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## [US Media Bias: Covering Israel/Palestine](#)

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## US Media Bias: Covering Israel/Palestine

By Remi Kanazi

On July 18, 2005 14 year old Ragheb al-Masri sat in the back of a taxi with his parents at the Abo Holi checkpoint. An Israeli bullet penetrated his back and cracked open his chest. His mother screamed as his body lay lifeless. Have you heard his name? I wouldn't expect that you have because *CNN*, *The New York Times*, and *The Washington Post* didn't report the killing online. If they had quoted his parents, their readers would have been able to feel their tears and envision the heartbreak. Ultimately, no Israeli soldier was arrested or even reprimanded.

Every time a suicide bombing strikes Israel, mass coverage of the tragedy begins instantly. Whether landing on the front page of *The New York Times* or taking up the headline block on *CNN.com*, the pain Israeli people endure is shown endlessly. Israelis *do* suffer. Suicide bombings *are* horrific. Nevertheless, Palestinian pain occurs far more frequently, and yet often overlooked by the mainstream American media.

Since the uprising in September of 2000, more than 3800 Palestinians have been killed in the Occupied Territories as a result of the conflict. Most Americans are unaware of the toll because it is not properly reported. In 2004, *If Americans Knew*—an American organization that exposes and examines the facts of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict—reported that 808 Palestinian conflict deaths occurred while 107 Israelis conflict deaths occurred. The study, however, found that *The New York Times* covered Israeli deaths in the headline or the first paragraph in 159 articles—meaning in some cases they covered the same death numerous times. In contrast, *The New York Times* only covered about 40 percent of Palestinian deaths—334 of 808—in the headline or in the first paragraph of the articles. Nearly eight Palestinians died for every one Israeli. Disturbingly *The New York Times* is considered the quintessential “liberal” newspaper of the US.

When Palestinian deaths occur, especially militant deaths, the Israeli Government's version of the story is taken as fact in the mainstream US media. In most cases, articles covering the death of Palestinians only include large Israeli quotes, without citing Palestinian witnesses and other credible nongovernmental organization sources. This continues to be the case after human rights groups have released reports stating Israel has indiscriminately shot at civilians, even using them as human shields. In as early as 2001, *Amnesty*

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*International (AI) and Human Rights Watch (HRW) stated, "At least 470 Palestinians have been killed, most of them unlawfully by Israeli security forces when their lives [Israeli Security Forces] and the lives of others were not in danger." Since the AI/HRW report, more than 3350 Palestinians have been killed. It is remarkable how so many can accept Israeli Government as the sole, objective source when it forcibly occupies the Palestinian territories.*

On August 25, 2005 the headline on CNN.com read, "Israel: Five Militants Shot in Raid." The article claims the militants were suspected of being involved with a suicide bombing; they were armed and exchanged fire with the Israeli Occupation Forces (IOF), and five Palestinians were shot. The report also mentions the town Netanya, where the suicide bombing referenced in the article took place, was a frequent sight for suicide bombings. No Palestinian quote, no witnesses giving an alternative perspective, and no mention that three of the victims shot were under the age of 18.

The Israeli newspaper, *Haaretz*, covered the same event including Palestinian quotes and some Palestinian claims. The paper reported that the IOF killed five Palestinians on August 25, three of whom Palestinian sources claim to be between the ages of 14 and 17 with no known links to militant organizations. Four of the victims died at the scene, while one of the young victims died later that night.

Varying Palestinian reporters cited witnesses claiming all five Palestinians were unarmed, including the two militants killed. This was the first fatal attack since the "disengagement" of the Gaza Strip.

The contrast in coverage between *CNN* and *Haaretz* is staggering. The *CNN* headline was written in absolutes: "5 militants shot in raid." The *CNN* article continues by stating only the Israeli claim that five militants were killed, making the headline biased and misleading. The *Haaretz* headline read: "U.S. urges restraint after IDF raid that killed 5 Palestinians." This headline refers to the people who were shot as Palestinians and not solely militants. The *Haaretz* article covers conflicting Israeli and Palestinian claims, which made it impossible to determine whether or not all five killed were militants or civilians.

