frequency	Percent
US-Iraq 2003 war	105	21.1
Explosions	55	11.1
Iraqi president elect	43	8.7
Killing journalists	38	7.6
Turkish intervention	36	7.2
Terrorist acts	30	6
Kurd tourism	30	6
Kurd border bombings	25	5
Iraqi local elections	24	4.8
Saddam Trial	20	4
Chemical Ali execution	20	4
Beheading Kurds	18	3.6
KDP/PUK unity govt.	16	3.2
Kurd MP killed	16	3.2
Oil deals	13	2.6
KDP/PUK agreement	8	1.6

The Washington Post heavily focused on the war in 2003 and that makes 23.4 percent of the whole coverage of events. The second biggest event reported by the paper is the Turkish military intervention into the Kurdistan region which makes 13 percent of the whole coverage. Table 19 shows that The Washington Post did not cover these events: Agreement meeting between KDP and PUK; Unity Government between KDP and PUK; Beheading Kurds; Iraqi president elected; Saddam Hussein trial; Bombing Kurdish borders by Turkey and Iraq; Kurdish MP killed; Oil deals; Kurds attack Islamists; Americans visit Halabja town; Kurds flee Arab areas; UN resolution; Kurds-Arab agreement; Kurds help PKK and Textile business.

**Table 19 shows percentage and frequencies of events reported in The WP**

	Frequency	Percent
US-Iraq 2003 war	79	23.4
Turkish intervention	44	13
Terrorist acts	34	10.1
Constitution rejection	30	8.9
Referendum	26	7.7
Kurds buy arms	26	7.7
UN office	18	5.3
Kurd forces Baghdad	18	5.3
Journalist arrest	16	4.7
Kurd-US oil meeting	13	3.8

The Washington Times focused mostly on the U.S.-Iraq war in 2003 which makes 30.7 percent of the whole event coverage. The second biggest portion is tourism in Kurdistan region which is 7.1 percent. Table 20 shows frequencies and percentages of all

the events reported by the paper. It also shows that the paper did not cover these events: Agreement meeting between KDP and PUK; Unity Government between KDP and PUK; Turkish intervention into Kurdistan; Iraqi provincial elections; Tourism in Kurdistan; Oil deals; “Chemical Ali” execution; Killing journalists; Constitution rejection; U.N. office opened in Kurdistan; Referendum on Kirkuk city; Journalist arrest; Kurdish forces in Baghdad; and Textile business.

**Table 20 shows percentage and frequencies of events reported in The WT**

	Frequency	Percent
US-Iraq 2003 war	125	30.7
Kurd tourism	29	7.1
Americans visit Halabja	19	7.1
Kurds flee Arab area	29	6.9
Oil deals	25	6.1
Kurd/Arab agreement	18	5.7
Kurds attack Islamists	62	4.7
Turkish intervention	19	4.7
UN resolution	28	4.4
Terrorist acts	16	3.9
Kurds help PKK	23	3.4

## **Discussion**

Data show that 64.5 percent of the U.S. newspapers' coverage is neutral about the Iraqi Kurdistan region, 26.3 percent of the coverage is positive and 9.2 percent is negative. This percentage of the coverage demonstrates impartiality and neutrality of the U.S. newspapers of the international coverage, in this context Kurdistan Region, to some extent. The content of the neutral paragraphs was merely historical or background information; it was rather a balanced content as most of them contained positive and negative portrayal of the Kurdistan region. However, the results show no significant difference of neutrality between The New York Times and The Washington Post (see Tables 14 and 15), while there is a significant difference between the neutrality of both newspapers and the third one, which is The Washington Times (see Tables 14, 15 and 16) as it's traditionally more conservative than the other two. Such a high number of neutrality of the U.S. newspapers demonstrates the fact that the U.S. newspapers are not very much biased in covering Kurdistan. However, the positive and negative sides of the coverage of those newspapers, which represent the whole newspapers in the United States as they have the highest circulation, do reflect the U.S. foreign policies of democracy, peace, development, and the free market.

