

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Discourse Dynamics of Media Texts: The Case of Libyan Saadi Gaddafi's Extradition

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ABSTRACT

This paper aims to provide an analytic comparative study of the international media coverage of the extradition of Mr. Saadi Gaddafi in 2014. The study compares the reports of *New York Times, al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *Aljazeera* networks regarding the extradition incident. It investigates concepts such as ideological representation and power dynamics to analyze those reports. The study employs Critical Discourse Analysis embodied in ideological representation and inter-textual meanings to reach an understanding of the societal currents which affect the texts. The findings of the paper reveal that media reports present elements of support and legitimization for the Niger Government action against Mr. Saadi Gaddafi. The study concluded that media was used to serve certain political discourses in the Middle East and in the Western powers.

KEYWORDS

Ideological representation, power dynamics, intertextual meanings, CDA, Libya.

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1. Introduction

Language is a crucial factor of news dissemination and the words used in news output are never free from hidden messages. Fowler (1991, p. 101) claims that "news is not just a value-free reflection of facts, anything that is said or written about the world is articulated from a particular ideological position". There is always a position of an ideologically-laden content in news stories. Further, this view is supported by Gee (1999, p. 2) who continues that "when we speak or write we always take a particular *perspective* on what the world is like". The language used in news stories has a particular impact on the news receivers.

This paper aims to provide an analytic comparative study of the international media coverage of the extradition of Mr. Saadi Gaddafi in 2014. The comparison was mainly between *New York Times (NYT), al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *Aljazeera* newspapers, in their reports of the incident of the extradition of Saadi in 2014. It is devoted to investigating whether or not the media reports indicate elements of support and legitimization for the Niger Government action against him. In this study, concepts such as ideological representation, intertextual meanings and power dynamics will be used to analyze the report as presented by mainly *NYT, al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *Aljazeera*. Further, it aims to uncover whether the media coverage attempts to persuade the reader that the extradition is ideology-free and based on legitimate grounds. In fact, intertextual elements have been employed to serve certain political systems agendas for some institutional powers through media.

Saadi Gaddafi supported his father, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, to quell the uprising against their regime. The uprising started in Tripoli of which many described as the "Arab Spring" in 2011 as it spread among countries of the Middle East and North African. The events lasted seven months before the Colonel had been captured and killed on the 20th of October 2011. That day was marked by Libyans as the "Day of Liberation". It signals the downfall of a dictatorship following similar events took place in Egypt, Tunisia and Yemen.

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However, the former leader and all his family members were tagged dictators by the international media for many decades as well as the Libyan people who wanted Colonel Muammar Gaddafi and all his sons overthrown and eliminated. They sought liberation from suppression and dictatorship for democracy which they had seen as achievable and took inspiration from the events that happened in Egypt and a league of other Arab regimes that were tumbled to the ground.

The circumstances of Saadi were dissimilar from those of other members of his family. He was never a major player in his father's rule nor the business elite. He was best known as a former professional soccer player. He was once accused by Libyans of ordering security forces to fire on protesters in Benghazi at the beginning of the uprising. He had initially attempted to calm the situation and promised to develop the long-neglected city into a new San Diego. He is also believed to have ordered the use of firearms against soccer fans at a stadium in Tripoli as early as 2000s.

During the uprising that ended his father's rule, Saadi at times stepped forward with plans to broker some kind of peace agreement involving overhauls and a political transition, but his ideas never got far on either side. Saadi fled to Niger when Tripoli, the Libyan capital, fell into the hands of the rebels in 2011. He applied for a political asylum; but the Libyan transitional government had insisted on returning him to Libya for imprisonment. The application was proven by the Nigerian government on March 6th, 2014, despite the fact that Saadi is not facing accusations of war crimes or violations of human rights at the International Criminal Court.

This paper aims to shed light on how language helps to legitimatize and reshape the commoners' view. In addition, it aims to find out if the elements of the news text of the *NYT*, *al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *Aljazeera* newspapers influence power and ideology. Furthermore, it reflects on how language can be a manipulative tool in political discourse. Therefore, the findings reveal the strategies developed by the media to influence the way in which people view the world. Further, they reflect on way news readers make wise judgment when reading news. In brief, this paper is targeting to answer the following questions:

- To what extent the language in the NYT, al-Sharq al-Awsat and Aljazeera newspapers exhibit power and legitimizing the incident to their ideological favor?
- How can language be a persuasive tool in political discourse?

