

An Historical Analysis of United States Newspapers' Bias in Reporting the Al-Aqsa Intifada.

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With the new Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations in Annapolis underway as I write this, I felt it would be beneficial to revisit the reactions and events which were induced by the last negotiations: the Oslo Peace Accords of 1993. It was quickly learnt that the Accords were almost completely unfruitful and were a serious reason behind creating the build up and backlash to what is now known as the Second Intifada or Al-Aqsa Intifada which started on September 28th, 2000. The Accords raised the hopes of the occupied Palestinians while the realities on the ground consistently worsened. Thus, logically, many fear that if Annapolis fails it could lead to a third Intifada. Therefore, it is of historical importance and relevance to study the American media's portrayal of, and reaction to, the Second Intifada. Not only would such an examination aid in better understanding the new negotiations in Annapolis, but also it would assist in better understanding the U.S. media's position in relation to this Middle East conflict since the U.S. has much sway and leverage in the region. By thoroughly analyzing numerous primary and secondary sources from the day of the uprising to a month after it began, this essay will attempt to prove that the American media's portrayal of Al-Aqsa Intifada were often skewed and factually inaccurate in favor of Israel, regularly showing bias against Palestine.

Background

The Oslo Peace Accords came in reaction to the Israeli occupation of Palestine which took place after the Six Day War. In 1967, Israel invaded Palestine and placed it under military Occupation. Quickly thereafter, the military occupation took another turn for the worse, bringing in Israeli settlers who built homes and communities on the newly occupied Palestinian land. With such a move came other annexations, such as water sources as well as infrastructure. Check points, fortress like neighborhoods, and military outposts steadily increased throughout the years, creating many social, economic, and political woes for the people of Palestine, sometimes leading to violent backlash. The Al-Aqsa Intifada was an example of a violent backlash.

The proverbial straw that broke the camel's back came on September 28th, 2000 when Ariel Sharon visited the Temple Mount, a holy site for both Jews and Muslims. The Palestinians' outrage was hardly due to Sharon's religious affiliation. Rather, it was because the visit asserted, once again, Israeli claims to occupied Palestinian lands, this time in the form of a claim to a Holy site by Israel's leader. All in all, the visit acted as a catalyst for a reaction to 33 years of occupation. With peace negotiations seemingly being not much more than political rhetoric and examples of hypocrisy, Palestinians from all walks of life engaged in their second uprising in less than two decades. The following will analyze how mainstream U.S. media portrayed the uprising, providing historical evidence which proves inaccuracy and bias were widespread in the coverage of Al-Aqsa. Under analysis are the United States' three biggest and most widely circulated newspapers: *USA Today*, *NY Times*, and the *LA Times*.

Sharon's Visit

The first major newspaper to report on Sharon's politically sensitive visit was the *LA Times*. On September 29th the headline read "Sharon's Temple Mount Foray Highlights Bitter Issue; Mideast: Visit by right-wing Israeli politicians sparks rioting. Dozens of troops, Palestinians are hurt"¹. The title of the article alone seems to not only prioritize the harm done to Israeli troops, but in fact also omits the fact that Palestinians were actually killed during the event. While the *LA Times* chose to neglect important details regarding the outbreak, the Israeli human rights group B'Tselem provided detailed facts and figures regarding the day's events. The organization's widely circulated and easily accessed findings showed that on September 29th, five non-combatant Palestinian residents of Jerusalem were killed by Israeli forces. They even went as far to say who the victims were: Bilal 'Ali Khalil 'Afaneh, 25, Yihya Muhammad Hassan Faraj, 35, Nizar Ibrahim a-Shweiqi, 18, Haitham 'Umran 'Awaida a-Skafi, 45, and Osama Muhammad Adam Jadeh, 22². Furthermore, the *LA Times* article chose to concentrate on Israeli celebrations of Sharon's visit rather than Palestinians' displeasure. The article concluded that that "In the waiting crowd below

¹ Tracy Wilkison, "Sharon's Temple Mount Foray Highlights Bitter Issue; Mideast: Visit by right-wing Israeli politicians sparks rioting. Dozens of troops, Palestinians are hurt." *LA Time*, September 29, 2000, World News Section.