Since the Kurdistan region is on the path to democracy, development, free market and peace, positive paragraphs of the three U.S. newspapers included adjectives like "developing, democratic, peaceful, safe, stable, free market" (see Appendix) to portray the region. The positive coverage tries to tell the readers the positive side of the region, which is a part from Iraq. Showing success and development of one part of Iraq still means Iraq after the 2003 war is en route development and peace.

The researcher found that some terms such as “developing, democratic, peaceful, safe, stable and free market” mean and show the positive side. Therefore he called any paragraph that contained those terms and alike. Results found that was the only possible way to tell whether a paragraph is positive. The researcher categorized words and terms which contain positive meaning. The same method was used to determine if a paragraph was negative. The researcher categorized these terms under “negative” variable such as: corruption, threat, militia, power and business control, provision of poor services, media suppress, tyranny and so on.

The negative coverage of the three newspapers demonstrate two issues: first, through framing the Kurdistan region as a “threat” on the whole Iraq reflects the worry of the U.S. government, which does not want a civil war between Kurds and Arabs in Iraq. The U.S. government seeks to pullout from Iraq by the end of 2011, any fight, clash or war inside Iraq will jeopardize the pullout plan.

Framing the Kurdish forces as “guerrilla” and “helping P.K.K.” demonstrates unawareness of the U.S. newspapers’ correspondent of sensitive and important issues. The correspondents are unaware that the Kurdish forces are formally labeled the military forces of Kurdistan region, not guerrillas, and the Kurdish leadership has been repeatedly denying that it does not help the P.K.K. This is where the socialization process comes to play a role as Schulman (1990), Waitt (1995) and Avraham (2002) said journalists should go through the process to learn more about a group they cover.

The newspapers framed the region as having “corruption, power duopoly and business control.” This is a focus on the concerns that the U.S. government has as it does

not want to leave Iraq with corruption and the U.S. administration wants power sharing and free market not monopolization of power and business in the country. Framing the Kurdistan region as “non-transparent, suppressing media, torturing prisoners” by the U.S. newspapers also reflect the agenda of the U.S. government in Iraq, which wants Iraq to be transparent, protect human rights and guarantee the freedom of speech.

The findings show that the U.S. newspapers focused on sensitive issues in the Iraqi Kurdistan region, the same issues that the U.S. government in Iraq is worried about. The issues and their percentage are shown in Table 1. Conflicts between the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) and Iraqi government over land, resources and power have received the biggest portion of the coverage, which is 16.4 percent overall. Kurds’ demand for independence came at the second highest rate of the U.S. newspapers coverage which is 14.2 percent. This issue is a big deal for the U.S. government since it strives for a peaceful, safe and unified Iraq so that it could get out of there on time as planned. Any attempt by the Kurdish leadership to secede from Iraq could change the foreign policy of the United States in Iraq. This fact tells that the news organizations focused on the areas where the U.S. government is most worried about.

The third biggest issue, which is 11.9 percent, is the oil deal issues between Kurds and Arabs. Iraq refused to allow Kurdish government to export oil and sign oil deals with the giant international oil firms, while the Kurdish government insisted to do so. That was an area of disagreement and an area where the U.S. government was worried about and always tried to perform as referee between the two cooling tensions down. America always wanted Kurdistan and Iraq to have democratic and peaceful elections. The U.S.

newspapers focused on the Kurdish elections and hailed the one held in Kurdistan region in July 2009.

Results show differences in the heed each newspaper exerted in each issue. For example, The New York Time's number one issue was elections in Kurdistan region. Issues over land, resources and power came after elections. However, The Washington Post's number one issue was the demands and concerns of the Kurdish leadership over independence. Different from both is The Washington Times which mainly focused on development issues, which is 20.5 percent of the whole coverag . This refers to the fact that the newspaper is a republican conservative and supported the agenda of the Bush administration in Iraq. The newspaper tries to justify the war by showing the developing side of the country and to tell the U.S. public and the world audience that the war has really brought peace, justice and prosperity to Iraq.

