

An Open Letter on U.S. Media Coverage of Palestine

From journalists, to journalists: Why reporting on Palestine has to change.

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Finding truth and holding the powerful to account are core principles of journalism.

Yet for decades, our news industry has abandoned those values in coverage of Israel and Palestine. We have failed our audiences with a narrative that obscures the most fundamental aspects of the story: Israel’s military occupation and its system of apartheid.

For the sake of our readers and viewers — and the truth — we have a duty to change course immediately and end this decades-long journalistic malpractice. The evidence of Israel’s systematic oppression of Palestinians is overwhelming and must no longer be sanitized.

In April, Human Rights Watch released [a 213-page report](#) that documented Israeli authorities committing “crimes against humanity of apartheid and persecution.” Leading Israeli human rights group B’tselem [characterized](#) the region as governed by a regime of ethnic supremacy.

These terms — apartheid, persecution, ethnic supremacy — are increasingly gaining institutional recognition after years of Palestinian advocacy, and we, as journalists, need to examine whether our coverage reflects that reality.

Take, for example, the language used in the recent coverage of East Jerusalem neighborhood Sheikh Jarrah. Media outlets often refer to forced displacement of Palestinians living there — [illegal under international law and potentially a war crime](#) — as “[evictions](#).”

This term misleadingly implies a real estate “dispute” between tenant and landlord, an inaccurate depiction of the state of affairs. The United Nations considers East Jerusalem [occupied Palestinian territory](#), meaning Israel’s territorial claims there are not recognized. More importantly, using the term ignores the [well-documented](#) aim of the Israeli government to establish and maintain ethnic dominance over Palestinians.

During the last few days of Ramadan, Israeli forces [violently attacked](#) worshippers at the Al Aqsa mosque compound with tear gas and rubber-tipped bullets. Journalists didn’t call this an “attack” or “assault” on Palestinians, but rather a “clash,” as if both sides shared equal

culpability and agency in the escalation.

When Israel attacked Gaza, media outlets framed it as a “conflict” between two equal entities, ignoring the total asymmetry in power. Under the [guise of objectivity](#), rockets fired at Israel — which caused significantly less damage than Israeli airstrikes — were covered just as much as Israel [attacking medical facilities](#) and [leveling entire residential buildings](#), clouding the nearly one-sided scale of violence and destruction.

The asymmetry in context does not just extend to the language we use; stories tend to [disproportionately amplify Israeli narratives](#) while suppressing Palestinian ones.

Too often, media outlets uncritically repeat Israeli military claims about its assault on Gaza without asking for evidence or proof, despite clear examples where Israeli officials [spread false information](#). Journalists reported the claim from Israeli forces that they had launched a ground invasion — [that was false](#).

The human toll caused by Israel’s bombardment is indisputable: Hundreds dead, [more than 65 of them children](#). While [statements made by Israeli officials](#) and their defenders justifying the killing of civilians went unchallenged, Palestinian civilians had their humanity interrogated: Journalists asked whether they [support violence](#) or [Hamas rockets](#).

Troubling still, reporting wanes considerably when Israel halts its airstrikes. Palestinians are ignored in so-called times of “peace” despite attacks and other hostile aspects of life under occupation continuing [after the ceasefire](#).

Though there have been exceptions that accurately reflect the plight of many Palestinians, they are few and far between.

As journalists, we are entrusted with a profoundly important mission in a free and democratic society, the power to inform the people and guide the national conversation, from the family dinner table to Capitol Hill.

We are calling on journalists to tell the full, contextualized truth without fear or favor, to recognize that obfuscating Israel’s oppression of Palestinians fails this industry’s own objectivity standards.

We have an obligation — a sacred one — to get the story right. Every time we fail to report the truth, we fail our audiences, our purpose and, ultimately, the Palestinian people.

All signatures are verified

If you’re a current or former journalist and would like to sign this letter, please fill out [this form](#).

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