² Statistics, "Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces in the Occupied Territories" B'Tselem, http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties_Data.asp?Category=1.

Temple Mount, Jews who came to support Sharon chanted: ‘This is Jewish land! Get out!’ And some hailed Sharon: ‘King of Israel!’” Also omitted by the *LA Times* are Palestinian views and reactions to Sharon’s provocative visit. This omission combined with the inclusion of the celebrating Israelis portrays Sharon as a hero. Whether Sharon was or not is a matter of opinion. What is a fact and not an opinion, however, is the blatant bias presented here.

On October 4th, less than a week later, the *LA Times* continued to divert attention from the source of the violence, that being the illegal occupation, and once again used wording and arguments which laid blame on the Palestinians, drawing a picture of Al-Aqsa as a mere spontaneous occurrence. The headline of the front page of the *LA Times* on the 4th read “Palestinian Rioting: A Fury Born of Control; Mideast: Arafat's actions and his people's pent-up anger are both factors”. Instead of concentrating on the settlements, occupation, or Israeli expansion as major reasons for the uprising, the *LA Times* simply stated that it was Yasser Arafat’s obligation to control the Palestinian people. The *LA Times* even went as far as to act a venue for Israeli Foreign Minister, Shlomo Ben-Ami, to assert that the Palestinian uprising was unjustified and that it was up to Arafat to shut it down. No analysis was given to repressive Israeli policy which brought the uprising to the forefront. Rather, the *LA Times*’ final statements for the day were:

Palestinian and some Israeli analysts say that viewing the violence as the result of one man's machinations is simplistic and allows Israelis to dismiss or ignore the real anger and hatred that lie below the surface. That view doesn't take into consideration the complex ways Arafat plays Palestinian organizations against each other, rewarding some, punishing others, always to emerge with the most power.³

If the true source of the violence is to be ignored, as it unacceptably was in this article, and concentration was to be put on individual players which are involved in or responsible for the event, then the *LA Times* would still be guilty of, if nothing else, giving unequal coverage and analysis to the meddling of Ariel Sharon at the time. All emphasis was on Arafat. Sharon, whose visit ignited the Al-Aqsa Intifada, not only escaped condemnation, but also

³ Tracy Wilkison, Palestinian Rioting: A Fury Born of Control; Mideast: Arafat's actions and his people's pent-up anger are both factors.” *LA Times*, October 4th, 2000, World News Section.

received much less press coverage for his actions and capabilities to bring the violence to an end. A fair assessment of all major political players' contribution to the Second Intifada would have seriously taken into consideration the expansion of settlements under Sharon's guidance as Minister of Housing Construction for 1990-1992 as well as Minister of National Infrastructure from 1996-1998.⁴ After all, the settlements were a focal point of Palestinian unrest, and under Sharon's guidance and initiative the illegal settlements' population grew from 227,500 to 258,400 from 1990-1992 and from 332,500 to 350,267 from 1996-1998⁵. Of course, such relevant facts were fully disregarded in the American coverage of the uprising.

Coverage of the Hostilities

During the Al-Aqsa Intifada American newspapers often provided details regarding casualties in what would be, at best, considered biased against Palestinians. While the statistics regarding the number of people dead were often flawed, what was even more flawed was the explanation given regarding the deaths, easily leading to a shift of blame towards the occupied people of Palestine. For example, on October 2nd, the front page of USA Today had a story titled "29 Slain During Middle East Clashes". Had the coverage ended there, USA Today would have not been guilty of any inaccuracies. However, the article went on to say "In Nablus, three Palestinians were killed when the Israeli army deployed helicopter gunships and moved tanks into position after Palestinian security forces attacked a small Israeli outpost in the center of the city."⁶ The wording of this article clearly skews the action-reaction relationship in the conflict. Even if USA Today is given the benefit of the doubt in the sense that they are correct in stating that the Palestinians were the first to engage in hostilities in this incident, the newspaper still fails to state that the Palestinian violence was a whole is in reaction to Israeli foreign policy in regards to Palestine. Their

⁴ "Israel: Security vs. peace." *Commonweal* 123, no. 14 (1996): 5.

