

# INTRODUCTION

## Introduction to media coverage

Nigel Parry, *The Electronic Intifada*

### I. The most significant omission

Although this introduction to media coverage will touch on a number of different issues, it is perhaps appropriate to begin by identifying the most profound and reoccurring omission from international reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

A Palestinian child throws a stone at an Israeli tank in Dheisheh Refugee Camp, July 2002.  
*photo by Musa Al-Shaer*

The most significant omission is shockingly basic -- there is no notable communication that the Israeli military occupation continued unabated in the post-peace process period, that the human rights situation continued as before or worsened, or that the Israeli land confiscation and settlement of Palestinian land did not cease for a single day.

That the prevailing Western perception of the conflict -- the prevailing American perception in particular -- primarily holds the Palestinians responsible for the failure of the peace process is shameful in light of what the majority Palestinian people experienced on the ground. Whatever adjectives you wish to use to describe the process by which Oslo was implemented in the occupied territories, "peace" is one that obscures -- not describes -- the realities on the ground. In a conflict over land, you don't keep taking land and still get away with claiming that you're working to resolve the conflict. This is exactly what Israel did during Oslo.

When the Second Intifada began in September 2000, many observers were surprised. This resulted from a widespread ignorance of the situation for Joe or Jane Palestinian on the ground and how much their situation had measurably worsened since the signing of the *Declaration of Principles* seven years previously.

Taking a step back from the small period of history that encompasses the "peace process", the Israeli military occupation has continuously and negatively impacted the lives of all Palestinians living in the West Bank and Gaza Strip for 35 years. This is not an esoteric historical fact. It means that anyone 35 years old or younger has only known a life characterised by boundaries, hopelessness, and fear. Until you have lived under military occupation, you have no hope of understanding the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict. This is not a conflict between Israel and Yasser Arafat

RECOMMENDED  
READING ON THE  
SECOND PALESTINIAN  
INTIFADA

*The New Intifada* (Verso 2001), features a chapter on media coverage of the Second Palestinian Intifada by the Electronic Intifada's Ali Abunimah [[buy it now](#)].

or the Palestinian Authority. This is a conflict between Israel and an indigenous people whose land it has been colonising with the help of massive human rights violations for over 50 years.

While there has indeed been fault committed on both sides -- an oft repeated truism that promotes an illusion of "balance" -- this is a struggle between a mouse and an elephant that wants the mouse's home. There is no balance of power on the two sides. Israel has one of the most powerful armies in the world. In the media, the conflict has mostly been stripped of its most important contents -- this imbalance of power that ensures the continuation of the conflict, and the plumb line of international law that exists to offer us a legal compass in international conflicts.

That the 35-year-old Israeli military occupation of the West Bank (including East Jerusalem) and the Gaza Strip is rarely mentioned in reports -- as if it were a matter of no real import -- is one thing. In the worst cases, the occupation is presented as if it were a matter of perception. CNN has developed into an art form, talking about "what Palestinians see as the military occupation." This obscures the fact that the international community and international law considers Palestinian land as occupied.

This 'occupation avoidance' is as inappropriate as it would be to have reported on South Africa during the 1980's without mentioning *Apartheid*, or reporting about "what Black South Africans see as Apartheid." There are facts in this world. While it is perfectly acceptable to hold opinions on what circumstances merit one person taking another's land or how best to resolve entrenched conflicts, it is utterly unacceptable to deny the basic truths of the matter.

The Israeli military occupation remains the most intrusive force in the lives of the three million Palestinians in the Gaza Strip and West Bank (including Jerusalem). As such it remains the most powerful determiner of, and the over-riding context for, Palestinian attitudes and reactions towards Israel.

The media's omission of the occupation or its subjectivising of it as a Palestinian perception is, indeed, as bad as it gets.

## **II. Local coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict: how bias begins on the ground**

Looking closer at the media that works on the ground is important, as this is often the primary source of information for foreign journalists. This section relates to media coverage of events and developments in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, offering a very brief overview and summary of the weaknesses of the existing Arabic, Hebrew, and English-language media with a focus on the latter, because it is the main pipeline for information out of the country.

