



International Press Institute

PATRIOTISM, PRESSURE and PRESS FREEDOM: HOW ISRAELI AND PALESTINIAN MEDIA COVER THE CONFLICT FROM INSIDE

IPI Mission to Israel, the West Bank & Gaza
February 12 –19, 2013

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Introduction – Why it Matters How Conflict is Covered

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the most protracted in history. It is complex, with historical, religious and geopolitical dimensions that affect regional and global politics, even as the conflict is itself complicated by international tensions and interests.

Conflict has been defined as an “an expressed struggle between at least two interdependent parties who *perceive* incompatible goals, scarce resources, and interference from the other party in achieving their goals {emphasis added}.”¹

On the other hand, political psychology professor Daniel Bar-Tal describes conflict resolution as “a political process through which the parties in conflict eliminate the *perceived* incompatibility between their goals and interests and establish a new situation of perceived compatibility {emphasis added}.”²

Thus definitions of conflict and conflict resolution deal directly with the *perception* of goals and interests. For this very reason, governments and political actors expend incredible resources and energy into “winning” control of the narrative (or narratives) of the conflict, which are defined in large part by the mainstream media. Both sides try to promote a negative image of the enemy and suppress information about their own wrongdoing. They recognize that public opinion matters in a war, and the news media help shape it.

Thus news media also have a strong role to play in the resolution of conflict.

That is not to suggest that all news media should try to build peace, or try to form a consensus about the “right” way to perceive events and ideas. Rather, journalists should simply be allowed to do their jobs well. By presenting news that is accurate and fair, and providing space for a range of opinions, news media allow members of the public to assess reality and make informed decisions.

But reality interferes with this ideal, and media do not operate in a vacuum. Economic interests and external pressures, and including restrictions on journalist rights, affect editorial decisions.

A delegation from the International Press Institute (IPI) travelled to Israel, the West Bank and Gaza for a weeklong research trip to speak with journalists about the current status of conflict reporting, and find out why factors affect that coverage.

Media houses in Israel and the Palestinian Territories, like their counterparts all over the world, have to negotiate a number of challenges, starting with the need to make money. In different ways and to varying degrees, media are subjected to pressure from local authorities and face press freedom violations and attacks.

¹Hocker, Joyce and William Wilmot. *Interpersonal Conflict*. Boston, MA: McGraw Hill, 2005

²Bar-Tal, Daniel. „From Intractable Conflict Through Conflict Resolution to Reconciliation: Psychological Analysis.“ *Political Psychology*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2000. Pg. 354 -355.

All of these affect reporting. Political and economic pressures limit the time and space that media devote to covering voices from the other side of the conflict, and affect their ability to be critical of the authorities. Censorship and gag orders may suppress important news. Restrictions on freedom of movement and access weaken reporting and isolate journalists within their own “side”. The threat of imprisonment or attack for reporting on sensitive issues, criticizing officials or protecting official sources leads to a climate of self-censorship.

Policy makers in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza should promote press freedom values and protect journalist safety in accordance with their obligations under international law. Israelis and Palestinians have a right to accurate, fair news because ultimately it is communities on both sides that must make the tough decisions and painful symbolic and material sacrifices that will be necessary to end the conflict.

Mission Overview

A three-person delegation of the International Press Institute (IPI) spent a week, from Feb. 13 – Feb. 19 2013, interviewing over 50 journalists and media experts about press freedom conditions and their experiences covering the conflict.

Journalists were specifically asked how the media covered the most recent conflict in Gaza, which took place from Nov. 14 – Nov. 21, 2012. They were also asked about the work of their own media companies in covering that conflict, and what the successes and challenges were.

On the basis of those interviews, this report aims to describe the status of conflict coverage today, and whether it is perceived as getting better or worse (and in which ways). It asks what the characteristics of coverage by media in Israel and Palestine are. Moreover, this report will explore the factors that most affect that coverage. Lastly, the authors have made recommendations on how some of these issues should be addressed in line with international press freedom principles and journalistic standards.

The delegation included: IPI World Press Freedom Hero Daoud Kuttab, who runs the Community Media Network in Jordan; IPI Senior Press Freedom Adviser Naomi Hunt; and Norwegian journalist and Project Consultant Kjetil Haanes.



The IPI delegation in Gaza. Left to right: Kjetil Haanes, Naomi Hunt and Daoud Kuttab. Photo: Kjetil Haanes

The delegation visited Jerusalem, Ramallah, Bethlehem, Gaza and Tel Aviv in order to conduct interviews for this report.

The fact-finding mission and this report were made possible with funding from the Norwegian Foreign Ministry.

IPI is a global network of publishers, editors and leading journalists based in Vienna, Austria and dedicated to the defence and furtherance of press freedom around the world.

Operation Pillar of Defence & Attacks on the Media

Background

Operation Pillar of Defence was the name given by Israel to the operation that took place in the Gaza Strip in November 2012.

Tensions had been building between the Hamas authority in Gaza and Israel for some time, but the operation officially began with the Israel Defence Force's (IDF) assassination of Ahmed Javari, a Hamas military commander on Nov. 14. Over the following eight days, the IDF carried out dozens of drone and airstrikes against suspected Hamas targets in the Gaza Strip.

According to the IDF's blog, 1500 "terror sites" were targeted, including 30 senior members of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, 19 "high-level command centres", 980 underground rocket launchers, and other military targets³.

The number of casualties differed slightly according to reports, as did the number of civilian deaths. The Gaza Ministry of Health recorded 191 deaths, while the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) said that 158 people died, of whom 103 were civilians, including 30 children and 13 women.⁴

Militants in Gaza retaliated against the Israeli offensive by firing over 1450 rockets into Israel, of which 142 fell inside Gaza, according to a statement made by United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki Moon to the U.N. Security Council on Nov. 21, 2012⁵. In Israel, six people were killed, including two soldiers and four civilians, the OHCHR reported.⁶ Palestinian rockets were later discovered to have been responsible for several Palestinian casualties, according to a report by the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights.⁷

Attacks on media buildings

The conflict in Gaza was accompanied by a number of targeted attacks on Palestinian media buildings and media workers.