2. Critical Discourse Analysis

Media texts are usually explored under the field of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) and news discourse is of prime interest to CDA (Ethelb, 2022). This is because van Dijk (2004) mentions that discourse analysis had a critical dimension in the 1980s and 1990s. Brookes (1995) argues that the main goal of CDA is to uncover how language works to construct meaning that signify people, objects, and events in the world in specific ways. As a result, the primary concerns of CDA include how discourse is influenced and constructed by relationships of ideology, power, and systems of knowledge or belief (Stoddart, 2007). Further, CDA also examines the way texts are used to sustain or generate social inequalities through representations of reality (Sriwimon & Zilli, 2017). This reality is usually dealt with as a hidden construction that is difficult to be understood by the public.

According to Fowler (1991), the fundamental framework of CDA is created by the interaction between the text and its context. Put differently, Fairclough (1995:7) states that "discourse is the use of language seen as a form of social practice, and discourse analysis is analysis of how texts work within sociocultural practice." According to this concept, it is important to consider the context in which texts are formed while interpreting texts. This justification makes it clear that three factors—discourse practice, text production, and sociocultural practice—should be taken into account in critical linguistic studies. These three components of CDA are intended to be connected when analyzing media text.

3. Ideology

When discussing ideology, power is the first concept that comes to the fore. According to van Dijk (2000:25), if there is one idea that is frequently associated with ideology, it is power. This proposition by Dijk reflects that power is the means that leads to obtaining outcomes. One of the tools of power is the media which plays a crucial role in transmitting information and creating reader-writer interactions. These are in fact the main components of printed media. Media is never exempt from the contest for influence over other forms of communication. The exercise of power is thus carried out through ideology and media is the vehicle which offers the service.

Further, ideologies that are common and ingrained in the community serve as a foundation for *background knowledge* that will be awakened at the proper time and place (Smith et al., 2021). In a similar vein, Fairclough (1989:141) used the term "member's resources" (MR) to describe the use of background knowledge that was activated during any social encounter. He elaborates that background knowledge is socially generated, and its use is natural in social relations and interactions. Fairclough (1989) defines background knowledge as something which people have in their heads and draw upon when they produce or interpret texts—

including their knowledge of language, representation of the natural and social worlds they inhabit values, beliefs, assumptions, and so on.

4. Media Discourse

Reath (1998:50) argues printed media is a tool for (re)producing ideologies and attitudes towards certain events. He continues that the media texts "are not simply vehicles for delivering information, they guide the ideological stance of the reader" (Reath 1998:50). Therefore, rather than relying on their own experiences and ideas, the majority of media consumers throughout the world learn about and form opinions regarding the extradition of Saadi Gaddafi from the mass and printed media, as well as social media. Therefore, the focus of this study is on how media discourse affects public opinion and reveals hidden motives in news broadcasts.

When a media outlet uses a particular language, it has an impact on our comprehension and knowledge of the world we live in. In other words, because it is governed and dictated by prevailing worldviews or ideologies. In this regard, Fowler (1991:11) argues that "the world of the press is not the real world, but a world skewed and judged". Further, Hodge & Kress (1993:17) account for a media outlet by saying that it usually presents "its perception of 'reality' in the form that it regards as most suitable for its readership." That is, there is a natural propensity in modern life to keep the influence of media discourse disguised from the majority of the public. The objective of media workers in this bias may be to maintain a stable state in which the subjects of the media are not even negotiating with them.

Further, Fowler (1991:23) states that newspapers "in part adopt this language for their own and, in using it, reproduce the attitudes of the powerful." These influential people are what van Dijk (2004) referred to as elites since they have the power to change the social and linguistic structures. In this argument, the general public usually does not actively participate in influencing media discourse. They just have a conversation with their partners, family, and friends. Therefore, the ability of the media to shape and (re)produce the attitudes of its users is essential.