⁵ May - June 2007 Settlement Report, "Israeli Settler Population 1972-2006" Foundation for Middle East Peace,
http://www.fmep.org/settlement_info/stats_data/settler_populations/Israeli_settler_population_in_occupied_territories.html.

⁶Va Mcneal, "29 Slain During Mid East Clashes" *USA Today*, October 2nd, 2000, News Section.

violence was a reaction to decades of occupation, and more recently, a tasteless visit of conquest by Sharon. However, USA Today's wording portrays Israeli killings as a legitimate act of self defense in reaction to unjustified and spontaneous Palestinian aggression. With any conflict which witnesses more than one side being violent, it is crucial to distinguish between who is acting and who is reacting. Such a distinction plays an important role in determining who takes majority of the blame in a confrontation. Logically, reactions are more justifiable, if proportionate, than the initial action. Thus, it is easy to see why USA Today's perhaps seemingly minor errors in wording details is of rather grave importance in the larger picture of American's perception of the conflict.

The article goes on to display similar bias when it says "In the Gaza Strip, where a 12-year-old was shot to death Saturday, three more people died after Palestinian police opened fire with automatic weapons and Israeli security forces responded with anti-tank missiles." Once again, the paper is asserting that Palestinians were first to ignite tensions and thus they are responsible for the 12 year olds' fate. Israel, on the other hand, according to the news paper, was simply and justifiably reacting to Palestinian hostilities. Moreover, honest coverage would highlight the background information leading to the hostilities, such as provocation by the Israeli leader or Israel's treatment of Palestinians over the past decades as a whole. Neutral coverage would simply state that in a gun battle, a 12 year old was shot. Unfair and bias coverage, as exemplified by USA Today in this article, disorients the action-reaction roles of the players involved and attempts to justify unjust killings by painting it to be a legitimate act of self-defense and an unfortunate occurrence due to a reasonable reaction. A closer look at the articles wording and knowledge of even the most basic background of the conflict proves otherwise.

One day later, on October 3rd, seven Palestinians, three of whom were 18, 15, and 12 years old, were killed by Israeli forces⁷. On this day, USA Today did not report on the new killings of these Palestinians at all which is of concern. Rather, USA Today's article was about how non-fatal clashes had taken place within Israel between Israeli civilians and

⁷ Statistics, "Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces in the Occupied Territories" B'Tselem, http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties_Data.asp?Category=1

police⁸. Such omission of an important issue is prejudice and furthers bias. Had information been published on Israeli killings of children, American public opinion would surely be affected. Prejudice via omission is still prejudice.

USA Today's other article for the 3rd titled "Who'll quell Mideast Riots" went as far as to say that Palestinians "provided the fuel" for the conflict⁹. But it was the concluding remarks of this article which were most factually inaccurate. At the end of the article it was written "The Arafat-led Palestinians could lose their best chance ever for a generous settlement." The "generous settlement" refers to the Oslo Accords of 1993. Perhaps the first indicator that USA Today was wrong in celebrating the Accord was that after seven years the Accord had still not been implemented. Furthermore, the statement is written in a way as to portray Israel as a benevolent and generous nation which is giving Palestinians a handout out of kindness. This is incorrect on two fronts. First, whatever was said would be given back the Palestinians was at one point illegally taken from them by Israel, such as the land where the settlements were built. Secondly, Israel never ended up giving anything to Palestine anyway. Finally, USA Today neglected, even after seven years, that even if the Oslo plans and promises were delivered, they were far from being a generous gift. The Oslo Peace Accords, at best, promised that Israel would return to Palestine only ninety percent of the land that it had occupied, maintaining military outposts and settlements through out Palestine¹⁰. This is not generous. If one has 100 dollars and someone steals it and gives back 90 dollars decades later, it would be foolish to call it a Samaritan act. Furthermore, 90% is not freedom. 90% is not sovereignty. Prisoners may have 90% of the area in a prison but the prison keepers who have the other 10% have all the power and control. Most importantly, it must be remembered that regardless of all of this, nothing was given back to the Palestinians by the year 2000. In fact, more was taken from them when regarding the figures already given regarding settler growth and expansion. Regardless of all this, USA Today portrays Israel as a compassionate nation in this matter.