³"Operation Pillar of Defense Summary of Events." *Israel Defense Forces Blog*, Nov. 22, 2012. Accessed April 12, 2013. <http://www.idfblog.com/2012/11/22/operation-pillar-of-defense-summary-of-events/>.

⁴"Q&A: Israel-Gaza violence." *BBC News*, 22, 2012. Accessed April 12, 2013. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-20388298>

⁵"United Nations website. Secretary-General's remarks to the Security Council [as delivered] on Nov. 21, 2012." United Nations. Accessed April 12, 2013. <http://www.un.org/sg/statements/index.asp?nid=6452>

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷ Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights on the implementation of Human Rights Council resolutions S-9/1 and S-12/1. Organisation of the High Commission for Human Rights, March 6, 2013. Accessed April 12, 2013. http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A.HRC.22.35.Add.1_AV.pdf

Israel carried out air strikes against two buildings containing the studios and offices of local and international media on November 18, 2012.^{8, 9} Shortly after 2 a.m., four missiles hit the Showa and Housari building housing Al Quds television, which is affiliated with Islamic Jihad. Seven journalists were injured including cameraman Khader al-Zahhar, who lost his leg in the attack¹⁰.

Later in the morning, around 7 a.m., two missiles struck the Shorouk building housing Al Aqsa television, which is affiliated with Hamas. The building also houses the offices of Sky News, Al Arabiya, Dubai TV, Iran's Press TV, the Bethlehem-based Ma'an News Agency, ITN, Russia Today, Al Quds Voice radio, and a number of other news outlets. During the IPI delegation's February visit, the Al Aqsa studio remained in shreds and the windows were blown out. Staff showed IPI the hole where one missile had hit their transmission antenna on the roof and then penetrated through the studio ceiling, destroying their facility.

The IDF claimed that the media buildings contained " Hamas operational communication sites," but the U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights argued in March 2013 that without " further justification by the IDF as to how the targets contributed to military action and how the attacks offered a military advantage," they could represent attacks on both freedom of expression and international humanitarian law.



The Shorouk building (centre) houses an Al Aqsa television studio and the offices of several local and international media companies. Photo: Naomi Hunt

Managers at Al Aqsa television station strongly denied that their station was involved in distributing commands to militants, and instead said their station was involved in boosting morale. The IDF missile took out their studio along with their antenna, which they believe indicates that the target was not an "operational structure" but rather their broadcasts.

Al Aqsa staff said their satellite broadcasts are made from a separate building, and that only

ultra-high frequency (UHF) broadcasts – which can only be received in a narrow radius from the site, including a nearby Israeli prison – were affected by the strike. They therefore speculated that perhaps the IDF wanted to prevent transmissions from reaching Palestinian prisoners in Israel's Nafha prison.

⁸Hunt, Naomi. "IPI condemns Israeli shelling of media buildings in Gaza conflict." International Press Institute, Nov. 18, 2012. <http://www.freemedia.at/home/singleview/article/ipi-condemns-israeli-shelling-of-media-buildings-in-gaza-conflict.html>

⁹ Sherwood, Harriet. "Israeli air strikes hit media centres in Gaza City." The Guardian, Nov. 18, 2012. Accessed April 12, 2013. <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/nov/18/israeli-air-strikes-media-centres-gaza>

¹⁰Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. OHCHR, March 6, 2013. Accessed April 12, 2013. http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A.HRC.22.35.Add.1_AV.pdf

The day they were bombed, Al Aqsa had shown pictures of the victims of Israeli attacks, nearly causing a prison riot, they told IPI.

The Shorouk media building was struck again on Nov. 19, this time on the third floor, resulting in the death of an Islamic Jihad media officer.¹¹ Foreign media had been warned of that attack ahead of time and could stay clear of the building.¹²

Journalists killed

Three media workers were reportedly killed by the IDF on Nov. 20 as they were traveling in their cars.^{13, 14, 15} Al Aqsa TV journalists, cameramen Mahmoud Al-Kumi and Hussam Salama, were killed as they returned from filming at Shifa hospital in Gaza City, according to news reports and local journalists. During IPI's visit to Gaza and to Al Aqsa TV, journalists repeatedly confirmed that these two men were journalists whose work appeared in the media.

At the time, an Israeli Defence Forces spokesperson was quoted in media reports as saying that the men were linked to Hamas. International groups including IPI called on Israel to provide evidence that the victims were not journalists, but these were ignored.

In a letter sent to the Committee to Protect Journalists in January 2013¹⁶, Aaron Sagui, spokesperson of the Israeli Embassy in Washington, D.C., asked whether those working for a news outlet that engages in hate speech and incitement can properly be considered journalists, and gave examples in which members of terror organizations had disguised themselves as members of the media. However, he did not explain why the two Al-Aqsa cameramen had been targeted or why they were considered militants.

The U.N. High Commissioner for Human Rights said “[t]he IDF [...] did not provide information specifying that the two men were members of an armed group or that they were directly participating in the hostilities, raising serious doubts as to whether they had lost their protection as civilians.”¹⁷

¹¹*Ibid.*

¹²*Ibid.*

¹³ Hunt, Naomi. “Israel kills three journalists in Gaza as more media offices are damaged.” *International Press Institute*, Nov. 21, 2012.