On September 7 the findings of a probe, conducted by *Haaretz* and the Israeli human rights group *B'Tselem*, found that three of the five Palestinians killed in the assault on August 25 were under the age of 18 and did *not* have any links to known terrorist organizations. Their investigation also found that the two militants killed were low ranking operatives who were not armed at the time. This repudiates the Israeli claim that IOF soldiers were in the area involved in an operation against militant leaders and a "ticking bomb" with connection to suicide bombings in Israel.

"Ticking bombs" are characterized as individuals that are an imminent physical threat to the state of Israel or people holding information that imminently threaten the security of the state of Israel. In most cases, "ticking bombs" are referred to as would be suicide bombers or those holding valuable information on individuals carrying out a suicide bombing. Israel used the "ticking bomb" scenario in the past as an excuse to torture Palestinians with impunity. In a 1998 study

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## Current Issue



Copies of the [Summer 2005](#) issue are now available. Feature articles in the new issue include: *The Pedophile Panic* by Judith Levine; *The Low Power FM Fiasco* by Ron Sakolsky; *Order 81: The Biotech War on Iraqi Farmers* by Jeremy Smith; *The Making of the Arab Menace* by Rayan El-Amine; and *Parrots and Peoples* by Richard Heinberg.

## Last Issue



on the “ticking bomb” scenario, *B’Tselem* found Israel’s claim that it is necessary to use torture against “ticking bombs” was in most cases “totally unsubstantiated.” The recent findings of *Haaretz* and *B’Tselem* deeply call into question the reliability of the state of Israel on affairs in the Occupied Territories and reaffirm the notion that using Israel as the sole source is careless and unacceptable.

Israel professes it doesn’t have the death penalty, but it has in the past and “maintains the right” in the future, to carry out extrajudicial assassinations of “wanted” Palestinians. Israeli Defense Minister Shaul Mofaz admitted on August 26 that Israel invaded and fired first in the incident that killed five Palestinians, while maintaining the notion that the militants—meaning all five killed—were armed. Again, Israel, the occupying force, reserves the “right” to play God with the lives of the Palestinian people. There are many examples of unarmed children and disabled Palestinians being injured or killed by Israeli forces. More than 875 women and children have died since the start of the conflict under the guise of security. Nearly 25 percent of the children killed were under the age of 12.

## Coincidence or Collusion?

Why are “left wing” media outlets such as *The New York Times* and *CNN* not reporting the Palestinian side of the story? Well the simple answer is *The New York Times* and *CNN* are not liberal, nor honest. They cover injustices only when there is no risk of backlash from readers and advertisers. The media moguls are only “aware” and objective when it pays them to be. *CNN* and *The New York Times* must vet their content, so as not to be viewed as “pro-Palestinian,” in fear that advertisers will pull their ads or commercials, leading to a loss in revenue.

Israel solidified itself as the strategic ally of the US in the Middle East after its victory in the Six Day War (1967 Arab/Israeli War). Israel was taken under the wing of the US—which saw its potential as a strategic, military, and political force.

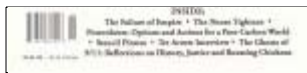
The rise of religious Zionism after 1967 and the subsequent call for the preservation of the Jewish homeland became relevant in America with the Jewish elite as well with Christian conservatives. Jewish historian, Norman Finkelstein, recalls in his book *The Holocaust Industry*,

Accordingly, American Jewish elites suddenly discovered Israel. After the 1967 war, Israel’s military élan could be celebrated because its guns point in the right direction—against America’s enemies.

Finkelstein continued to state,

“Now they [The Jewish elite] could pose as the natural interlocutors for America’s newest strategic asset. From bit players, they could advance to top billing in the Cold War drama. Thus for American Jewry, as well as the United States, Israel became a strategic asset.”

As the years progressed, Israel claimed victory in the 1973



Ramadan War (Yom Kippur War) with the defining help of America. The mounting support for Israel as a war victor, a "democracy," and a capitalistic society settled well with Americans.

38 years after the Six-Day war, America sees an even stronger military and political ally in Israel, and the pro-Israeli lobby has made sure that the sense of Jewish victimization has never faltered. Finkelstein comments, "Organized Jewry has exploited the Nazi holocaust to deflect criticism of Israel and its own morally indefensible policies."