### **i. Arabic-language news**

The majority of Arabic-language print and electronic news available in the country is produced by Palestinians, with some Israeli produced Arabic-language news available on Israeli state television and radio.

Palestinian-produced news is undermined by its low investigative content and is mostly delivered as opinion-oriented advocacy, both characteristics a direct result of the Palestinian media's history of operating under foreign military occupation.

Almost all of the Palestinian news organisations have some level of affiliation with the ruling faction in the Palestinian Authority (PA). Palestinian-produced news is subject to regular censorship and editorial interference by the PA, mainly when reporting on the PA, but also when reporting on Israel at times of increased conflict. See **Media in Palestine: Between the PNA's Hammer and the Anvil of Self-censorship** (from *The Palestinian Human Rights Monitor*, V.3, #5, PHRMG, November 1999).

Local television stations such as Ramallah's al-Watan can be a good source of raw information during times of increased conflict when live unedited material is broadcast.

Satellite channels such as al-Jazeera are a relatively new phenomenon, and are often of a higher quality, although these still broadcast in Arabic.

Israeli-produced Arabic-language news is largely used as a propaganda channel by the Israeli government.

As a result, Arabic-language news almost exclusively reflects either Palestinian Authority or Israeli government opinion. Due to both this and the low-level of Arabic-language skills of foreign correspondents, Arabic-language news is therefore not used as a primary source of information for foreign correspondents stationed in the country.

## **ii. Hebrew-language news**

Hebrew-language news is produced almost exclusively by and for Israelis, with a negligible amount of Palestinian-produced Hebrew-language news broadcast on Palestinian Authority television and radio.

The majority of this news naturally therefore reflects an Israeli perspective on the conflict or reflects the same quality issues as does Arabic-language news.

## **iii. English-language news**

Only one weekly Palestinian newspaper, **The Jerusalem Times**, publishes in English. Much news falls short of international standards of objectivity and accuracy and the readership that the *Jerusalem Times* does have is largely loyal solely as a result of the existing vacuum of Palestinian-produced English news rather than as a result of the quality of the publication.

The Palestinian-run **Jerusalem Media and Communication Center (JMCC)** compiles a weekly *Palestine Report* in English of superior quality. Its very basic style and format for many years limited its readership to research centers than the general public, although recent moves towards a magazine presentation are

winning it a wider audience. Similarly many local Palestinian research centers and non-governmental organisations, such as human rights centers, publish material in English. The Internet has done much to open up this material to a English-language readership.

Two daily English-language Israeli newspapers exist:

a. **The Jerusalem Post**

The *Jerusalem Post* offers a diet of news and opinion with an unrelenting right-wing slant, of often questionable journalistic integrity.

b. **Ha'aretz**

*Ha'aretz* is a more liberal Israeli daily published in English, offering for the most part far higher quality news and strong investigative pieces that regularly expose the negative aspects of the Israeli occupation.

**Arutz Sheva** ("Channel Seven") is a Jewish settler radio station also broadcasts in English, naturally reflecting an intractable right-wing position mixed in with biblical commentary. Israeli Army Radio also offers some reports in English, with the expected slant that its name suggests.

### **III. The English-language news-gathering infrastructure: the main information pipeline out of the country**

#### **i. Introduction**

As the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the top news stories in the world, many major networks and newspapers maintain permanent representatives in the country. According to one Israeli researcher (Cohen, 2000), some 300 foreign news organisations are represented. Other news organisations prefer to send representatives only at critical periods, which means that at any given time, there can be some several hundred correspondents stationed in the country.

English-language news, represents the overwhelming majority of reporting from the West Bank and Gaza Strip available internationally.

#### **ii. Who are the foreign correspondents?**

Dr. Joel Cohen, a lecturer in communications at the Academic-Technological Institute of Holon and a research fellow at Bar Ilan University, undertook a study into foreign correspondents based in Israel, reported by *Ha'aretz* on 6 November 2000. Much of the study's findings make it clear why the Israeli viewpoint dominates.