⁸Va Mclean, "Widening unrest crosses the Israeli border 'Great damage' to hopes for deal as death toll rises" *USA Today*, October 3rd, 2000, News Section.

⁹ Va Mclean, "Who'll Quell Mideast Riots?" *USA Today*, October 3rd, 2000, News Section.

¹⁰ Ilene R. Prusher, "What the Oslo deal left out hinders Middle East peace process." *Christian Science Monitor* 89, no. 74 (1997): 1.

The New York Times, while more discreet, did not shy away from painting Palestinians as the aggressors either. On the 16th of October it printed an article titled “Whose Holy Land? Gaza; Palestinian Militias: Motley but Armed”. The article begins by asserting that “Palestinian militia known as the Tanzim, increasingly visible in street demonstrations and gun battles, will perhaps determine whether the battles with Israel continue or come to a halt.”¹¹ By claiming that the Palestinian fighters would “determine whether the battles with Israel continue or come to a halt” the article hinted at the idea that the continuation of the conflict was the decision made by the Palestinians. Therefore, through this line of rhetoric, Palestinians were responsible for the fighting which was occurring. The NY Times fails, like the other papers, to take into account how a change in Israeli policy regarding the occupation would might have brought the violence to an end. The article also happened to select to interview a Palestinian who was extreme in his views instead of a moderate. The interviewee, Yasid Abu Abed, was quoted saying “The only thing I am getting ready is my coffin”, “When I saw the Israeli helicopters attack our headquarters I felt proud”, and “I will strap explosives on my body and blow myself up to attack the Israelis if it is required”. Such statements perpetuate the stereotype that Palestinians are extremists and terrorists who do not value life. Abed is not a significant Palestinian figure. He is not known, nor is he an authority figure or leader. He is just another militant from the Palestinian side who happens to fall into one extreme. Instead of choosing a moderate to interview, the NY Times chose Abed. This was not fair.

However, this is not to say that extremists do not exist within Palestine. They undoubtedly do. But they exist in Israel as well. The NY Times illustrated otherwise by only covering the actions of Palestinian extremists and fundamentalists in the form of suicide bombers but never published any articles on the same type of people on the Israeli side; that being the heavily armed and ideological settlers. On October 27th the NY Times ran an

¹¹ Chris Hedges, “Whose Holly Land? Gaza; Palestinian Militias: Motley but Armed” *New York Times*, October 26th, 2000, World Section.

article titled “Suicide Attack in Gaza Strip Increases Tension in Mideast”¹². From the beginning one can detect the ostracizing nature of the article. What is of great irony is that this uneven-handed observation of a suicide bombing actually did not harm anyone except the suicide bomber, as no others were injured nor killed in the incident. The legitimate reasoning and just motivation of running such an article was thus hard to see. The article never analyzed what reasons a 24 year-old would have for taking his life. It does not analyze the underlining suffering and oppression that would force a human being to commit such an act. Simply put, it shows this self-harming incident as an event harmful to others which is factually inaccurate. Instead of illustrating the incident as an act of desperation or as a signal that there were some obvious social ills driving individuals to commit such actions, the NY Times portrays the incident as one of pure madness and hatred, further strengthening anti-Palestinian sentiments with its audience. The least that could have been done to make such an analysis more even-handed was covering the crimes against humanity committed by settlers during the Al-Aqsa Intifada which was never done by the American media source under analysis. Palestinian victims of Israeli extremist acts remained unnamed, unheard of, and unknown. For example, during the rare yet highly publicized suicide bombing following the first month after the breakout of the Second Intifada, the major American media sources at hand never mentioned that, for example, Mustafa Mahmoud Mussa 'Alian, a resident of Aksar Refugee Camp, was stoned to death by Israeli settlers on October 14th, 2000 while working as a taxi driver¹³. No act of Israeli extremism made it through the filter of mainstream American newspapers, but Palestinian ones consistently made the front page. There was asymmetry in reporting. It was an asymmetry which was unacceptable and unjust.

