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How U.S. Media Hide Truths About the Gaza War



Photograph by Nathaniel St. Clair

A few days before the end of 2024, the independent magazine +972 reported that “Israeli army forces stormed the Kamal Adwan Hospital compound in Beit Lahiya, culminating a nearly week-long siege of the last functioning hospital in northern Gaza.” While fire spread through the hospital, its staff issued a statement saying that “surgical departments, laboratory, maintenance, and emergency units have been completely burned,” and patients were “at risk of dying at any moment.”

The magazine explained that “the assault on medical facilities in Beit Lahiya is the latest escalation in Israel’s brutal campaign of ethnic cleansing in northern Gaza, which over the last three months forcibly displaced the vast majority of Palestinians living in the area.” The journalism from +972 — in sharp contrast to the dominant coverage of the Gaza war from

U.S. media — has provided clarity about real-time events, putting them in overall context rather than episodic snippets.

+972 *Magazine* is the work of Palestinian and Israeli journalists who describe their core values as “a commitment to equity, justice, and freedom of information” — which necessarily means “accurate and fair journalism that spotlights the people and communities working to oppose occupation and apartheid.” But the operative values of mainstream U.S. news outlets have been very different.

Key aspects of how the U.S. establishment has narrated the “war on terror” for more than two decades were standard in American media and politics from the beginning of the Gaza war in October 2023. For instance:

+ Routine discourse avoided voices condemning the U.S. government for its role in the slaughter of civilians.

+ The U.S. ally usually eluded accountability for its high-tech atrocities committed from the air.

+ Civilian deaths in Gaza were habitually portrayed as unintended.

+ Claims that Israel was aiming to minimize civilian casualties were normally taken at face value.

+ Media coverage and political rhetoric stayed away from acknowledging that Israel’s actions might fit into such categories as “mass murder” or “terrorism.”

+ Overall, news media and U.S. government officials emitted a mindset that Israeli lives really mattered a lot more than Palestinian lives.

The Gaza war has received a vast amount of U.S. media attention, but how much it actually communicated about the human realities was a whole other matter. The belief or unconscious notion that news media were conveying war’s realities ended up obscuring those realities all the more. And journalism’s inherent limitations were compounded by media biases.

During the first five months of the war, the *New York Times*, *Wall Street Journal*, and *Washington Post* applied the word “brutal” or its variants far more often to Palestinians (77 percent) than to Israelis (23 percent). The findings, in a study by Fairness and Accuracy In Reporting (FAIR), pointed to an imbalance that occurred “even though Israeli violence was responsible for more than 20 times as much loss of life.” News articles and opinion pieces were remarkably in the same groove; “the lopsided rate at which ‘brutal’ was used in op-eds to characterize Palestinians over Israelis was exactly the same as the supposedly straight news stories.”

Despite exceptional coverage at times, what was most profoundly important about war in Gaza — what it was like to be terrorized, massacred, maimed and traumatized — remained almost entirely out of view. Gradually, surface accounts reaching the American public came to seem repetitious and normal. As death numbers kept rising and months went by, the Gaza war diminished as a news topic, while most talk shows seldom discussed it.

As with the slaughter via bombardment, the Israeli-U.S. alliance treated the increasing onset of starvation, dehydration, and fatal disease as a public-relations problem. Along the way, official pronouncements — and the policies they tried to justify — were deeply anchored in the unspoken premise that some lives really matter and some really don't.

The propaganda approach was foreshadowed on October 8, 2023, with Israel in shock from the atrocities that Hamas had committed the previous day. “This is Israel’s 9/11,” the Israeli ambassador to the United Nations told reporters in New York, and he repeated: “This is Israel’s 9/11.” Meanwhile, in a *PBS News Weekend* interview, Israel’s ambassador to the United States declared: “This is, as someone said, our 9/11.”

What was sinister about proclaiming “Israel’s 9/11” was what happened after America’s 9/11. Wearing the cloak of victim, the United States proceeded to use the horrible tragedy that occurred inside its borders as an open-ended reason to kill in the name of retaliation, self-protection, and, of course, the “war on terror.”

As Israel’s war on Gaza persisted, the explanations often echoed the post-9/11 rationales for the “war on terror” from the U.S. government: authorizing future crimes against humanity as necessary in the light of certain prior events. Reverberation was in the air from late 2001, when the Pentagon’s leader Donald Rumsfeld asserted that “responsibility for every single casualty in this war, whether they’re innocent Afghans or innocent Americans, rests at the feet of the al Qaeda and the Taliban.” After five weeks of massacring Palestinian people, Israel’s prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu said that “any civilian loss is a tragedy” — and quickly added that “the blame should be placed squarely on Hamas.”

The licenses to kill were self-justifying. And they had no expiration date.

This article is adapted from the afterword in the paperback edition of Norman Solomon’s latest book, [War Made Invisible: How America Hides the Human Toll of Its Military Machine](#) (The New Press) and was originally published by [MediaNorth](#).

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