Some 300 foreign news organisations are represented in Israel, many more than in any other place in the Middle East. The second is Egypt - with only 120. Two-thirds of these come from Western Europe and North America. The article stated:

The data that the foreign correspondents supplied about themselves are quite surprising in view of the Israeli claim of a clear pro-Palestinian bias among the press. The vast majority of the

correspondents report from Israel about news from the Palestinian Authority as well, and about the conflict in general. A fairly large proportion among them are Jewish, most have lived in Israel for many years (almost 10 years is the average), and some are married to Israeli women. Some are veteran Israeli journalists who report from Israel to the foreign media on a permanent basis.

The Western background of most of the journalists makes it easier for them to connect with the Israeli mentality than that of the Palestinians. About 91 percent defined their knowledge of Israel as "good," as opposed to only 41 percent who said they thought their knowledge of Arab countries was on a good level, and 35 percent who said it was "medium." They also know a great deal more about Judaism than about Islam: 57 percent said they had a "good" level of knowledge of Judaism, as opposed to only 10 percent for Islam. And their Hebrew is much better than their Arabic: 54 percent are completely fluent in Hebrew and another 20 percent have a working knowledge of the language, while only 6 percent are fluent in Arabic, while another 42 percent can "get by" in Arabic.

Perhaps the most important aspect of the above is that all but a literal handful of the foreign and Israeli correspondents writing for the English-language news agencies and wire services live in Israeli-controlled parts of the country where a full range of Western-style amenities are readily accessible. News is often produced with only irregular exposure to Palestinian society, without visiting Palestinian areas and, in the worst cases, Palestinians sources are not consulted for their reaction to events before publication.

When journalists do not rely on first hand information for their 'news', the end result can be very misleading. In an Associated Press wire service report of 11 April 2001, "Israel Tanks Enter Palestinian Camp," AP correspondent Ibrahim Barzak wrote:

In a *first foray* into Palestinian territory, Israeli tanks and bulldozers rumbled into this refugee camp early Wednesday, razing or heavily damaging 30 homes and triggering a heavy exchange of fire that wounded more than two dozen Palestinians.

In fact this was not the "first foray" at all. Human rights worker Michael Brown, working for PCHR in Gaza during the early part of the Palestinian Uprising, told The Electronic Intifada:

Many news agencies are now parroting the Israelis' line that this attack was the first of its kind. It was not. I lived through the most terrifying night of my life on December 13 when Israeli military forces entered Khan Yunis to demolish homes. I saw Palestinian families with small children fleeing their homes in the dead of night. An old man came to the door of his home and vomited. I saw the injured children a few hours later at the hospital. No news report I saw gave any sense of the widespread terror that gripped the refugees of Khan Yunis. The structural bias in the media is such that seemingly all the international correspondents were sleeping unawares in Jerusalem or Tel Aviv and the next day simply relied on statements from Israeli military officials.

[For a full report on the events of 13 December 2000, see "[Israeli occupation forces break into Khan Yunis: Four Palestinians killed and another 28 wounded](#)," PCHR press release, ref: 200/2000, 13 December 2000]]

What are we left with? Israeli and international journalists report from a distance on the Palestinians, from a society which views Palestinians as threatening, and a society which is highly sensitised to how its perception of the conflict is reported.

Reports are subject to a minimal level of Israeli government censorship but as the above findings would seem to indicate, most censorship and/or bias occurs automatically as a result of the worldview, knowledge, and geographical location of correspondents. These factors do not provide a basis for the kind of investigative reporting of specific events or a general recognition that there is a natural imbalance implicit in any military occupation.

In general, it is true to say that the European media tends to include more of the

Palestinian perception of the conflict than their American counterparts, although this observation is not intended to suggest that European reporting is satisfactory in itself.

This disparity, on the American side of the Atlantic, stems largely from long-embedded negative perceptions of the Arab World and Islam, a cultural familiarity with Judaism stemming from America's Christian roots, and the United States' political history of support for Israel at the expense of the Palestinians. For more information about the development of the American worldview towards the Israeli-Arab and Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, see "Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on US Middle East Policy," by Kathleen Christison (1999), referenced in the recommended reading at the end of this introduction.