Results showed that the U.S. newspapers used seven different sources to cover the Iraqi Kurdistan region. The sources range from local independents, international independents (see code book appendix), citizens, the U.S. officials, sources from the opposition group in Kurdistan, the Kurdish officials (see code book appendix), and the Iraqi officials. The Kurdish officials, mainly from both K.D.P. and P.U.K. ruling parties, are used most as they come first in the findings of this study making 51.1 percent of the whole sources used by the three newspapers excluding the reporters' own words. That's half of all the other sources. The second most frequent source is citizens and then come the U.S. and Iraqi officials (see table 5) for all the percentages of the sources used excluding the reporters' own words. However, the researcher included the reporters' own words to see how much the take of reporters was. Results showed that the reporters' own

words were 54.4 percent which is more than half of all the sources used. This result demonstrates that the reporters mostly relied on the Kurdish, Iraqi and U.S. officials and then their own words.

The findings do not show a significant difference of the sources used by The New York Times and Washington Post. However, they do show a significant difference between the sources used by both newspapers and the Washington Times (see tables 8,10 and 12), which they show frequencies and percentages of sources used in each newspaper excluding the reporters' words. The latter has used the U.S. officials, Kurdish and Iraqi officials most as they make up 78.9 percent (see table 12). In fact, the three newspapers mainly relied on the Kurdish, American and Iraqi officials. The Washington Post's percentage of using officials is 73 percent and The New York Times' is 70.9 percent. This fact demonstrates that the U.S. newspapers focus on powerful sources to support the U.S. government's agenda in Iraq, not ordinary citizens. None of the newspapers used opposition sources to a great deal, or local independent or international independent ones. They portrayed Kurdistan region mainly from the mouth of officials. Reporters used their own words to a great deal to describe the Kurdistan region (see tables 7, 9 and 11) for the frequencies and percentages of all sources including reporters' words.

Results also show that the U.S. newspapers frequently focus on events, not issues (see table 17). The findings demonstrate that the coverage mainly focuses on the U.S.-Iraq war in 2003. Then they focus on the Turkish intervention into the Kurdistan region and also cover the whole terrorist acts as they happened. The results show that the events

were all reflecting the U.S. government's worry and concerns over the stability, peace and political process in Kurdistan and Iraq. The events are mostly about war, explosions, terrorist acts and tensions between Kurdish and Arab people and between various ethnic and sectarian groups in Kurdistan and Iraq. However, these events don't mean that the region is negative; rather they tell that the Kurdish people are victims of terrorist acts, explosions and try their best to tackle ethnic and sectarian tensions.

### **Limitations**

This study has a few limitations. The first one is that it only focuses on newspapers, not other media outlets such as TVs, newswires or online news services. Another limitation is that the population contains only three newspapers. It would have been a richer population if it would have included other mainstream newspapers such as The Los Angeles Times, The USA Today and The Christian Science Monitor.

Also the results would have been much more interesting if the coverage of the sample taken for this study would have been compared to other international media such as Arab, Turkish or European media coverage of Kurdistan Region. This is definitely an area that merits future research.

There are many other areas that merit further studies such as: comparing coverage of the U.S. mainstream newspapers on Kurdistan Region and Iraq, comparing coverage

of the U.S. newspapers of two same minority groups in two different countries such as Kurds in Iraq and in Iran, Syria or Turkey. Portraying Kurdish people in the coverage of the English speaking native newspapers such as two main newspapers in the U.S., two in Australia and two in Canada is an area that merits further research.

Another area of research about Kurdistan region would be taking the TVs or the news wires such as AP, AFP and Reuters as samples of study. These newswires have wider range and deeper coverage about the region as a part of Iraq.

## **Conclusion**

This study infers how the U.S. newspapers cover and frame the staunchest ally of the United States in the Middle East: Kurdistan Region of Iraq. The research concluded with a quantifiable data of the favorability, sources, issues and events in the coverage of the U.S. newspapers of the region.