5. Methods and data

Discourse is an essential means of power domination. It is highly influential accessing people's thoughts. This study employs tools of discourse related to ideological representation and inter-textual meaning of news items. The study collects data from three reports from renowned media outlets (*New York Times, al-Sharq al-Awsat,* and *Aljazeera*) that were all posted on March 6, 2014. The *New York Times* was chosen as the daily newspaper because of its reputation for being unfair when it comes to the Middle East issues. However, a study published in September 2003 by Matt Viser with the title "An Analysis of the New York Times and Ha'aretz and their Portrayals of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict" explored the pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian biases by looking at quantitative indicators of news coverage in the *New York Times* and Ha'aretz (Viser, 2003). Multiple indicators were used to investigate three time periods (1987–1988, 2000–2001, and post–September 11). By these standards, the *New York Times* favors Israel over the Palestine, and over time, the prejudice has grown more obvious.

al-Sharq al-Awsat "The Middle East" newspaper is an Arabic international newspaper with its headquarters in London and is also considered a pioneer of the "off-shore" model in the Arabic press (Mellor, 2005). In 2005, the *NYT* described *al-Sharq al-Awsat* as one of the oldest and most influential newspaper in the region (Naharnet Newsdesk, 2015). This can be a clear indication of the respect and the close relationship between the two newspapers. *al-Sharq al-Awsat* is known for its support of the Saudi government despite being published under the name of a private corporation, the Saudi Research and Marketing Group (Mellor, 2005). The newspaper was formed with the agreement of the Saudi royal family and government leaders. Faisal bin Salman, a member of the Saudi royal family, is the owner of the newspaper (Darwish, 2009). In a speech in 2003, Colonel Muammar Gaddafi, the former leader of Libya, accused King Abdullah of arranging for the Americans to occupy Iraq (Darwish, 2009). The Saudi King was attacked by the Libyan leader in the Arab League Summit in 2009 (Naharnet Newsdesk, 2015).

Aljazeera, a Qatari broadcaster owned by the *Aljazeera* Media Network with headquarters in Doha, Qatar, and sponsored by the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa. *Aljazeera* was the first declared enemy for the Libyan leader in his most recent speeches (Ethelb, 2022).

For better or worse, the channel's enormous popularity has also made it a public opinion-shaper. Its reporting frequently affects what is covered and what is not, as well as what Arab viewers believe about certain topics (Bishara, 2012). As the most-watched channel in the area, it has been seen to have contributed to the Arab Spring, especially the uprisings in Tunisia and Egypt. In January 2011, The *New York Times* wrote: The protests rocking the Arab world this week have one thread uniting them: *Aljazeera*, whose aggressive coverage has helped propel insurgent emotions from one capital to the next. (Bishara, 2012).

Since Qaddafi is not being charged with war crimes or human rights violations at the International Criminal Court in The Hague, the background of the newspapers raises suspicions that they are using language to advance their power and ideologies. This of

course was happening via the language they used and through which they were legitimizing the action of the Niger government as a right and deserved action to be taken against Saadi.

6. Framework and Background of Critical Discourse Analysis

Fairclough and Wodak (1997) believe that societies shape languages and vice versa. This study uses CDA to explore the relationship between social and linguistic structures. In other words, it examines the role of social institutions in exercising power through the use of language. Furthermore, the study explores the rhetorical critique on persuasion (including "manipulation") in news reports texts in relation to the way to pursue and to change societies in particular directions. The analysis section below will look at the three texts from the previously mentioned newspapers. By using CDA, a lexical analysis and linguistic justification will be performed analyze the data. That is to focus on how power relations are manifested at both the macro-level and inter-textual meanings of the persuasive strategies. The study focuses on intertextual knowledge aiming to account for some societal interactions that are influencing the way people consume news reports.

6.1 Analysis of data

According to Fairclough (2006:1), media texts have the power to "misrepresent as well as represent realities. It can weave visions and imaginaries which can be implemented to change realities and, in some cases, improve human well-being, but it can also rhetorically obfuscate realities and construe them ideologically to serve unjust power relations". As a result, the ideological representation and power dynamics in language usage in the three newspaper reports will be addressed and studied from the viewpoints of CDA.