### iii. Sources

Foreign correspondents and their Israeli counterparts tend to get their information from three main sources:

1. **The Israeli government**

The very active and professional Israeli Government Press Office (and its embassy and lobby satellite organisations around the world) distributes a wide range of breaking news and analysis on every conceivable issue free of charge to journalists via e-mail, fax, beeper, websites, and print material. Government information is also disseminated indirectly via Israeli government television news broadcasts.

2. **Palestinian press services and stringers**

The independent Palestinian Jerusalem Media and Communication Center offers a pay-service for journalists which includes daily summaries of the Arabic press and breaking news alerts of political rallies, press conferences, dramatic events, and translations of communiqués, compiled by a network of Palestinian stringers and distributed via the Web, fax, e-mail, and beeper. A similar, although less impressive daily news summary is offered by *The Jerusalem Times* newspaper. Due to its low quality, the output of the official Palestinian press agency Wafa and the recent Palestinian Authority initiative -- the **Palestine Media Center** -- is all but ignored. A proportion of the larger foreign news networks have their own Palestinian stringers in the cities and towns in the West Bank and Gaza Strip but rarely have Palestinians working higher up in the news editing infrastructure.

3. **Other journalists and media**

Factual content in foreign news reports and the Israeli English-language press can regularly be traced back to Israeli government television news broadcasts. If you have ever attempt to track down the source of a specific piece of information, it can get quite convoluted as the result of journalists using other journalists' work as their sources. Following a bombing in Jerusalem on 30 July 1997, an attempt to discover **the authenticity and source of a leaflet that apparently claimed responsibility** became a rather cyclical journey, leading from news agency to news agency without any apparent resolution.

#### iv. Censorship by checkpoint and intimidation

Palestinians are deliberately excluded from any meaningful input to the international news gathering process by the Israeli government. Palestinian journalists for Palestinian press based in the West Bank and Gaza Strip are very rarely granted Israeli press cards, which cuts them off from travel inside Israel and to Jerusalem, between the West Bank and Gaza Strip, and makes them vulnerable at checkpoints controlling access to areas within the West Bank and Gaza Strip during increased times of conflict.

As for Palestinians working for foreign news organisations, as their offices are mostly located in Jerusalem this fact serves as a *de facto* Israeli veto against Palestinian employees' participation in the editorial process. On 1 November 2000, a month after the beginning of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, *Ha'aretz's* breaking news website:

Since the beginning of the current violence in the territories, the Government Press Office (GPO) has refused to issue or renew press credentials for Palestinians who work for foreign news media based in Israel, and the step has become long-term policy to combat alleged pro-Palestinian bias in reporting, Army Radio reported on Wednesday.

Finally, Palestinian and sometimes foreign journalists are also regularly targeted by Israeli troops for harassment and violence. Index on Censorship reported that in 1998, ten Palestinian journalists were shot by Israeli troops, sustaining varying degrees of injury. In addition, the Palestinian Authority regularly arrests Palestinian journalists and editors, occasionally even shutting down local offices of international media organisations, which has created a climate of intimidation and widespread self-censorship. During the Al-Aqsa Intifada that began in September 2000, Index on Censorship reported that:

At least ten journalists were wounded [....] On 29 September five journalists were injured by security forces while covering disturbances around the Al-Aqsa mosque in Jerusalem. Hazem Bader, an Associated Press cameraman, was shot at close range in his right hand by a sniper's rubber-coated metal bullet. Khaled Abu Aker, a correspondent with the TV station France 2, was beaten by police after refusing to hand over a rubber-coated bullet he had picked up off the ground. Associated Press journalist Khaled al-Zeghary was shot in his right leg by a rubber-coated metal bullet, and then beaten by six policemen who removed his camera. Photographer Mahfouz Abu-Turk was shot in his leg by two rubber-coated bullets from about 30 metres by special forces, and an Agence France-Presse photographer, Awad Awad, was shot by rubber-coated bullets in his right leg and right arm from close range. On 1 October ABC News cameraman Amer al-Ja'bari was wounded in the head at the Hebron bypass road while standing at least 400 metres from clashes. He left hospital the following day after surgery. On 2 October Mazen Dana, a Reuters cameraman, was hit in the left foot and leg by live ammunition fired by Israeli forces - having been shot in the same leg only the day before. He believes the attacks may have been deliberate. Also on 2 October, Loay Abu Haykel, a Reuters photojournalist, was hit in the leg by a rubber-coated bullet while covering the clashes. The same day in Hebron, Wa'el al-Shiokhy, journalist with the local station TV al-Nawras, was also shot. [Sources: Reporters Sans Frontiers, Committee to Protect Journalists, cited in Index on Censorship's *Index*, Issue 6, 2000]