<http://www.freemedia.at/home/singleview/article/israel-kills-three-journalists-in-gaza-as-more-media-offices-are-damaged.html?L=0&cHash=362ad6352c>

¹⁴ “Israeli airstrikes kill 3 Palestinian journalists.” *The Associated Press*, Nov. 20, 2012. Accessed April 12, 2013. <http://www.usatoday.com/story/news/world/2012/11/20/israeli-airstrikes-kill-palestinian-journalists/1718177/>

¹⁵ “Israeli air strikes kill three Palestinian journalists.” *Reuters*, Nov. 20, 2012. Accessed April 12, 2013. <http://www.reuters.com/article/2012/11/20/palestinians-israel-gaza-media-idUSL5E8MKF8X20121120>

¹⁶ Letter from Aaron Sagui, Spokesperson, Israeli Embassy, USA to CPJ Executive Director Joel Simon. *Committee to Protect Journalists*, Feb. 13, 2013. Accessed April 12, 2013.

http://www.cpj.org/blog/Israel_response_to_CPJ_January_2013.pdf

¹⁷ Report of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. *OHCHR*, March 6, 2013. Accessed April 12, 2013.

http://www.ohchr.org/Documents/HRBodies/HRCouncil/RegularSession/Session22/A.HRC.22.35.Add.1_AV.pdf

A third media worker, Mohammed Abu Eisha, who reportedly worked for Al Quds Educational Radio, was also killed on Nov. 20 when his car was hit in the town of Deir el-Balah. Reports – including from IPI –described Abu Eisha as a director of educational programs, on the basis of accounts from local sources and news reports. Later reports, including by Reporters Without Borders, said that Abu Eisha was working for the Al Quds Brigade at the time of his death and therefore cannot be considered a journalist.

Propaganda war

Israel and Hamas actively battled for control of the conflict narrative, sharing their own statistics, images and version of events across a variety of platforms.

Both sides stepped up their use of social media. The IDF and the Alqassam Brigades, Hamas' military wing, used Twitter and YouTube to brag about attacks and rally public support. The IDF additionally ran accounts on Tumblr, Instagram and Facebook, and kept a running blog. Indeed, TIME and several tech and gaming websites reported that the IDF blog had even introduced “gamification” features that rewarded frequent visitors and tweeters with points and virtual promotions.

The IDF dropped flyers warning Gaza residents to move out of certain neighbourhoods and stay away from Hamas operatives. BBC correspondent Paul Danahar tweeted that the “evacuation warning in [#Gaza](#) affects up to half the population and has come just a few hours before dark,” but said Hamas officials called leafleting a scare tactic and urged people to stay put.¹⁸

Website and social media hacking were also reported on both sides. For instance, the Palestinian News Network (PNN) told IPI that their website, which saw traffic quadruple during the conflict, was repeatedly taken down by hackers who were operating near Tel Aviv. The attack was so sophisticated that PNN had to bring in an external specialist from Jordan to fix it, they told IPI.

On the other side, while it appears that no Israeli media outlets were targeted, pro-Palestinian hackers reportedly took over the Facebook, Twitter and YouTube accounts of Silvan Shalom, a Likud party politician.¹⁹

The most drastic media hacks were carried out by the IDF, which took over the frequencies of Gaza-based outlets including Al Quds television, Al Quds radio and Al Aqsa television for to spread warning messages and propaganda.

According to journalists as Al Quds Voice radio, the attacks happened “at least tens of times,” and in fact the station wouldn't even know they had been taken over until listeners called in. The IDF would broadcast messages warning people to stay away from armed Palestinians and not to let terrorists in their homes.

¹⁸Mackey, Robert. “Blog: Nov. 20 Updates on the Gaza Conflict”. The Lede, The New York Times, published Nov. 20, 2012. <http://thelede.blogs.nytimes.com/2012/11/20/latest-updates-on-the-gaza-conflict-2/>

¹⁹*Ibid.*

The Lede blog on the New York Times cited reports that said Israel used Al Quds television's frequency to show a cartoon rat describing how Hamas leaders were hiding in sewers "like mice and rats."²⁰

²⁰*Ibid.*

Media Coverage of the Nov. 2012 War on Gaza

Both Israeli and Palestinian media were biased in their coverage of the Gaza conflict, according to journalists. Many editors and journalists who were interviewed on both sides said it was their role to serve “their” public and freely acknowledged that their media houses reported primarily from that perspective.

That said, journalists also said they worked very hard to ensure that their stories were accurate. None of the journalists interviewed believed that they had made any major factual errors, and all said that their own newsrooms were scrupulous in fact checking and citing the sources of their statistics.

Journalists did recall some reporting errors and exaggerations by factional media. For example, Hamas-linked news outlets were said to have wrongly reported that rockets from Gaza had hit the Knesset in Jerusalem. Despite multiple reports to the contrary, Hamas and journalists working for those media denied that those media houses that they had made any exaggerations, and blamed errors on reports that they had received from Palestinian militant groups, which they couldn’t confirm because they were trapped.

There are fundamental differences between the media environments in Israel and the Palestinian Territories that should not be overlooked when comparing their coverage of the conflict.

In general, the Israeli media are more advanced from a technical and training standpoint. Israeli media houses and journalism institutions are decades older and subsequently much more established than those in the Palestinian Territories.

As an example of these differences, the Israeli media has a unified code of ethics that is adjudicated by the Press Council and which has also been recognized by the country’s Supreme Court. The Palestinian Journalist’s Syndicate, on the other hand, has four different ethics codes, none of which are widely adopted by journalists or media houses, and there is no press council for Palestinian media.

Moreover, Israeli journalists enjoy much greater press freedoms than Palestinian journalists, who face restrictions and threats from both the Israeli authorities and the authorities in the West Bank and Gaza.

There is also a difference in how the media in Israel, the West Bank and Gaza see themselves. The Israeli media function more or less like the media in many developed Western democracies and see themselves in this light. Despite some security restrictions on their work, journalists’ main concerns were with securing the financial future of traditional media and thus their editorial independence.

Palestinian journalists operate at a heightened risk of physical harm, face a greater threat of imprisonment and are not able to move freely. Israel controls movement from and into the Palestinian Territories, and even within the West Bank. It additionally exercises control over many aspects of economic and political life in Palestine. The Israeli army and intelligence services are responsible for press freedom violations against Palestinians ranging from media raids and physical attacks to imprisonment – often without charge.

Additionally, the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and the Hamas-controlled authority in Gaza have jailed or brought lawsuits against many local journalists. In the Gaza Strip, media exercise even greater self-censorship, and refrain from criticizing Hamas or its policies and discussing sensitive issues.