The effectiveness of the pro-Israeli lobby hinges on the willingness of the US government to support Israel. According to the strongly pro-Israeli website the Jewish Virtual Library, the US has given Israel nearly 50 billion dollars in aid from 1974 to 1997. If the US government didn't have significant interests in backing Israel, the pro-Israeli lobby would be less of a factor much like the Palestinian lobby. Interestingly, the Jewish Lobby only supported Israel when it was in their interests to do so. Finkelstein notes, "The Holocaust industry sprung up only *after* Israel's overwhelming display of military dominance and flourished amid extreme Israeli triumphalism."

The convergence of American and Israeli support found success in delegitimizing the Palestinian cause. This consequently washed Israel's hands clean in US eyes of the atrocities committed throughout the Middle East—i.e. the invasion and indiscriminate bombing of Beirut in 1982—and more directly to the Palestinian people through dispossession and occupation. Strikingly, the American media refuses to differentiate between the past suffering of the Jewish people and the suffering Israelis endure due to inept Israeli policy which has besieged the Palestinian people for 58 years.

Consider the backlash professors at Columbia received because they were accused of promoting anti-Semitism. In reality Joseph Massad, one of the accused professors, and others simply critiqued the Israeli government. As a result, pro-Israeli groups like the David Project and Campus Watch tried to silence their right to free speech. Just as questioning the war in Iraq is "un-American," the idea of questioning Israeli actions is "anti-Semitic." Ridiculous assertions such as equating anti-Zionism with anti-Semitism is a way in which the pro-Israeli lobby restricts the media from criticizing Israel or fairly reporting matters.

In a post-9/11 world, it has been much easier to side with mostly European Israelis, who look more like Americans, who love capitalism like Americans, and who are fighting "Arab terror" like Americans. Unfortunately for the Palestinians, the media doesn't like to diverge from mainstream political correctness. If objectivity was the top priority of the media, they would not have dropped the ball in the coverage leading up to the war in Iraq. Even Bob Woodward of the "liberal" Washington Post admitted, "We did our job but we didn't do enough, and I blame myself mightily for not pushing harder."

The media are corporate sponsored outlets that feed into the majority support at a time when the Palestinian lobby is virtually non-existent in America. The "biblical rights" of Jews and their suffering the Holocaust are exploited to reassert the status of victimization. Pro-Israeli advocates incorporate the notion that the Arabs are trying to "drive the Jews to the sea."

Copies of the [Spring 2005](#) issue are still available. Feature articles include: *The Ghosts of 9/11: Reflections on History, Justice and Roosting Chickens* by Ward Churchill; *The Failure of Empire* by the editors of Monthly Review; *The Noose Tightens* by Derrick Jensen and George Draffan; *Powerdown* by Richard Heinberg; *Stencil Pirates* by Josh MacPhee; and *Tre Arrow Interview* by Allan Antliff.

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But who would really push the American/Israeli agenda, besides those fearing backlash? The neoconservatives and Christian coalitions in support for Israel. The Pat Robertsons and the Billy Grahams. Neoconservative talk radio hosts Rush Limbaugh and Sean Hannity. Best selling authors Alan Dershowitz and Thomas Friedman. Lobbying groups like AIPAC (American Israel Public Affairs Committee) and the ADL (Anti-Defamation League), and attack dogs such as Daniel Pipes and his cronies in Campus Watch. The fortune 500 companies such as Caterpillar, McDonalds, Disney and Starbucks to name a few. But most damningly, it's the "liberals," that complete the majority support. Hilary Clinton and Nancy Pelosi, the honest broker himself Bill Clinton, the heads of *The New York Times*, *CNN* and the rest of the "left wing" media that won't stand up for what's morally right. These people are too selfish or too weak to do what's right, and off with the heads of those who do.

The dilemma of the "free press" in America is that it isn't free. The media hinges on the support of the people, newspaper subscriptions, television viewership, advertisements, and the bottom line of their companies. We live in a capitalistic society run by corporate profits and essential year over year growth.

I understand why *The New York Times* and *CNN* reports the way it does. They are media hacks run by the corporate dollar. Injustice is injustice. Murder is murder. While Palestinian suffering goes on unreported children like Ragheb Al-Masri remain dead and forgotten, and the American press remains biased and forgiven.

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