This study concludes that the coverage of the U.S. mainstream newspapers reflect the foreign policy of the United States government. Besides 64.5 percent of the U.S. newspapers coverage of the Iraqi Kurdistan region is neutral, 26.3 percent is positive and 9.2 percent is negative. The high percentage of the neutrality implies that the U.S. newspapers were impartial and were neither influenced by the U.S. agenda in Iraq nor supported it. However, the positivity's implication means the reflection of the U.S. agenda and foreign policy in Iraq because the newspapers used these terms to portray

Kurdistan: democratic, safe, stable, free market, development, economic boom. To portray the region as a safe haven, developing, and democratic means to show a success and democratic part of Iraq because Kurdistan is a region still in Iraq. So, that implies that at least one part of Iraq is safe, booming, developing, stable, democratic and peaceful after the 2003 invasion.

The negative side, quite low in percentage, implies three things: first, it shows that the correspondents have no thorough knowledge of some sensitive issues going on in the region. This is noticed through framing the Kurdish forces as guerrillas without knowing that this term “guerilla” is at odds with the formal name of the Kurdish forces that introduced formally as Kurdish military forces, better known as Peshmarga. The second implication of the negative coverage is that it also reflects the U.S. concerns in Iraq. The researcher noticed that through the terms the reporters used to address the issues in Kurdistan such as: threat, non-transparent, corrupt, power and business monopoly. The U.S. administration does not want Kurdish people in Iraq be a threat for the rest of Iraq because any political stand-off between Kurds and Arabs will jeopardize the U.S. pullout plan, supposed to be implemented by the end of 2011. The U.S. government does not support a corrupt, non-transparent and power and business monopoly in Iraq. The third implication is the fact that the U.S. newspapers framed the Kurdistan region as positive because only 9.2 percent of the entire coverage is negative. The researcher expected the percentage of positive coverage would be even more but it came out only 26.3 percent. However, even the neutrals paragraphs had positive parts because most of the neutral ones, which make 64.5 percent, had positive and negative sides; very few paragraphs were neutral because of background and historical information. If the researcher would

do this study again he would change the name of the neutral variable to mixed, meaning a paragraph containing positive and negative aspects.

Shoemaker & Reese (1996) argue that media coverage is a mixture of variety of aspects that shape the coverage on different levels. They talk about forces of the media coverage. One of the forces is news sources that collect factual information for journalists. The sources used by the U.S. newspapers were significantly interesting because the highest percentage of the sources used was 51.1 percent, which were Kurdish ruling party officials. (see table 6). Overall, 70 percent of the sources are Kurdish, American and Iraqi officials. That means the U.S. newspapers mainly rely on powerful sources, not citizens. According to the findings, the voice of citizens and opposition were low as the former consists of 13.4 percent and the latter is 5.6 percent. The opposition sources were mostly used in 2009 that was when an opposition group for the first time participated in the elections and won 25 seats. This finding implies that the newspapers did not listen to what the public was saying, perhaps told the stories through the mouth of those in power who usually and often tell the bright side of the situations underway in the region. Perhaps the reason why reporters used officials mostly is the language barriers because most, if not all, Kurdish high ranking officials know English, while citizens, local independents and opposition groups do not. Therefore, there is a weak voice of the public and independent people in the coverage of the U.S. newspapers. As Avraham (2002) said journalists do not alone decide what region to cover, what news sources to use, news organizations decide too. Therefore the news organizations decide alongside with the journalists to choose sources for their coverage.

The U.S. newspapers focused on sensitive issues in the Iraqi Kurdistan region. These issues also reflect the worriedness, agenda and programs of the U.S. government. The issues and their percentage and frequencies are shown in table 1. Conflicts over land, resources and power, conflicts amongst Kurds themselves and tensions between various sectarian and ethnic groups have received the biggest portion of the coverage which is 27.5 percent overall. These issues are big deals for the U.S. government since it strives for a peaceful, safe and calm Iraq so that it could get out of there on time as planned and show to the world that the war, once most people in the world criticized, has brought greatest good for Iraqis. Any conflict would ruin the plans and policies of the U.S. government as it also wants to leave Iraq when it can stand on its own feet and could handle its security.