6.1.1 The ideological representation of Extradite

The verb *extradite* conveys ideological representation when used in news reports through its selective usage, framing, and contextualization. The choice of which individuals or groups are described as being *extradited* reflects bias or ideological leanings. News reports shape public perception and reinforce certain narratives by focusing on specific cases or individuals – as in the case of Saadi, who is being selectively targeted for political motives, national interests, or alignment with particular ideologies. The question here is why they choose this particular verb other than several synonyms such as deportation or handover? The usage indicates that Asaadi was being handed over as a criminal and a fugitive. News reports employ positive or negative language to describe the process, depending on the political or ideological stance of the media outlet. For example, describing a person as *extradited for justice* versus *extradited for political reasons* can significantly shape public opinion.

NYT wrote "saying he didn't stay quiet" as an indication of justification for reasons behind the incident of the *extradition*. The other two reports and due to the strained relationship between the Saudi and Qatari governments; especially in 2011 when the Libyan Colonel nominated the them in his last speech as enemies and ironically thanked them for conspiring against the Libyan people. The problem goes beyond the words and accusations; and due to the fact that both countries are the main producer of oil in the Middle East area; some economic issues were involved in the conflict. However, in case of *NYT* the quotation above helped to prevent the contradiction that was present in the *Aljazeera* and *al-Sharq al-Awsat* reports regarding this indication when they stated that the International Criminal Court did not *accuse, want* or *seek* Saadi. In fact, the way *extradition* cases are contextualized within larger narratives or global events also conveys ideological representation. Placing emphasis on the motives behind extradition, the impact on international relations, or the perceived injustices within the process can influence how the audience interprets and evaluates the information.

By applying CDA, the choice of the verb *extradite* can provide insights into power dynamics and ideological representations. For example, the alternative verbs, such as *transfer* or *hand over*, could have been used instead. The selection of *extradite* carries connotations of legal processes, criminality, or authoritative actions. It can clearly uncover underlying power dynamics and hidden agendas that shape the representation of extradition case. The use of *extradite* seeks to portray *extradition* as a necessary measure to bring criminals to justice and protect society from wrongdoing. Further, crime-related vocabulary, such as *suspect*, *accused*, or *fugitive*, is commonly used to reinforce this framing.

6.1.2 The use of lexicalities

Different expressions were used to declare the process of sending Saadi behind bars, al-Sharg al-Awsat used the verb transferred which used to describe objects more than humans. Aljazeera used has been placed which is also used for objects as well as human beings, that is to say these two verbs show negative attribution towards Saadi, and give the impression of his brutal nature. The custody term in NYT report is associated with the so-called *child* custody, it is more of the right to determine the residence, protection, care, and education of a minor child or children. In such context the reader of NYT will be influenced by the parody, and sympathy with the incident.

Further, the use of the passive voice in *has been placed* and *had taken custody of* obscures the agent or the party responsible for the action. The phrases *had taken custody of* implies a power imbalance between the party taking custody, the Libyan government in this case, and the one being subjected to *custody*, Saadi Gaddafi. The lexical choice of *has been placed* and *transferred* draws on legal and institutional language which have an impact in framing the event of *extradition* in general to comfort with ideological leanings of an institution. In fact, the phrases *has been placed* and *had taken custody of* carry connotations of control and confinement when contrasted to agency, autonomy, and freedom. For example, phrases like *has been detained* or *was handed over* could convey different nuances and implications. Such lexical choice unveils the power dynamics, institutional influences, and potential biases embedded in news reports. The analysis of linguistic choices and their discursive implications gives a more nuanced interpretation of the events and offers a critical engagement with the way the media represents stories.

6.1.3 The intertextual meanings of lexical items

On reporting on the father's regime, *NYT* and *Aljazeera* chose to express the way they saw the four decades as the peak of authority and power, and the downfall of the regime was unexpected as it requires powerful will and determination. However, *al-Sharq al-Awsat* has expressed different points of view, using the verb *crumble*, meaning to gradually decay or disintegrate; that is the regime did not *topple* suddenly. The three newspapers had implicitly argued the legitimation and delegitimation of the Colonel's regime. For the *NYT*, the regime has paced itself strongly among famous political bodies, seized power, had formed a threat to the dominant world powers, and it had been a legitimate regime. *al-Sharq al-Awsat* used the verb *crumble* to delegitimize the regime and deny the forty years of its existence. It somehow reconstructs the readers' beliefs regarding the necessity of eliminating all the links to the former dictator regime. This strategy reveals the power that the owners (governments and royals) have over the press and media and expose many hidden agendas that targeting Libya as a competitor country in the oil industry.