Most importantly, Palestinian mediawork under the conditions of occupation and the conflict and see themselves in this context: as representing the voice of an oppressed society.

These differences between the Israeli and Palestinian media's understanding of their roles, and the fact that Israeli media institutions are older and more developed, obviously has an effect on media output.

In general the Israeli media carry a broader spectrum of political views, including views that are harshly critical of Israeli policies toward Palestinians.

Among Palestinian media, different outlets or voices within media houses may represent the opinions of different political factions or ideologies within Palestinian society. However, all share a common opposition to the Israeli occupation and control over Palestinian life. Based on discussions with journalists, although journalists might sometimes withhold criticism of Palestinian officials' wrongdoing for fear of repercussions, their opposition to Israeli policies is the result of a sense of national solidarity and a perceived need to present a united Palestinian front.

Journalists on all sides were asked how they or their newsrooms had explained the origin of the Nov. 2012 conflict in Gaza. Rather than blaming actors on the other side, most journalists in Israel and the West Bank had thoughtful explanations. These varied, but in general journalists on both sides agreed that Hamas and Israel each had their own strategic reasons for provoking conflict. The exception was journalists in Gaza, who were unwilling to criticize Hamas in this regard and tended to blame the conflict entirely on Israeli aggression.

Israeli media coverage

Patriotism

Israeli media did give space to a range of opinions, from those who were very critical of the operation in Gaza and those who were very much in favour.

Nonetheless, Israeli coverage was overall more patriotic during the Nov. 2012 conflict than during Operation Cast Lead in 2008 – 2009, journalists said. One editor suggested that Israelis had less sympathy for civilian casualties in Gaza this time around because Israelis were being targeted by bomb attacks and rockets, which reached all the way to the outskirts of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. Even editors at *Ha'aretz*, a left-wing newspaper that are often criticized by officials and Israeli for being too pro-Palestinian, said that they had praised Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and the IDF for their "restraint" during Operation Pillar of Defence.

In general, journalists felt that Israel made a real effort during the Nov. 2012 conflict to be precise in its attacks and spare the lives of civilians, and their reporting reflected that.

Human-interest stories

Journalists generally agreed that there were too few human-interest stories about the conflict, and that there was disproportionate coverage of the suffering of Israeli civilians.

Anat Saragusti is a former Gaza correspondent and founder of Channel 2 television station, who now works as the executive director of Agenda, an NGO that pushes for social change via the media and that focuses on gender issues. She told IPI that Israeli broadcasters relied heavily on masculine and military voices in their coverage of the Gaza conflict, to the exclusion of women's voices and civil society perspectives. "Agenda" raised this issue with the television networks, which were offered a list of alternative interview partners. But while the public broadcaster responded positively, commercial stations were less interested. This would seem to indicate that reports featuring feminine voices have worse ratings, or that editors think such reports will have worse ratings.

At the Israeli Democratic Institute, IPI met with Tehilla Schwartz Altshuler as well as The Seventh Eye website's chief editor and reporter, Hanoch Marmari and Oren Persico. They noted that Israeli media did not carry many voices from the Palestinian side during the conflict, and buried that content when they did have it. Marmari pointed out that for news media, reflecting on life in Gaza is a kind of "luxury" because it doesn't serve the main purpose of journalism, which is to survive financially. The sense was that human-interest stories about Palestinian suffering don't sell to Israeli news consumers.

Since the end of the Gaza operation, Israeli media have focused much more intensively on local elections and other social and economic issues, journalists said. One observer explained that Israeli media reflect a sense that there is "regional chaos" in the Middle East, and that nothing can be done about the Palestinian conflict for the moment – and so it is not reported on very much.

Sources on the other side

The amount and sympathy of coverage given to voices from the other side depended on news outlets' political affiliations. For example, stations belonging to the Israeli Broadcasting Authority and Galei Tzahal (Army Radio), which belongs to the IDF, were generally described as being very pro-government, or even as "excessively" patriotic. Some Israeli journalists, including one at the IBA, said that they had carried too few Arab voices, but pointed out that it was not just editors who were responsible: Palestinian officials, who usually try to get air time, didn't call.

Most broadcasters did not carry live interviews with Hamas as a matter of policy, explaining that they couldn't control or edit what was said if they broadcast

live. The exception was the popular online news portal Walla!, according to one of its correspondents, who said they did stream live interviews.

Some newspapers, such as *Maariv* and *Ha'aretz*, employed Palestinian correspondents in Gaza. Journalists inside and outside *Ha'aretz* newspaper said that this newspaper reflected more Palestinian voices than any other media house. Other major news outlets had regular coverage of Palestinian perspectives, but relied on their reporters in Israel to carry out telephone interviews with officials and civilians in the Strip, or on international wire services.

Many Israeli journalists said they were, in fact, desperate for more Gaza sources, but Hamas officials avoided their phone calls. Since December 2012, Hamas has made it an official policy not to deal with Israeli journalists, and has also forbidden journalists in Gaza from having contact with Israel, as is discussed later in this report. However, this was not the case in November 2012, and it might be worth noting that some Palestinian reporters had the same problem reaching their sources during the conflict, but interpreted it differently: They didn't think they were being ignored; rather, they believed Hamas officials were tough to reach because they had "gone into hiding."

Bearing in mind that the Israeli media landscape is much older and more developed than Palestinian media, journalists on both sides noted that Israeli media reports were, in general, technically superior and more professional. One Palestinian radio journalist said Palestinian media need to catch up to their Israeli colleagues, who make "compelling and powerful stories" that "do not appear to be propaganda."

Hate speech

Various instances of hate speech or incitement were recorded by the IllamCenter in Nazareth. Some egregious examples included an incident on November 18, in which Channel 2 military analyst Rony Daniel reportedly said that Gaza should be levelled to the ground. Two days later, a presenter on Reshet Beit radio reportedly told listeners not to worry because an incoming rocket from Gaza had fallen on an Arab village (presumably, as opposed to falling in a Jewish Israeli area). A journalist for popular newspaper *Maariv* reportedly suggested, on Nov. 20, that Israel cut off Gaza's electricity and water. On Nov. 22, *Israel Hayom* reportedly published a piece that said the life of Israeli soldiers is more valuable than the life of Palestinian civilians.