Wolfsfeld (1997) stated that when reporters go to cover minorities beyond their home borders, they search for issues that could attract the readers' attention. They focus more on topics that embrace conflicts, specifically conflicts that are matter for home readers of the reporters.

“These two news criteria have tremendous effects on the coverage of minorities: the news organizations' decisions to focus on powerful groups and conflicts result in the under, representation of less powerful minorities, who are covered only in relation to conflict, violence, law breaking and threats to the social order” (Avraham, 2002, p. 73).

Kurds' demand for independence came at the second highest percentage of the U.S. newspapers coverage which is 14.2 percent. The U.S. government concerns over this issue since it strives to rebuild Iraq unified so that it could satisfy all the Iraqi political

components. Any attempt by the Kurdish leadership to secede from Iraq could change the foreign policy of the United States in the country.

The third biggest issue is the oil deal issues between Kurds and Arabs. Iraq refused to allow Kurdish government to export oil and sign oil deals with the giant international oil firms, while the Kurdish government insisted to do so. That was an area of disagreement and an area where the U.S. government was worried about. America always wanted Kurdistan and Iraq to have democratic and peaceful elections. The U.S. newspapers focused on the Kurdish elections and hailed the one held in Kurdistan region in July 2009.

Results also show that the U.S. newspapers frequently focus on events, not issues (see table 17). The findings demonstrate that the coverage mainly focuses on the U.S.-Iraq war in 2003. Then they focus on the Turkish intervention into the Kurdistan region and also cover the whole terrorist acts as they happened. The results show that the events were all the reflection of the U.S. government's worry and concerns over the stability, peace and political process in Kurdistan and Iraq. However, the events show not only one side of Kurdistan but it also shows the bright sides, developments, peace, and economic boom and rebuilding. Unlike the international coverage of Iraq which educated the public only about war, explosions, terrorist acts and tensions in Iraq. Through these events, the U.S. newspapers frame Kurdistan region, a part from Iraq, as a haven of prosperity, development, democracy and peace.

The researchers learned that the coverage of the U.S. newspapers of the Kurdistan region mirrors the U.S. policy in Iraq. The U.S. newspapers mainly focus on events, not

issues and mostly rely on powerful sources, not ordinary citizens. The whole coverage of the newspapers frame Kurdistan as the other Iraq not the one portrayed as a haven of bombings and terrorist acts, but a different, prosperous, booming, developing and democratic Iraq. Besides showing different issues, tensions and conflicts, the whole coverage show a different part of Iraq.

Journalists can learn mainly two things from this study. First, before they start writing about minorities they need to get background information and socially interact with the people and culture to avoid misrepresenting and misunderstanding the community in their news stories. Using terms like militia or guerrillas for the Kurdish military is an example of that misrepresentation and misunderstanding. Second, they should not only rely heavily on officials as they give only one perspective of any event or issue in the region. Through the coverage the voice of the public is almost missing. When a Kurdish official tells a reporter Kurdistan is stable, developing and prosperous, that is not all about it. How about the understanding of citizens for democracy, prosperity and development? They need to tackle that by using local interpreters so that they could communicate with citizens too.