What also brought the credibility of the article into question was its exceptional downplay of the Israeli settlements which were a major cause of the conflict. The article

¹² Deborah Sontag, “Suicide Attack in Gaza Strip Increases Tension in Mideast” *New York Times*, October 27th, 2000, World Section.

¹³ Statistics, “Palestinians killed by Israeli Civilians in the Occupied Territories” B’Tselem, http://www.btselem.org/english/statistics/Casualties_Data.asp?Category=3

stated that there were “200,000 or so Israeli settlers in the West Bank and Gaza”. However, internationally studied, accepted and neutral sources put the actual number of settlers in 2000 at 371,904¹⁴, almost double the figures documented by the NY Times. Such factual inaccuracies are unacceptable coming from such a powerful, widely circulated and trusted source of information.

Similarly, USA Today embarked on the same path. On October 18th, when it published

“As [Ahmed Yassin] spoke, hundreds of Palestinian police and youths, shouting "Revenge, revenge" and "Children of the Jews, our bullets will find you," carried the flag-draped body of a Palestinian policeman through Gaza's streets.”¹⁵

While it is undeniable that such occurrences did take place, USA Today did not accurately reflect that such extremism existed in both camps. For example, racist and supremacist Israeli settler movements such as Gush Emunim maintained a consistent campaign of spreading racial hate towards Palestinians during the Al-Aqsa Intifada, claiming that all Palestinians must be purged from all of the land, making room for the “chosen people”¹⁶. Gush Emunim openly claimed that Palestinians must be disposed of from the land of the chosen people at any cost, which had a disturbingly similar tone to that of the Nazi movement. However, during the month long period after the uprising started, the three largest American newspapers put heavy emphasis on Palestinian extremism while never once mentioning the Gush Emunim movement and its practices in their publications.

Blaming the PLO

Article called “Unrest part of PLO scheme” published on October 26th in USA Today displayed its most blatant favoritism towards Israel. An exert reads:

“Ariel Sharon's visit was used as a pretext for premeditated violence, in a long-established Palestinian strategy to control Jerusalem and further delegitimize Israel. In recent months, Israeli intelligence warned of evidence of preparation in the Palestinian authority for a major

¹⁴May - June 2007 Settlement Report, “Israeli Settler Population 1972-2006” Foundation for Middle East Peace, http://www.fmep.org/settlement_info/stats_data/settler_populations/Israeli_settler_population_in_occupied_territories.html.

¹⁵ Jack Kelly, “Hammas Leader Refuses to Accept Cease-Fire Agreement” *USA Today*, October 18, 2000, News Section.

¹⁶ Zeev Sternhell, "Blood and Soil." *Index on Censorship* 33, no. 4 (2004): 178.

confrontation. Indeed, the PLO's No.2, Nabil Shaath, had said that as long as Israel continued to concede, there would be quiet, but "as soon as they say no" over Jerusalem, the heavily armed Palestinians would resume their uprising."

Factual inaccuracies were abundant in this article. Firstly, "premeditated violence" was unlikely to have taken place due to the organization of the Palestinian people. The people of Palestine were not politically homogenous and thus a theory of premeditated uprising failed to address how people from different political standpoints, religions, sexes, and ages all rallied behind the Al-Aqsa Intifada throughout occupied Palestine. Therefore, the logical explanation for the mass uprising must be that years of oppression brought the Palestinian people to a boiling point as was the case in the first Intifada in 1987. Furthermore, as it was learned during the Oslo Peace Accords, Yasser Arafat did not have the great control over the Palestinian people which America and Israel said he did because during the Oslo Accords alone many of his own people protested against his cooperation with America and Israel. Thus, given the decades of harsh oppression that all Palestinians faced under occupation, mass and largely independent mobilization after a major provocation is not at all infeasible. USA Today, however, described the situation as one which was planned by the PLO in advance and one in which the PLO had the power to control. USA Today did not address how the end of oppressive Israeli practices as well as provocative political conquests by Israeli leaders may very well have done away with all major violence.