On 31 October 2000, **CNN Correspondent Ben Wedeman was wounded in Gaza**. In the **debrief** from his hospital bed, an editor's note stated that, "The CNN crew, which arrived at the scene, said the preponderance of fire came from the Israeli side as Palestinian militiamen and security forces took cover."

#### v. Palestinian Authority media relations

Sky TV's Middle East correspondent Keith Graves, writing about the Sharm El-Sheikh ceasefire summit in the 22 October 2000 edition of the British *Independent* newspaper, noted the vast difference in approach to the media between the Israeli and Palestinian sides.

[Israeli] government officials distributed videos of "Palestinian provocations" and glossy brochures filled with gruesome photographs of the aftermath of suicide bombs directed at Israeli targets. Officials who normally would barely pass the time of day with foreign reporters were suddenly on first-name terms. It was impossible to cross the lobby of the hotel where most of the delegations were staying without running the gauntlet of Israeli propagandists.

Of the Palestinians there was neither sight nor sound.

Although this is not the whole picture, it is indicative of a pervasive trend of Palestinian neglect of, and under-investment in, media relations. A quick browse of official Palestinian Authority websites, such as [pna.net](http://pna.net), will confirm this, particularly when viewed next to their Israeli counterparts.

## **vi. Multiplying mistakes: the role of the wire services**

The vast majority of newspapers, radio, and television media worldwide rely on wire service organisations such as Reuters, the Associated Press, and Agence France Press for their reports. As a result, the kind of structural issues with the news gathering infrastructure in Israel/Palestine cited above are very influential, as most of the editorial-level consumers of the wire services have no real understanding of how to sift the information they receive. The ultimate result is a reliance on an Israeli-controlled, Israeli-influenced channel for information about the conflict.

The following example from a Reuters wire report posted on CNN's website on 28 April 1998 will demonstrate how this results in the passing on of an Israeli angle on events to the worldwide media.

"Israel to ban Palestinians during jubilee break"

JERUSALEM, April 27 1998 (Reuters) - Israel is to ban the entry of Palestinians from the West Bank and Gaza from Wednesday until Saturday when the Jewish state marks Remembrance Day for its war dead and its 50th anniversary, the army said on Monday.

Israeli police said earlier in the week that security forces were on heightened alert for possible attacks by Moslem militants during the long weekend. In a statement, the army said provisions for such a holiday closure were contained in interim peace deals with the Palestinians.

During the closure, security forces would allow the entry of Palestinian ambulances in cases of medical emergency and permit diplomats and other foreigners to enter Israel from the West Bank and Gaza, the army said.

On the surface, this would seem to be a fair report of a development. What will be stunning to a reader who comes to this conclusion after reading the above is that there has been *a permanent closure of Israel to Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip since March 1993*.

Since 1993, only between 8,000-35,000 Palestinians who fulfill strict Israeli security requirements (e.g married men over 35) are allowed into Israel to work at any one time, a figure that represents only one percent of the three million Palestinians in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

At times when there are security concerns such as detailed in the above report even this small number have their permits canceled. In other words, 99 percent of Palestinians - almost three million people - have been experiencing an unbroken Israeli closure for six years.

When the one percent of Palestinians are later allowed to return to work inside Israel, Reuters will similarly report that Israel has "lifted" or "eased" the closure on the territories, as if the turning on of this erratic and tiny trickle is a positive development or even a "concession" instead of a false focus created by Israel to conceal a much more destructive and wider reality.

As with all wire service reports, this profoundly misleading report was internationally distributed, reproduced in thousands of publications, and used for copy by thousands of television and radio news programmes.