## Appendix 1: The tables

**Table 1 issues covered in the three newspapers**

	Frequency	Percent
Conflicts/Baghdad	206	16.4
Independence	178	14.2
Oil/Baghdad	150	11.9
Valid Elections	144	11.5
Services	113	9
Kurd conflict	77	6.1
development	72	5.7
Ethnic strife	63	5
Kirkuk	43	3.4
Democracy	42	3.3
US promises	38	3
Iraqi election issues	25	2
Christian security	24	1.9
Stability	21	1.7
Kurds form govt.	21	1.7
Free speech	20	1.6
Kurds influence	19	1.5
Total	1256	100

**Table 2 shows issues covered by The New York Times.**

	Frequency	Percent
Elections	97	23.7
Conflict Baghdad	59	14.4
Oil/Baghdad	54	13.2
Ethnic strife	41	10
Kurd conflict	40	9.8
Services	29	7.1
Iraqi elections	25	6.1
Christian security	24	5.9

Stability	21	5.1
Free speech	20	4.9
Total	410	100

**Table 3 shows issues covered by The Washington Post**

	Frequency	Percent
Independence	119	24.1
Conflict Baghdad	76	15.4
Oil/Baghdad	63	12.8
Kirkuk	43	8.7
Democracy	42	8.5
Services	40	8.1
Elections	32	6.5
Ethnic strife	22	4.5
Kurds form govt.	21	4.3
Kurds influence	19	3.8
Kurd conflict	17	3.4
Total	494	100

**Table 4 shows issues covered by The Washington Times**

	Frequency	Percent
Development	72	20.5
Conflict/Baghdad	71	20.2
Independence	59	16.8
Services	44	12.5
US promises	38	10.8
Oil/Baghdad	33	9.4
Kurd conflict	20	5.7
Elections	15	4.3
Total	352	100

**Table 5 shows sources used by the three U.S. newspapers including reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Reporter	1365	54.8
Kurdish officials	576	23.1
Citizens	151	6.1
US officials	132	5.3
Iraqi officials	123	4.9
Kurd opposition	63	2.5
International source	44	1.8
Local independent	38	1.5
Total	2492	100

**Table 6 shows sources used by the three U.S. newspapers without reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Kurdish officials	576	51.1
Citizens	151	13.4
US officials	132	11.7
Iraqi officials	123	10.9
Kurd opposition	63	5.6
International source	44	3.9
Local independent	38	3.4
Total	1127	100

**Table 7 shows percentage of sources used by The New York Times including reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Reporters	501	55.2
Kurdish officials	224	24.7
Citizens	56	6.2
Iraqi officials	48	5.3

Kurd opposition	40	4.4
US officials	16	1.8
International source	12	1.3
Local independent	10	1.1
Total	907	100

**Table 8 shows percentage of sources used by The New York Times excluding reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Kurdish officials	224	55.2
Citizens	56	13.8
Iraqi officials	48	11.8
Kurd opposition	40	9.9
US officials	16	3.9
Int. independent	12	3
Local independent	10	2.5
Total	406	100

**Table 9 shows frequencies and percentages of sources used by The Washington Times including the words of reporters.**

	Frequency	Percent
Reporters	404	48.7
Kurdish officials	207	25
US officials	60	7.2
Citizens	55	6.6
Iraqi officials	45	5.4
Local independent	23	2.8
Kurd opposition	22	2.7
Int. independent	13	1.6
Total	829	100

**Table 10 shows frequencies and percentages of sources used by The Washington Times excluding the words of reporters.**

	Frequency	Percent
Kurdish officials	207	48.7
US officials	60	14.1
Citizens	55	12.9
Iraqi officials	45	10.6
Local independent	23	5.4
Kurd opposition	22	5.2
Int. independent	13	3.1
Total	425	100

**Table 11 shows sources used by The Washington Times including reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Reporters	460	60.8
Kurdish officials	145	19.2
US officials	56	7.4
Citizens	40	5.3
Iraqi officials	30	4
Int. independent	19	2.5
Local independent	5	0.7
Kurd opposition	1	0.1
Total	756	100

**Table 12 shows sources used by The Washington Times excluding reporters**

	Frequency	Percent
Kurdish officials	145	49
US officials	56	18.9
Citizens	40	13.5
Iraqi officials	30	10.1
Int. independent	19	6.4
Local independent	5	1.7
Kurd opposition	1	0.3
Total	296	100

**Table 13 shows percentage of favorability of the three newspapers**

	Frequency	Percent
Neutral	1611	64.5
Positive	658	26.3
Negative	229	9.2
Total	2498	100