Such views were said to be popular with a broad swathe of the Israeli public. Rony Daniel was mentioned repeatedly by Israeli journalists, who expressed regret that the journalist was considered a "hero" for saying "what the people are really thinking."

Palestinian media

Patriotism

As in Israel, journalists and editors for Palestinian media said they were inevitably biased in covering the Gaza conflict, which they saw as another instance of Israeli aggression in the context of the broader occupation and conflict.

As one journalist described it, even in the West Bank, Palestinian media treated the Gaza conflict as an attack on Palestinians, and not as an attack on Hamas. One editor of a West Bank newspaper said that the conflict with Israel was an “existential issue” for Palestinians, so there could be no objectivity; another editor said his paper saw the conflict as a war *on* Gaza, and not a war *with* Gaza. Palestinian state TV in the West Bank also showed more solidarity with Hamas than it had in the past, journalists said.

One Palestinian editor noted that the Gaza war was a media war, and that leaders used journalists in their “mobilization.” There is, he said, a convergence between journalists and political leaders - of journalists answering questions rather than asking them, as he put it. As an example, he noted that the outgoing Israeli Knesset had eleven journalists as members. He also noted that Al Aqsa TV in Gaza, too, acts as a Hamas mouthpiece with a budget of “infinity”.

Other journalists echoed his belief that the media – Israeli and Palestinian – act according to the interests of their owners and their “side.”

However, all said they were careful to be accurate with their facts. One exception was Al Aqsa television, a Hamas-affiliated station based in Gaza, which was accused of serving as a Hamas mouthpiece and exaggerating the success of Hamas rocket attacks on Israel. One Palestinian reporter said he was even told by an Al Aqsa editor that the station sees itself as “jihad media,” although the editor also explicitly said that they do not “target human beings”.

Other West Bank journalists think Al Aqsa TV has become more professional over the past few years. One joked that the fact Hamas had some actual military achievements to report helped keep Al Aqsa’s coverage more professional.

The IPI delegation met with journalists at Al Aqsa TV, which is pro-Hamas, and Al Quds Voice radio, which is close to Islamic Jihad. Journalists at one station described their basic goal as patriotism: to support local people and lift their spirits. They had to make sure that people did not fall for Israeli propaganda; for example, they worked to discredit a leaflet they said the IDF had distributed that warned of a ground invasion that never actually took place.

Despite the accusations that pro-Hamas media such as Al Aqsa are propaganda tools, all Palestinian journalists – without exception – agreed that the station, much like Israel’s army radio, is staffed by professional journalists and not militants. A

journalist working for Al Jazeera made a point of noting that Israel had attacked journalists whose work appeared on television, who were doing “real work.”

Palestinian journalists that IPI interviewed in both Gaza and the West Bank saw the bombing of Al Aqsa’s journalists and station as attacks on media targets, not military targets, and believed the IDF’s goal was to silence a certain message.

It is worth noting that Gaza residents relied heavily on local news reports during the conflict. As one journalist from Al Quds radio explained, people preferred local media to pan-Arab media because they “heard their own stories”.

Radio was of particular importance in the Gaza Strip, because frequent electrical power outages and the airplanes overhead that interfered with high frequency satellite transmissions meant that it was impossible to watch television.

Media takeovers

Palestinian media, particularly Hamas-linked media, did not have full control over what they were broadcasting. During the Gaza conflict, the IDF repeatedly took over the transmission frequencies of Al Aqsa TV and Al Quds Voice radio to broadcast their own warnings and messages. A reporter at Al Quds said the station was taken over “tens of times,” and that people would call in to let them know it was happening. He said messages included warnings to stay away from armed Palestinians, and not to let terrorists into your house.

In the West Bank, the Palestine News Network (PNN) had its website hacked from within Israel. It was not clear who was responsible for the hack, which specialists said originated near Tel Aviv. PNN editors speculated that the hackers may have believed they were affiliated with the Palestinian Authority (PNN is, in fact, a privately-owned news agency and distinct from WAFA, the Palestine News & Info Agency, which belongs to the PA) or may just have disliked their coverage – they said their web traffic quadrupled during the conflict.

Sources on the other side

Journalists at most Palestinian and Arab media said that they did not interview Israeli officials directly during the conflict, although most said they did occasionally work with Israeli journalists to exchange information. One radio editor in the West Bank said that his station did not interview official Israeli sources because there was a “national consensus” that the conflict was with Palestinians as a whole.

Some reporters said they did have Israeli government contacts, but that their publications had policies against saying their correspondent had talked to a particular official directly. In most cases, Palestinian media relied on quotes and information taken from wire services and Israeli media outlets. The exception was the Ma’an News Agency, whose chief editor, Nasser Allaham, said that they quoted Israeli officials directly and interviewed them live. He said they even tried to interview settlers, although they gave up after some time because the settlers refused to speak with them.

However, in contrast to the Israeli public, which was disinterested in Palestinian views, the Palestinian public was hugely interested in the official Israeli perspective on the Gaza conflict.

Major newspapers in the West Bank translated several columns and reports from the Israeli media each day. The chief editor of *Al Ayyam*, Abdelnasser Najjar, said his newspaper made an effort to include a wide range of Israeli opinions, even pieces written by settlers. The Palestinian News Network, a private news agency, said that it subtitled Hebrew-language videos in Arabic, which was a popular service. Ma'an News Network's most popular television show features Allaham translating and commenting on Hebrew news and press conferences. According to Allaham, the station even received phone calls from officials in Gaza asking them to carry on with particular live translations, since the officials don't speak Hebrew and couldn't understand what Israeli officials were saying.