## **vii. The passive bias of omission**

Structural issues in the news gathering process are most clearly observed in omissions. On CNN's website (<http://www.cnn.com/WORLD/meast/sites.html>) a list of related websites in the Middle East had no category for Palestinian sites (despite every other people in the region being covered) for several years without any change, until repeated letters to CNN Interactive by the author of this analysis finally resulted in this problem being addressed.

When comparing what is included in and omitted from reports, one quickly learns what is considered to be "news". Analysis of news content over time reveals a pattern of focus on issues and semantics that stem from the Israeli government's agenda.

One media analyst (Abunimah, 1998) found that over two years, up to the end of September 1998, 49 of the US-based National Public Radio (NPR)'s reports on Israel/Palestine focused on "security", 33 referred to "terrorism", 32 to "Hamas", and 36 to "Dennis Ross". By contrast, only six NPR reports referred to "human rights", eight to "closure", one to "Shin Bet" (the Israeli internal security apparatus), two to "live ammunition" or "rubber bullets", three to "torture" and two to "demolition". This demonstrates the pervasiveness of the Israeli definition of what should be considered "news".

Of the 42 reports that referred to "Israeli settlements", Abunimah noted that eighteen contained the word "security" (a common Israeli justification for settlements) while only one contained the word "[land] confiscation". The term "illegal" never appeared in connection with Israeli settlements despite their illegality almost universally confirmed by international diplomatic and legal bodies such as the United Nations, and state governments, including that of the United States. This demonstrates that even the specific semantic twists of the US-promoted Israeli repertoire have been adopted by the media of the international community.

The fact is that terrorism, violence, and the statements of Israeli and Palestinian leaders remain a central focus of media reporting of events in the West Bank and Gaza Strip, to the exclusion of forces and events that have a far deeper impact on the lives of Palestinians.

Daily access to Palestinian perspectives by making it standard practice to base foreign correspondents in the same Palestinian areas that they report on would alone greatly address these issues. However, the continued prioritising by news organisations of comfort and convenience for correspondents rather than direct experience of the culture suggests that we are unlikely to see this happen in the near future.

## IV. Smoke without fire: the pressures of the pro-Israel lobby

The oft-cited "complexity" of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict is in reality a re-articulation of decades of pro-Israel lobby assertions that the conflict is a "unique" situation that requires a "special" international approach.

In reality, the conflict follows a standard historical pattern of military occupation, the colonial appropriation of indigenous land and natural resources, and repression of dissent.

The pro-Israeli forces that wish to prevent the articulation of non-approved repertoires on the conflict have helped to create a media status quo in which reporting has largely been reduced to just two points of interest -- the sporadic instances of violence (clashes and attacks), and developments at a macropolitical level (negotiations and summits), both of which are arenas in which Israeli dominates the spin machine.

This narrow information stream is actively policed by an army of well-funded and well-organised pro-Israel lobbies such as **AIPAC**, **CAMERA**, and the **ADL**, capable of unleashing storms of protest at every perceived misrepresentation of Israel.

Ironically, some of these groups admit what is apparent -- that the predominant tendency of the US media is to be pro-Israel. In a very bizarre 25 June 2001 press release from the ADL, "U.S. Editorial Survey Finds Overwhelming Support For Israel, Strong Criticism Directed at Arafat And Palestinian Authority", we find the following two contradictory statements:

1. Contrary to the widespread negative assumptions about U.S. media coverage in the Middle East, the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) today released findings of an editorial survey of the nation's largest daily newspapers, which *showed overwhelming support for Israel* [....]
2. "Our survey shows that the editorial boards of the major newspapers across the country are viewing the situation in the Middle East in a *realistic and objective manner*," said Glen A. Tobias, ADL National Chairman and Abraham H. Foxman, ADL National Director. "Many of the editorials are *in synch with the policies of the Bush administration and reflect the overall American perception of the situation on the ground in Israel*."

So much for the 'watchdog' role of the press. It's hard to conceive a more disturbing reality than one in which *many* of the editorials of the much-touted 'free press' are "in synch" with that of the government. The sad truth is that "the overall American perception of the situation on the ground in Israel" is not one of support for Israel as ADL would have us believe but rather a general ignorance resulting from exactly this mediocre and polemic American media coverage. Organisations

such as the ADL and CAMERA will only continue to thrive as long as this remains the case.