The final part of the article made yet another misleading claim, asserting that Palestinians are heavily armed. It is common knowledge that most Palestinians involved in the uprising turned to stones and other easily found objects as weapons. Molotov cocktails were sometimes used. Few had AK-47s as well as the highly inaccurate and ineffective homemade rockets. Conversely, the article failed to mention to what degree Israel was armed. Ironically enough, Israel was the only nuclear power in the region. According to nuclear-whistler blower Mordechai Vanunu, at the time Israel possessed "over 200" nuclear bombs in 1986¹⁷. Furthermore, the American-armed Israeli army was one of the most powerful armies in the world. With an average \$3 billion¹⁸ allowance from the US to spend on arms, the Israeli military was easily the strongest military power in the Middle East

¹⁷ Neil Sammonds, "Nuclear secrets." *Middle East* (2002): 22.

¹⁸ Mark Thomas, "Instead of dropping the bombs themselves, the US military should get Interflora to deliver them." *New Statesman* 130, no. 4562 (2001): 17.

during the Al-Aqsa Intifada. In reality, the rock throwing Palestinians were confronting a regional superpower. Relative to Israel, the Palestinian's arsenal was nothing. None of this was highlighted or considered by the newspaper.

The same article goes onto say

“The PLO leader expected that whichever way Israel reacted, he'd win. Either Israel would reassert its claim to Jerusalem and the PLO would start an uprising claiming Israel as aggressor, or Israel would let the challenge stand and let the PLO establish its de facto control over Jerusalem.”

The wording in the article is also interesting in that it writes “claiming Israel as aggressor”. Many would in fact have argued that occupation was aggression, and thus no “claims” needed to be made about whether or not Israeli was being an aggressor. The “claim” was rather a fact. The wording brought Israeli aggression out of the spotlight and into doubt. Conversely, it turned the Palestinians into the aggressors. Therefore, the wording is not only unjust and unreasonable, but also misleading. Furthermore, the article was written in a way which made the uninformed reader believe that both Israel and Palestine had equal claims to Jerusalem when in fact that land was taken by Israel in 1967 through its illegal expansion and occupation. Therefore, in fact, a “de facto” control of Jerusalem by Palestinians was not evenhanded enough. It can rationally be argued that Palestine deserved to have the land that Israel had taken away from it returned and not merely have to have de facto control over it. The way that this article was written though painted Jerusalem as an “up-for-debate” issue, with both Israel and Palestine having equally legitimate claim to it. Finally, it is important to point out that in the year 2000 and throughout the whole conflict Israel maintained control over the area in question here.

The next day, on October 4th, the one sided commentary of USA Today continued. This was in an article titled “Israeli Peace Steps on Equality”. It indiscreetly hinted that the PLO was an, anti-Semitic organization, rife with a culture of religious intolerance. It was written

“Years ago, Israel gave religious custody of the mosques built on the Temple Mount to the Muslim Waqf, the organization that administers Islamic property, displaying both respect and Israel's willingness to share. In tragic contrast, Palestine Liberation Organization leader Yasser Arafat's response to yet further compromises offered by Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Barak is that Israel have no control at all.

By their callous denigration of the Jewish religion, the Waqf's behavior is quite of a piece with bigotry in declarations by Arafat and other Palestinian officials that the Temple Mount and Western Wall, what remains of the Temple, are not Jewish holy sites at all and should therefore not be shared.”¹⁹

The article once again builds-up Israel's reputation, classifying it as a kind and giving nation. Quickly thereafter, it juxtaposed Israel with the seemingly intolerant and ethnocentric PLO. This was done by the newspaper unfairly; attempting to mix politics with religion, concurring that a policy against Israel is a policy against Judaism. However, the PLO's policy were not opposed to Judaism but rather opposed to Zionist expansion and domination. Before the Six Day War of 1967, the Temple Mount was under Palestinian control as it fell into their land. After the occupation, however, Israel annexed this land too. The USA Today article speaks of control and discrimination which is quite ironic as in the year 2000 Israel controlled who could or could not enter the area, more often than not barring Palestinians for 'security reasons'. Furthermore, as far as respect for the holly sites went, USA Today failed to mention that four short years back, in 1996, Israel, against both Muslim and Christian protest, dug a tunnel under the area to promote Israel's tourism industry²⁰. This was, of course, met with outrage from people of many faiths as well as the faithless who respected others' religions.