It should be noted that in December 2012, Hamas instituted a policy of non-cooperation with Israeli media. Hamas officials no longer contact Israeli journalists or answer their phones when called, and have forbidden all journalists in the Gaza Strip from working with Israeli media. More information about this comes later in the report.

Media in the West Bank vs. Gaza

Hamas-linked newspapers are banned in the West Bank, while West Bank papers are not distributed in the Gaza Strip – although in both places you can access all content online. It is a situation that one journalist in Gaza described simply as “silly.”

In January 2006, Hamas won a majority of seats in the Palestinian legislative election, but the government they formed, which Fatah refused to join, was not recognized by Israel, the United States or the European Union, which cut aid. A conflict broke out between Fatah and Hamas forces afterward, which resulted in the June 2007 takeover of the Gaza Strip by Hamas forces. The period of retributive attacks that followed sucked the media in, as well, and journalists working for pro-Hamas and pro-Fatah media were attacked, arrested and expelled from the West Bank and Gaza, respectively.

This situation has improved to some degree in the years since then. For example, unlike during Operation Cast Lead, during the 2012 Gaza conflict, Palestine TV (which is operated by the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank) had an office in the Gaza Strip. Other West Bank newspapers told IPI that they now have many more stringers in Gaza than in previous years.

Journalists in the West Bank were more likely to criticize Hamas policies than journalists in Gaza, who operate under tighter restrictions – although even West Bank journalists mostly saved their criticism for social media, according to one journalist. For example, West Bank journalists were critical when Hamas killed an alleged Israeli collaborator and allowed his body to be dragged through the streets.

In terms of covering Operation Pillar of Defence, all Palestinian media were pro-Palestinian; some were explicitly pro-Hamas. For example, Najjar at *Al Ayyam* said that his Ramallah-based newspaper talked about Palestinian steadfastness in the face of attack, while Al Aqsa TV in Gaza painted a picture of Hamas victory.

Head of Hamas Media Office Ehab Al Ghusain denied that factional media had made things up, and when asked whether they had exaggerated, replied that Palestinians have to live in the war. According to Al Ghusain, the local media did a better job of covering the Gaza war than foreign Western or even Arabic media, and said that was why Israel had targeted them. He said that it was Hamas' experience that the Israeli media had a greater capacity than local media, but that they had an agenda and made up fake stories, too.

Journalists in Gaza and the West Bank said Al Aqsa TV had exaggerated to strengthen their owners' position, for example by ramping up the success of rocket strikes.

Hate speech

Isolated incidents of hate speech and incitement were also reported in media affiliated with the Palestinian Authority, while Hamas-affiliated media were accused of far worse instances of incitement and exaggeration.

In a report published on Nov. 20, 2012 by The Washington Institute, David Pollock wrote: "In the West Bank, print and broadcast media controlled or influenced by the PA are emphasizing Palestinian suffering, but generally avoiding hate speech, calls to arms, or boasting about damage to Israel. In Gaza, by contrast, Hamas media are relentlessly inciting violence, indulging in venomous hate speech, and gloating about imaginary hits on Israeli civilian targets." Pollock cited, as examples, reports from the Hamas-affiliated Al Aqsa TV station on Nov. 15 and Nov. 18, in which they wrongly claimed that a Hamas rocket had hit the electricity network in southern Tel Aviv and that Ben Gurion airport had been closed down.

Coverage by media in the West Bank was much more professional and less prone to incitement than it had been during the first and second Intifadas, journalists told IPI. The editor of a major West Bank newspaper said that most Palestinian media, despite often employing a "populist touch," had absorbed "the message" about hate speech. For example, while his journalists (like every journalist working for Palestinian or Arab media) referred to the victims and targets of Israeli attacks as "martyrs," they also referred to "Israelis" rather than "Jews".

Factors Influencing Coverage

Patriotism and defining the public interest

By their own admission, news media were wrapped in the flags of their nations when they covered the Gaza war in Nov. 2012. While media represented a range of views and carried alternate opinions, by and large they took sides with their own authorities. Israeli and Palestinian journalists considered this normal, though some questioned whether it was ideal.

While the patriotism on display was partially due to external pressures, it seemed mainly to stem from a sense of patriotism and duty to the public on their side, especially the families of victims on their side.

Palestinian and Israeli journalists said that media on both sides were more patriotic in their coverage of the Nov. 2012 conflict than of Operation Cast Lead.

Since the end of the Gaza fighting, Israeli media have not given much space to Palestinian issues or the conflict, focusing instead on domestic issues and elections.

Palestinian media focus to a much greater degree on Israeli policy and the conflict. Among Palestinian in opposition to the Israeli occupation, although there are differing views as to how political leaders should handle this issue.

Public pressure and commercial interests

Palestinian media, both print and broadcast, devote substantial space to translations of Israeli media content. These translations are among their most popular offerings because Israeli political developments directly affect Palestinian well-being.

The opposite is true in Israel. As one Israeli media analyst put it, “ratings drop by the second” when there is discussion of Gaza on the television or radio – and so there is great commercial pressure on media to cover something that consumers want to watch.

Israeli media, like media across the developed world, are under greater financial pressure than ever before. The financial crisis and the shift in media consumption habits, as readers increasingly expect to get their news for free online, have changed the way that media work. In much of the developing world, newspapers have experienced an enormous drop in advertising revenues, which formerly subsidized the production of “serious” news.

With this backing gone, traditional media feel compelled to focus on content that is cheap to produce and sells well, like celebrity news, while cutting back on costly content, like foreign news, investigative reporting or longer human interest features. Some media have put up paywalls on their websites, which can drive traffic to free sites.

All of these dynamics are in play among Israeli media, perhaps to the detriment of conflict coverage. A number of Israeli journalists fretted that *Ha'aretz*, a well-known left wing newspaper that also runs an English-language website, may one day be forced to close its doors. Despite having put up a pay wall on its website, the newspaper is losing revenue. Editors at the paper told IPI that between 2011 and 2012, the newspaper lost twelve percent of its advertising volume.