The aggressive 'smoke without fire' approach of the pro-Israel lobby has rendered journalists wary of being seen to be sympathetic towards the Palestinian people under military occupation, hesitant to even comment on the obvious imbalance of power or the humanitarian dimension of the conflict, and consumers of the media who do not seek out alternative information sources are being transmitted this very same wariness by default.

Unlike initiatives such as The Electronic Intifada, which accepts that reporting of all Palestinian violence is part of the role of good journalists -- so long as the wider context of the Israeli military occupation and Israel's violence are also presented -- what the pro-Israel media lobby terms "bias" is often merely what it considers to be 'over-reporting' of the violence that military occupations tend to unleash on their discontent, occupied populations. There is a prevailing belief that Israeli state violence is morally superior to the violence of individual Palestinian militants (even when the latter is directed against military targets) or of stone-throwing Palestinian demonstrators, and should therefore not get as much airtime or column inches as incidents of Palestinian terrorism currently do.

In this repertoire, Israeli violence is described as "necessary", "retaliatory", or "self-defence". Palestinian violence is always "terrorism", and many an Israeli spokesperson -- always, amazingly, with straight faces -- has solemnly intoned about the "lethal" threat posed by stones thrown by 12-year-olds. Meanwhile, indiscriminate Israeli fighter, helicopter, and tank shelling and rocketing of Palestinian neighbourhoods in response to a few shots fired by a Palestinian gunman totting breach-loading rifles is, of course, "retaliation".

Death and injury statistics made it abundantly clear from which side the overwhelming amount of violence comes from, as does the endless reports from human rights organisations that log home demolitions, agricultural vandalism, land confiscation, and other acts of violence towards inanimate targets.

Having heavily invested in a powerful public relations infrastructure, Israel's distortions and spin regularly succeed in portraying legitimate Palestinian resistance to occupation and legitimate Palestinian unwillingness to make further concessions as evidence of Palestinian "extremism". Simultaneously, Israel carries on its brutal military occupation with its myriad of violations against Palestinian human rights. This website specifically aims to progressively deconstruct this process of obfuscation and distraction that characterises the Israeli media war machine.

For more information about the pro-Israel lobby, see "They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby" by Paul Findley (1989), referenced in the recommended reading at the end of this introduction.

## **V. For more information**

This introduction only offered a brief overview of some of the issues relating to coverage of the conflict, with a focus on the international media. For more detailed information, [join the mailing list](#) of the ELECTRONIC INTIFADA, read what you

can do about it in our [Media activism advice](#) section, visit some of the "Media monitoring projects and websites" in our [related websites](#) section, and track down some of the recommended books below.

## Recommended reading

- **"Perceptions of Palestine: Their Influence on US Middle East Policy," by Kathleen Christison (Hardback, 1999).**

Although the history of America's "special relationship" with Israel is by no means a unexplored topic for authors, Kathleen Christison's book breaks new ground by its sheer scope of analysis, tracing 130 years of formulation of American perceptions of the Middle East, and their ultimate manifestation in U.S. government policy. "In the Middle East," writes Christison at the beginning of her book, "terminology shapes reality; it becomes a way of seeing reality, and, finally, it is reality." This single line, perhaps better than any other, encapsulates the political landscape mapped by Christison's book, a well-referenced 293-page investigation of the sources of the US mindset that has shaped Middle East policies through twelve key presidencies from Wilson to Clinton. Perceptions on Palestine analyses the state of knowledge of the president and key policymakers in each administration and the preconceptions with which they entered office, by examining - where available - their writings and the writings of those who most closely influenced them; by exploring coexistent popular attitudes towards the Middle East in the media, films, and literature; and by looking at how each administration was influenced by the prevailing conventional wisdom.

- **"They Dare to Speak Out: People and Institutions Confront Israel's Lobby" by Paul Findley (Paperback 2nd revised edition, August 1989).**

One of the most devastating accounts of the reach of Israel's lobby in the US, this book by former Republican Congressman Paul Findley offers extensive examples of McCarthyite tactics and the reality of "one dollar, one vote" democracy.

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