On October 25th, almost a month in to the Al-Aqsa Intifada, USA Today went on to critique Palestinian leadership and Palestinian radio for spreading propaganda and thus fueling conflict. The article stated:

“Despite Israeli demands that it stop inciting the public, the Voice of Palestine radio, controlled by Yasser Arafat's Palestinian Authority, is delivering a daily diet of news, commentary and propaganda aimed at rallying the Palestinian masses into a confrontation with Israel.”²¹

The wording of this political article was very uneven-handed and was subject to scrutiny for the sake of fairness. In the first paragraph of the article above, it was said that the radio station was spreading “propaganda” and “calling the masses into confrontation with Israel”

¹⁹ Va Mclean, “Israeli Peace Steps on Equality” *USA Today*, October 4th, 2000, News Section.

²⁰ Nomi Morris and Eric Silver, "The tunnel that started the battle" *Maclean's* 109, no. 41 (1996): 32.

²¹ Va Mclean, “Palestinian radio: All the news that fits the cause Israel says the broadcasts are nothing but lies and propaganda. Listeners say the station is the only information source they can trust.” *USA Today*, October 25th, 2000, News Section.

in a way which demonized the Palestinian uprising. “Propaganda”, in this case, was a loaded word. While it is logical to assume that Voice of Palestine appealed to the Palestinian people to stand and fight for their rights against an illegal occupation, that is not to say that it was feeding the population harmful information which is what the wording in this USA Today article hinted at. Furthermore, the word “confrontation” is attempting to achieve the same demonizing effect. USA Today could have just as easily stated, for example, “calling the masses to fight against the occupation” which is a perfectly accurate statement. There is nothing wrong with such a statement. In fact, those who stand for justice encourage the distribution of such broadcasts. Historically, it has been the case that the weak in asymmetrical battles for freedom have appealed to the masses for support and unity. Such broadcasts have asked the people to immediately stand against the oppressor. For example, via the African National Congress’s radio station during apartheid, Walter Sisulu, a hero of the struggle, announced over the airwaves

“In the face of violence, men struggling for freedom have had to meet violence with violence. How can it be otherwise in South Africa? Changes must come. Changes for the better, but not without sacrifice. Your sacrifice. My sacrifice. We face tremendous odds. We know that. But our unity, our determination, our sacrifice, our organization are our weapons. We must succeed! We will succeed!”²²

Undoubtedly, the apartheid government of Charles Swartz at the time condemned such broadcasts. The U.S. which at the time maintained that the ANC was a terrorist organization at that time called such broadcasts propaganda and wrong. However, there are few who can argue against the acceptable and just nature of such calls to actions like the one made by Sisulu as doing so would be an acceptance of apartheid. The case of Voice of Palestine is the same. In both cases the less powerful and dominated group was fighting against an unjust authority. Rationality, political awareness and an admiration for justice and equality celebrate such broadcasts. However, those from the opposing side quickly tried to categorize such announcements as counterproductive, unjust, and as propaganda. This is what USA Today did on October 24th.

²² Broadcast on ANC Radio by W. M. Sisulu, “26 June 1963” African National Congress, <http://www.anc.org.za/ancdocs/history/ug/rf630626.html>.

Furthermore, while USA Today routinely criticized Palestinians' actions and institutions on the outset of the Al-Aqsa Intifada, it at no point called into question the policies of Israeli institutions and policies which perpetuated violence. For example, the Israeli government armed its settlers with military machines guns²³. There have been countless incidents of settler attacks on Palestinians. Arming settlers is thus promoting violence and B'Tselem has a detailed history to show how, when, and who the armed settlers have killed²⁴. However, the major American media sources do not condemn nor inquire into such matters, once again showing bias. Furthermore, USA Today failed to question Israeli radio stations. The primary source of violence from the Israeli camp was the Israeli Defense Source. The IDF had its own nationwide radio station which broadcasted nationally around the clock²⁵. USA Today, at no point, brought into question the announcements made by the IDF which attempted to justify Israeli military action.