**Table 14 shows favorability in percentage by The New York Times**

	Frequency	Percent
Neutral	569	62.7
Positive	247	27.2
Negative	91	10
Total	907	100

**Table 15 shows favorability in percentage by Washington Post**

	Frequency	Percent
Neutral	511	61.4

Positive	213	25.6
Negative	108	13
Total	832	100

**Table 16 shows favorability in percentage by The Washington Times**

	Frequency	Percent
Neutral	531	70
Positive	198	26.1
Negative	30	4
Total	759	100

**Table 17 shows events reported by the three newspapers in percentages**

	Frequency	Percent
US-Iraq 2003 war	309	24.9
Turkish intervention	99	8
Terrorist acts	80	6.4
Kurd tourism	59	4.8
Explosions	55	4.4
Iraqi president elect	43	3.5
Oil deals	38	3.1
Killing journalists	38	3.1
Constitution rejection	30	2.4
American visit		
Halabja	29	2.3
Kurds flee Arab Areas	28	2.3
Referendum	26	2.1
Kurds buy arms	26	2.1
Kurd border bombings	25	2
Iraqi local elections	24	1.9
Kurds/Arab agreement	23	1.9
Saddam Trial	20	1.6

Chemical Ali execution	20	1.6
Kurds attack Islamists	19	1.5
Beheading Kurds	18	1.4
UN office	18	1.4
Kurd forces Baghdad	18	1.4
UN resolution	18	1.4
KDP/PUK unity govt.	16	1.3
Kurd MP killed	16	1.3
Journalist arrest	16	1.3
Kurds help PKK	14	1.1
Kurd-US oil meeting	13	1
KDP/PUK agreement	8	0.6

**Table 18 shows percentage and frequencies of events reported in The NYT**

	Frequency	Percent
US-Iraq 2003 war	105	21.1
Explosions	55	11.1
Iraqi president elect	43	8.7
Killing journalists	38	7.6
Turkish intervention	36	7.2
Terrorist acts	30	6
Kurd tourism	30	6
Kurd border bombings	25	5
Iraqi local elections	24	4.8
Saddam Trial	20	4
Chemical Ali execution	20	4
Beheading Kurds	18	3.6
KDP/PUK unity govt.	16	3.2
Kurd MP killed	16	3.2
Oil deals	13	2.6
KDP/PUK agreement	8	1.6

**Table 19 shows percentage and frequencies of events reported in The WP**

	Frequency	Percent
US-Iraq 2003 war	79	23.4
Turkish intervention	44	13
Terrorist acts	34	10.1
Constitution rejection	30	8.9
Referendum	26	7.7
Kurds buy arms	26	7.7
UN office	18	5.3
Kurd forces Baghdad	18	5.3
Journalist arrest	16	4.7
Kurd-US oil meeting	13	3.8

**Table 20 shows percentage and frequencies of events reported in The WT**

	Frequency	Percent
US-Iraq 2003 war	125	30.7
Kurds attack Islamists	62	4.7
Kurd tourism	29	7.1
Kurds flee Arab area	29	6.9
UN resolution	28	4.4
Oil deals	25	6.1
Kurds help PKK	23	3.4
Turkish intervention	19	4.7
Americans visit Halabja	19	7.1
Kurd/Arab agreement	18	5.7
Terrorist acts	16	3.9