Competition is fierce. The 2007 introduction of the free daily newspaper *Israel Hayom*, which takes a populist, pro-Netanyahu stance and is owned by billionaire Sheldon Adelson, has shrunk the market share of newspapers that charge for their content.



Dalia Dorner, President of the Press Council of Israel and a former justice of the Supreme Court. Photo: Naomi Hunt

Dalia Dorner, president of the Israeli Press Council, considers the economic pressure on the media to be a main threat to press freedom.

She said the country needs a broad press and it would be very problematic if newspapers like *Ha'aretz* and *Maariv* (a more centre-

aligned, populist newspaper) close.

Dorner noted that, unfortunately, consumers want newspapers to reflect their own economic interest, which creates an ethical issue for media that are trying to stay independent but also stay open.

Official pressure, ownership and affiliation

Media in Israel and the Palestinian Authorities are subjected to varying degrees of political pressure on their newsrooms that result from formal and informal links to officials.

In Israel, ministerial control over appointments at different public stations provides a means of influencing their coverage. For example, Israel Educational TV is operated as a branch of the Education Ministry, while Galei Tzahal, Army Radio, is operated by the Israeli Defence Forces.

The state broadcasting network, the Israel Broadcasting Authority, operates a number of television and radio stations that cover news, entertainment and music.

Editors at the IBA face increasing interference from government officials, who influence key appointments at the broadcaster, according to several journalists both within and outside the organization. One journalist described it as a “troubled institution” where one can sometimes see management’s “fingerprints” influencing decisions all the way down the ladder. This weakness, he said, was especially detrimental because you need a strong public broadcaster when the commercial press is “degenerating” as a result of financial pressures.

One journalist within the IBA said that the network should function “like the BBC [in the United Kingdom],” but that there is “too much political involvement.” The journalist said editors are under pressure not to cover certain areas or to be more patriotic about certain economic and political issues.

He described a “salami system” of restrictions, in which the ability of journalists to do their job is sliced away bit by bit. For example, he said this affects coverage of Palestinian issues because journalists will be told that there is no money for them to take an armoured car into the West Bank, or they will be given lots of assignments so that they don’t have time to do investigative pieces.

In short, public radio and television, which were once famed for their independence, are now coming under increasing editorial pressure and their ability to work has been curbed, according to journalists.

Privately owned media in Israel, as elsewhere in the world, reflect a particular editorial stance that depends on their owners’ political views and on the need to make money.

In Gaza, Hamas is able to stop journalists from working, as they have done with journalists working for Israeli media, and journalists have repeatedly been detained or interrogated as a result of their work. Nonetheless, several journalists in Gaza told IPI that they have no problems with Hamas; another, rather more cynically, said that in general journalists have no problem with Hamas because they don’t speak freely.

Often the red lines for Gaza media are what would be expected from any media during an active conflict – for example, during Gaza war, none would reveal where rockets were coming from. One journalist said he didn’t contact Israelis during the conflict because he “doesn’t need more problems with Hamas.”

There are a number of media houses that are linked with Hamas or rival group Islamic Jihad and that have offices in the Gaza Strip, including *Felsteen*, Al Aqsa TV, Al Quds Voice Radio, Pal Today TV, Al Quds TV and others. While these are said to practice a fairly high standard of journalism, as one reporter said, they still clearly promote the vision and interests of their owners. Al Aqsa, for example, was accused of incitement and exaggeration in its coverage.

In the West Bank, journalists are under less political pressure than their Gaza-based counterparts, although many of the most powerful media houses are affiliated with Fatah and the Palestinian Authority. The Palestinian Authority directly operates the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation, which runs Palestine TV and Voice of Palestine Radio. It also owns WAFA, the Palestine News Agency.

Palestinian journalists noted that media, especially factional media, were seen to promote the positions and interests of their owners, both in their coverage of the Gaza conflict and in general.

Other media considered to be pro-Fatah include *Al Ayyam* and *Al Hayat Al Jadeeda*. During IPI’s visit, a new chief editor, Aref Hijjawi, said that the newspaper has stopped reprinting PA press releases and now considers itself the “least loyal paper in Palestine.” He has since been replaced.

Resource constraints

Media in Israel and the Palestinian Territories are facing financial hurdles, many of which are similar to those their colleagues face around the world.

News consumers are going online, and this shift has caused a drop in subscriptions and advertising that massively threatens the underpinnings of traditional print media. Free publications, which are subsidized by powerful backers, also compete with traditional quality newspapers.

Some companies, such as *Ha'aretz*, face advertising boycotts from major companies because of their editorial stance. According to Chief Editor Aluf Benn, these included Bank Hapoalim for some time, as well as IDB Group, which he explained included "large advertisers in the retail, cellular, insurance and savings/pensions management" sectors.

One news agency, the Palestine News Network, said it faced a huge problem with other, smaller websites copying their content without any attribution or linking. For example, PNN would spend time and money subtitling Hebrew-language videos into Arabic, only to have these appropriated wholesale. This too affects their bottom line.

Small or new media and journalist associations that rely on international donor support face an additional challenge as funds are increasingly allocated to the Arab Spring countries.

As a result, many media houses were facing cuts that also impact reporting. IPI met with journalists from Israeli and Palestinian media that said they wouldn't send reporters into dangerous areas without offering them basic protection, including equipment, training or insurance coverage, and since they cannot afford those things, they don't send reporters.

The lack of resources also impacts the number of in-depth and human interest stories that major media are able to produce.

Threat of imprisonment or violence

Israel

Israeli journalists are rarely detained or prosecuted by their own government, although there are exceptions. Uri Blau, a reporter for *Ha'aretz* newspaper, was charged in 2012 with illegally possessing classified documents, which he had used to expose alleged military wrongdoing four years earlier. In July 2012, Blau accepted a plea bargain in which he admitted guilt and was spared prison time, instead serving several months of community service. (The whistleblower who had given him the documents, a former soldier named Anat Kamm, was sentenced to four and a half years in prison in 2011. Her sentence was reduced by a year in Dec. 2012. In Feb. 2013, reports said Kamm was requesting compensation from *Ha'aretz* for having revealed her identity.)