The terms of *topple/crumble* are evaluative in nature. They frame events in a particular way by conveying a sense of negativity, instability, or failure. They suggest a sudden and forceful collapse, creating a narrative of dramatic change or downfall. They describe a government being *toppled* by opposition forces or an organization *crumbling* under internal conflicts. The terms imply a negative assessment of the events described. They suggest failure, weakness, or inadequacy. By employing such evaluative language, news reports influence the reader's perception of the actors involved, potentially reinforcing existing biases or preconceptions. Further, they reflect power dynamics within the discourse. For instance, if a news report describes a protest movement as attempting to *topple* an authoritarian regime, it positions the regime as a dominant force resisting change. This framing may influence how power relations are understood, with implications for the perceived legitimacy, resistance, or oppression of various actors involved (Ethelb, 2019).

The use of *topple* in a news report invokes intertextual references to political contexts and regime change. It suggests the removal or overthrow of a government or leadership. This intertextual meaning connects the news report to historical instances of political upheaval, social movements, or revolutions. It evokes associations with power dynamics, and instability. On the other hand, the term *crumble* carries intertextual meaning by drawing on discourses related to the structural integrity or stability of a regime, for example. When a news report states that a regime is *crumbling*, it references a broader narrative of decay, or dysfunction. This intertextuality connects the news report to discussions about the resilience, sustainability, or effectiveness of social, economic, or political structures. Both *topple* and *crumble* can convey intertextual meaning through vivid imagery to describe the downfall of individuals or organizations. *Topple* may invoke intertextual references to iconic instances of regime change, such as the fall of the Berlin Wall or the Arab Spring. This intertextuality situates the news report within public narratives surrounding similar events. When a news report uses these phrases to describe a situation, it evokes intertextual connections to past instances of similar events reported in the media.

Other terms used in the reports and have intertextual connotations are Accuse, wanted and sought.

al-Sharq al-Awsat usage of *sought* is more to be inappropriate, while the other two choices are much suitable to be used with Courts and Law. In such cases, the words "*wanted* and *accused*" show more serious and inevitable reaction towards the incident, but the word "*sought*" is weak regarding the situation. The use of *accused* in a news report invokes intertextual references to legal contexts and criminal justice systems. It implies that someone has been formally charged with a crime or wrongdoing. This intertextual meaning connects the news report to legal procedures, notions of innocence or guilt. In fact, *wanted* and *sought* carry intertextual meaning by drawing on discourses related to law enforcement and fugitive searches. When a news report states that a person is *wanted* by the authorities or *sought* for questioning, it references a broader narrative of pursuing individuals who are considered suspects or persons of interest. When a news report mentions that a person is *accused* of a crime, it may invoke intertextual references to high-profile cases that received extensive media attention. This intertextuality establishes connections between different news reports, shaping the audience's perception of the severity or significance of the accusation. For example, these phrases may evoke inter-textual associations with notions of suspicion, guilt, or the pursuit of justice. Thus, by conveying intertextual meaning, phrases such as *accused, wanted*, and *sought* in news reports tap into broader discourses, legal contexts, and

interconnections between different texts. This intertextuality shapes the audience's interpretation, frames the discourse, and contributes to the construction of meaning in media representations.

Other terms that were used in the reports and had some ideological and textual referenes are *thanked* and *criticized*. While *NYT*, has kept silence regarding the relation between the two countries, *Aljazeera* wrote about the positive and bright side of Libyan-Nigerian relation: "Thanked Niger for its co-operation". On the other hand, *al-Sharq al-Awsat* focused on the negative aspects such as the tension and the refusal. Moreover, the word *criticized* can be problematic especially when the two nations in question are having tense relations regarding this issue. The purpose of this study is to find out whether the use of language in *NYT*, *al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *Aljazeera* of the incident of the *extradition* of Saadi Gaddafi in 2014 have some ideological tendencies that attribute for the power dynamics.