## Appendix 2: The coding sheet

### 1- Favorability

Neutral: 0

Positive: 1

Negative: 2

### 2- Sources

Writer: 0

Local independent: 1

International independent: 2

Citizens: 3

US officials: 4

Kurdish opposition: 5

Kurdish official: 6

Iraqi officials: 7

### 3- Issues

Elections (Kurdistan): 1

Services: 2

Oil issues with Baghdad: 3

Conflicts with Baghdad: 4

Ethnic strife: 5

Corruption: 6

Conflicts on land between Arabs and Kurds: 7

Kurdish elections: 8

Internal Kurdish conflicts: 9

Jewish Kurdish link: 10

Kurdish anxiety for US Pullout: 11

Culture: 12

US promises: 13

Stability: 14

Christian Issues (security): 15

Iraqi election issues: 16

Freedom of speech: 17

Democracy: 18

Independence: 19

Kirkuk: 20

Freedom of press: 21

Kurds influence: 22

Kurds are kingmakers: 23

Development: 24

4- Events

- 1- U.S.-Iraq 2003 war
- 2- Terrorist acts
- 3- Agreement meeting between KDP and PUK
- 4- Unity Government between KDP and PUK
- 5- Explosions
- 6- Beheading Kurds
- 7- Iraqi president elected
- 8- Saddam Hussein trial
- 9- Bombing Kurdish borders by Turkey and Iraq
- 10- Kurdish MP killed
- 11- Turkish intervention into Kurdistan
- 12- Iraqi provincial elections
- 13- Tourism in Kurdistan
- 14- Oil deals
- 15- “Chemical Ali” execution
- 16- Killing journalists
- 17- Constitution rejection
- 18- U.N. office
- 19- Referendum
- 20- Journalist arrest
- 21- Kurdish forces in Baghdad
- 22- Kurd-U.S. meeting on oil
- 23- Kurds buying arms
- 24- Kurds attack Islamists
- 25- Americans visit Halabja
- 26- Kurds flee Arab areas
- 27- UN resolution
- 28- Kurds-Arab agreement
- 29- Kurds help PKK
- 30- Textile business

## Appendix 3: The coding book

### Coding book for defining favorability, sources and issues

- A. Case number: start from number one. Give each paragraph a number until the end.
- B. Article date (mm/dd/yyyy): the date the article was published.
- C. Newspaper name: the name of the newspaper the article published in.
- D. Indicate the favorability of each paragraph:
  - 1= positive
  - 2= negative
  - 0= neutral
- E. Determining favorability:
  - Any paragraph that includes these terms to portray Kurdistan and/or Kurds is a positive one:  
Stable, safe, Kurds are suppressed, independent, economic boom, development, democratic, broker, stateless, changing and peaceful, friendly with foreigners, like negotiations and talks, peace initiative, protect minorities' rights, kingmakers, positive influence on Iraqi political process, lenient on land conflict, help Iraqi government, contributes to rebuilding Iraq, model for democracy, safe for tourists, helps Christians and victims of terrorism.
  - Any paragraph that includes these terms to portray Kurdistan and/or Kurds is a negative one:  
Poor services, corrupt, electoral conflicts, torture, tyranny, power monopoly, business control, media suppression, non-transparent, help P.K.K., guerrillas, non-justice, honor killing and threat, violate women rights, killing journalists, arresting journalists, militia groups and internal conflicts.
  - Any paragraph that includes both of the terms above to portray Kurdistan and/or Kurds is a neutral one and any paragraph that is a background or historical facts.
- F. Define sources: Each source has been given a number as mentioned in the coding sheet.
  - Writer = 0 means the words of the correspondent.
  - Local independent = 1 means opinion leaders, intellectuals, thinkers, members of independent NGOs, authors and independent journalists.
  - International Independent = 2 means international figures like U.N. officials, E.U. officials, international community members, international NGOs.
  - Citizens = 3 means local Kurdish people from Kurdistan region.
  - U.S. officials = 4 means any U.S. official either from the military of the U.S. government.

- Kurdish opposition = 5 means supporters, officials and members of opposition groups like Change Movement, Kurdistan Islamic Union and Kurdistan Islamic Group which are three opposition groups in the Iraqi Kurdistan region.
- Kurdish official = 6 means any Kurdish official from both ruling parties – Kurdistan Democratic Party (K.D.P.) or Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (P.U.K.) either in the political parties, government or parliament.
- Iraqi officials = 7 means any Iraqi official from the Iraqi parliament, government and political parties.
- G. Issue definition: each issue has been given a number as written in the coding sheet.

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