The American media also outright omitted important events which took place during the Intifada which showed Israel in an unfavorable way others in the world showed both sides of the conflict. The most famous example of such an event was the Israeli military's killing of the 12 year-old Palestinian civilian, Muhammad al-Dura, on September 30th, 2000. Muhammad will go down in history as did the man who stood in front of the tank in Tiananmen Square. Muhammad al-Dura quickly became an international figure reflecting upon the Al-Aqsa Intifada when the French television station France 2 captured and aired footage of the 12 year-old trying to find shelter in his father's arms, hiding behind a cement block. Both he and his father, both unarmed and not participating in hostilities, were captured on film being shot to death by an Israeli sniper²⁶. The international media immediately provided information on the incident. Newspapers in Asia, Europe, and Africa printed frames from the incident in their most widely circulated newspapers upon the incident's occurrence²⁷. Understandably, the typical reaction to Muhammad's fate was one

²³ Samah Jabr and Betsy Mayfield, "On Living and Letting Live." *Washington Report on Middle East Affairs* 19, no. 9 (2000): 9.

²⁴ Statistics, "Palestinians killed by Israeli Civilians in the Occupied Territories" B'Tselem, http://www.btselem.org/english/statistics/Casualties_Data.asp?Category=3

²⁵ Joel Simon, "Should a Broadcast Station Be a Military Target?" *Columbia Journalism Review* 39, no. 5 (2001): 68.

²⁶ Nidra Poller, "Myth, Fact, and the al-Dura Affair." *Commentary* 120, no. 2 (2005): 30.

²⁷ "Shooting Error" *New Republic* 226, no. 12/13 (2002): 11.

of condemnation of the Israeli “error”. However, an extensive search has shown that only the smallest of America’s three largest newspapers ever printed the boy’s name in their paper; the LA Times. Even here, the LA Times did not even provide a photograph of the incident which was the international standard. It also did not print the article until 3 days after it happened, unlike other international newspapers, and when it did it print the article it printed it tucked away on page 16 with no mention on the front page, clearly not giving it much attention. Even in this sole incident that Muhammed was mentioned within the big three newspapers, the LA Times went onto to provide the Israeli army’s attempted justification for the seemingly blatantly unjustified killing publishing that “Maj. Gen. Yom-tov Samia, head of military forces in the southern region that includes Gaza, told Israeli radio... he was sure Rami and his father, Jamal, ‘were there not just by accident.’”²⁸ If the Israeli army was thus provided with a wide-reaching mechanism to attempt to sway the American public, it was only fair to provide testimonies from eye witnesses, for example from the camera man who shot the footage, Talal Abu Rahma, reflecting upon a view divergent from the Israeli army’s. Conveniently, this was not done.

Conclusion

In the month following the outbreak of the Al-Aqsa uprising, the three biggest and most powerful American newspapers clearly showed bias in favor of the Israeli position. Palestinians were disadvantaged by the American in a few different ways. At times the information given about them was inaccurate. Other times the media contrasted Palestinian action with the great reflections given to Israel. Sometimes information which would have been beneficial to the image of the Palestinian side was completely disregarded. It was also not rare to find factual inaccuracies or skewed presentations of the Palestinian side. The uneven nature of the coverage and its content in the American media was disturbing. The most powerful country in the world, where public opinion had the potential of determining other nations’ foreign policy due to an unmatched influence and paternalistic power, was often given inaccurate and bias information. Furthermore, given the wide circulation and built-up credibility of the three newspapers, it was especially dangerous that the information

²⁸Tracy Wilkison, “Father-Son Image Shocks, Sickens Both Sides” *USA Today*, October, 2nd, 2000, News Section.

was sometimes inaccurate because the readers trust in these primary sources made the reporting go largely unquestioned, allowing bias to go unnoticed. With Annapolis underway, it would be detrimental to the peace movement to see same mistakes in reporting repeated again.

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