The use of *thanked* and *criticized* invokes intertextual references to previous statements, actions, or events. For example, if a news report mentions that a politician thanked a particular group, it may reference a previous interaction or promise made by the politician to that group. By referencing this intertextual context, the news report establishes a connection between past and present events, shaping the audience's understanding and interpretation. In fact, *thanked* and *criticized* align with prevailing discourses or dominant narratives surrounding the *extradition* of Saadi to Libya. The terms convey intertextual meaning by referencing political discourse and public debates about the *extradition*. When a news report mentions that a politician criticized a policy, it may invoke a larger discourse surrounding that policy, including arguments and counterarguments put forth by different political actors.

This leads to assume that the *al-Sharq al-Awsat*'s use of the verbs shows that Asaadi is identified as a criminal and brutal threat to the satiability of Libya as the country is facing a severe civil war for over three years since the event. It draws a picture to the reader that this figure constitutes a danger to the turmoil in Libya. The agenda for *al-Sharq al-Awsat* was to negatively influence the readers' beliefs and attitudes towards the son of the former Libyan leader Colonel Muammar Gaddafi by practicing such power and ideological representation. Yet *NYT*'s language was much alike to *Aljazeera*'s. Both tried to stay neutral and stand in the middle. *Aljazeera* tends in some lines in the report to abandon its Non-Aligned position, and practice some kind of power and promoting ideological orientations that it favors. Their language can still be described as neutral and serving the agenda of maintaining stable relations with the parties concerned.

7. Conclusion

This paper investigated discourse dynamics of media texts and the way newspapers with different political and ideological backgrounds cover the same incident using various lexical expressions. These lexical items usually provide contextual ideological representations and intertextual meanings. The primary objective of this study was to conduct a comprehensive comparative analysis of international media coverage regarding the extradition of Mr. Saadi Gaddafi in 2014. Specifically, it on examining the reporting of this incident in three prominent newspapers. The study attempted to explore the extent of power and ideological bias reflected in the language used in *New York Times, al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *Aljazeera*. Furthermore, it discussed the capability of media to influence public opinion. The paper studied the case of Mr. Saadi Gaddafi extradition to Libyan authorities in 2014. It analyzed the coverage of the incident by three respectable newspapers, *New York Times, al-Sharq al-Awsat* and *Aljazeera* networks investigating concepts of critical discourse analysis such as ideology, discourse, lexicality, and power dynamics.

They study revealed that intertextual connotations related to legal contexts shape the audience's perception of seriousness, guilt, and the pursuit of justice in media representations. The examples used in the study align with prevailing discourses and dominant narratives surrounding the extradition, reflecting ideological tendencies and political debates. It exhibited that both *NYT* and *Aljazeera* adopt a more neutral stance, although *Aljazeera* occasionally deviates from its non-aligned position to promote ideological orientations it favors. In a broader context, these findings contribute to our understanding of how media ideology and discourse shape public opinion and influence the interpretation of events. They highlight the role of media outlets in framing narratives, promoting certain ideologies, and influencing societal discourse. This study serves as a reminder of the importance of critically analyzing media representations to gain a more nuanced understanding of the power dynamics and ideological influences at play.

The reports of these three media texts had set around the extradition of the Libyan leader's son who was negatively and heavily agitating enough to warrant such fate to Saadi. Thus, the study believes that it is important for news consumers to critically analyze the language, framing used in news stories, and context presented in news reports involving the extradition incident. By recognizing potential ideological representation, individuals could seek diverse perspectives and sources to form a more comprehensive understanding of the issue at hand. News reports may selectively target political opponents or individuals associated with rival ideological groups. For instance, in a politically polarized context, a news outlet with a specific bias may extensively cover extradition cases involving individuals from opposing political parties, while downplaying or ignoring cases involving individuals from their own group. One limitation of this study is that it focused only on three specific newspapers, which may not represent

the entirety of international media coverage on the extradition of Saadi Gaddafi. Thus, future research is recommended to further understand the specific mechanisms through which intertextual connotations shape audience perception in media representations. It is also recommended that a broader range of media outlets and analyzing their coverage of the extradition case would provide a more comprehensive understanding of the ideological tendencies and political debates across different news sources. Furthermore, exploring the impact of the potential consequences of biased or ideologically driven reporting would contribute to the field of media studies and inform discussions on media ethics and responsibility.

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