

Racism Plagues Western Media Coverage

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Racism is “the belief that one ‘racial group’ is inferior to another and the practices of the dominant group to maintain the inferior position of the dominated group. Often defined as a combination of power, prejudice and discrimination.”

This is how the British Library defines racism on its Web site. The above definition hardly deviates from the essence of almost all definitions of the ominous concept. And, indeed, the concept is being fully utilized with Israel’s onslaught against the Palestinians, and the international community and media’s mild, if not accommodating response to the onslaught.

The capture of Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit is an act of self-defense. According to international law and the Geneva Conventions, he can be considered a prisoner of war, but not according to CNN, Fox News and the increasingly spineless BBC, which presents the soldier as a victim, who was “kidnapped” by Palestinian “militants” who are “affiliated” with the Hamas government.

By not challenging the Israeli narrative in any meaningful way, the uncritical media has become a tool in the hands of Israel’s war strategists and their eternal concoctions.

Consider this example. An Israeli military commander tells a BBC correspondent dispatched to the border area between Israel and Gaza, that Israel intends on opening the border for “as long as it takes” to offset the humanitarian crisis developing in Gaza. The Israeli Army representative in a barefaced lie declares that the border has always been open, despite the perpetual Palestinian threat on the state of Israel. The BBC correspondent thanks him and signs off.

Is it possible that the BBC is unaware of the fact that Gaza has been under a strict military siege since Hamas’ democratic advent to power through the January 2006 elections? Could it be that the Western media has missed the dozens of shocking reports that have warned that the Israeli siege — which began months before the capture of Shalit — was soon to create chaos and panic among the already malnourished Palestinians in Gaza? Did they all miss statements by top Israeli officials vowing to carry on with the siege until the outset of Hamas?

Some reporters misrepresent facts out of ignorance, not by design. But if that indeed was the case, then how can one excuse the fact that the same media that coined the term “kidnapping” to describe the action of the Palestinian fighters who captured Shalit refused to use the same association to describe the kidnapping of most of the elected Palestinian Cabinet, mostly academics with no connection to any militant wing?

Israel’s military spokesman insisted that they are “all terrorists” and Israel, “like any

democratic” country has the right to protect itself against terrorists. If that was true, why did Israel refrain from kidnapping them until Palestinian fighters embarrassed the Israeli Army and captured their first prisoner of war in a long time? Is “rounding up” Palestinian ministers and scores of legislators the same as having a soldier captured in what has been for long a one-sided Israeli war?

If you are an avid viewer of Fox News or a reader of the New York Times, then Israel is yet to exceed its legitimate legal boundaries: that of a democracy opting to defend its citizens. But only racism can lead to such rationale. Only a racist media portrays the capture of a soldier whose army units have besieged Gazans for years, denying them food and medicine, as a violation of all that is holy. Only a racist media presents the kidnapping of 9,000 Palestinians, now in Israeli jails, as a just outcome of Israel’s routine arrests of Palestinian terrorists or potential terrorists. Only racism can play down the Israeli destruction of Gaza’s infrastructure, which is justified without question, for such actions are necessary to impede the militants’ efforts.

And yet, Israel is praised for its “generous” act of allowing some food to be transferred to Gazans, who ironically have gone hungry because of the Israeli-spearheaded international campaign to punish Palestinians for electing Hamas.

Only racism can completely remove from the current discourse the murder of dozens of Palestinian civilians at the hands of the Israeli Army (90 civilians in seven weeks) as the reason that led to the Palestinian raid on the Israeli Army post and the capture of Shalit, and instead depict the current escalation as if it was entirely the work of the Palestinians, with Israel’s slate still clean.

Indeed, Israel’s slate will continue to be clean as long as racism and inequality are the concepts according to which this conflict is explained. Israel has the right to do all the above actions without hesitation because Israel is not Palestine, and the lives and well being of the residents of Israel, at least some of them, cannot be equated with Palestinians. Turn the tables for a moment and you’ll understand how repellent such racism is.

Inequality has always been at the heart of this conflict, the late professor Edward Said used to say. Racism is at the heart of inequality, I must add. The media can be ignorant, biased and self-serving, indeed, but it can also be utterly racist.

Ramzy Baroud’s latest book: “The Second Palestinian Intifada: A Chronology of a People’s Struggle” (Pluto Press, London) is now available at Amazon.com.

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