Palestinian journalists, on the other hand, have been the victims of arrest and attack from the Israeli authorities, the Fatah-controlled Palestinian Authority in the West Bank and from Hamas in the Gaza Strip.

Gaza

The Palestinian Center for Media Freedom and Development (MADA), which tracks press freedom violations, recorded over a dozen press freedom violations in the Gaza Strip in January 2013. Over three days, Gaza's internal security forces arrested eleven journalists who were released some days later following an international outcry. Two others were interrogated, and one reporter attacked. In February, Hamas prevented a Pal Today TV crew from filming and detained them for half an hour; another journalist was interrogated for two hours about an allegedly defamatory article.

In January 2013, shortly before the IPI delegation went to Gaza, a number of journalists working for pro-Fatah media were arrested by Hamas, which gave no explanation for their arrest. Others were summoned for interrogation. Hamas members have also been accused of mistreating detainees. In March 2012, as IPI reported at the time, three journalists who were covering a mass wedding in Gaza City were attacked by members of Hamas, who forced one of the reporters to take his shirt, belt and shoes off and sit in a dark room for an hour. Hamas leadership later apologized for the incident.

West Bank

Journalists in the West Bank have also faced interrogation, arrest and attacks in recent months, or have been denied access to official events because of political positions they've taken on social media. Both Israeli and Palestinian forces were responsible for these attacks.

As IPI documented in 2012, Israeli soldiers and Palestinian security forces were responsible for raiding television stations, attacking and arresting journalists covering demonstrations, raiding homes and detaining members of the media. Journalists were subjected to long periods of administrative detention by the Israeli authorities, while the Palestinian security forces interrogated and detained reporters who were known to be critical of the Palestinian Authority.

In early 2013, MADA recorded numerous violations against Palestinian journalists by both Israeli and Palestinian forces.

MADA recorded that in January 2013, Israeli forces denied Palestinian journalists access to areas of interest, assaulted and detained news crews, and prevented them from recording army actions. In February, Israel was responsible for wounding five journalists with rubber bullets, and again for attacking journalists and preventing their coverage of certain events and areas, MADA reported. Israel also extended the "administrative detention" without charge of journalist Amer Abu Arafa, who has been in custody since August 2011. In March 2013, Israeli forces prevented two Al Jazeera journalists from interviewing a family in

Hebron even though the reporters showed their press IDs, according to a report from the International Solidarity Movement.

In February 2013, group of youth – not government forces – confiscated copies of a magazine in the West Bank, MADA said. In March 2013, journalists told IPI that the Palestinian President's Office had prevented a number of colleagues from covering U.S. President Obama's visit to the West Bank, either because they worked for Hamas-affiliated media or because they had been critical of P.A. officials on social media websites. IPI called for an investigation. Also in March, a reporter for Al Jazeera was reportedly detained by Palestinian security after returning from training course in Qatar, and was questioned about the news network, according to the Jerusalem Post.

Criminal defamation laws and laws that outlaw "insults" to officials are still in use in the Palestinian Authority.

Restrictions on freedom of movement

Restrictions on freedom of movement are the most serious problem facing Israeli and Palestinian journalists who cover the conflict.

This violation of the right to freedom of movement is detrimental to accurate and fair reporting on the conflict. First of all, it is the source of vast resentment for the many Palestinian journalists who cannot enter Israel and who cannot travel to the West Bank (if they are in Gaza) or to Gaza (if they are in the West Bank). Even travel within the West Bank is affected by Israeli control, because certain roads can only be used by Israeli settlers and because checkpoints have been set up within the West Bank.

Most Palestinian journalists, like most Palestinians, have not been able to enter Israel proper for years. Many young reporters have never been to Israel at all. Beyond the feeling of discrimination and injustice, the ban makes it impossible for Palestinian journalists to witness daily Israeli life, to see Tel Aviv and Jerusalem and other Israeli cities, or to interview civilians.

Restrictions on Israeli journalists

Citing security reasons, Israel forbids its citizens, including journalists, from traveling to the West Bank or into the Gaza Strip.

In the Gaza Strip, the Hamas-led authority currently forbids Israeli journalists from entering. At other times, a very small handful of Israeli journalists have been known to visit the Strip, although usually just for a few hours.

There are a handful of Israeli journalists who cover Palestinian issues who visit the West Bank on a very regular basis.

Israeli journalists expressed a great desire to travel to the Gaza Strip. It is worth noting that the head of the Gaza division of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate said it might be worth pursuing permission for such visits if journalists from Gaza could also be allowed to report from Israel.

As of May 2013, Israeli journalists were also reportedly subjected to tighter restrictions if they wished to report from the West Bank, where they had previously been free to enter. In response to a petition signed by 200 Palestinian journalists, who were protesting what they perceived as preferential treatment for their Israeli colleagues, the Palestinian government said it would now require Israeli journalists to apply for press credentials.

Reporting from Israel

The vast majority Palestinian journalists, whether from Gaza or the West Bank, are forbidden from entering Israel, and so, of course, they don't report from there.

Palestinian journalists who wish to report from Israel would need Government Press Office (GPO) cards or other appropriate accreditation in order to get entry permits, but in practice only a tiny minority of journalists working for foreign media have GPO cards. Israel doesn't officially recognize the existence of Palestinian journalists working for Palestinian media. Please see the section entitled "Restrictions on official access", for more information about this.

Restrictions on journalists in the West Bank

Because they can't enter Israel, journalists in the West Bank also cannot travel through Ben Gurion Airport near Tel Aviv. Instead, they have to make the much longer trip to the airport near Amman, in neighbouring Jordan.

Even within the West Bank, Palestinian journalists can't always move freely. Certain main roads are limited to use by settlers (and in practice, to those traveling in cars with Israeli license plates). There are checkpoints that can only be crossed by Israelis, forcing Palestinians to take longer routes to their destinations.

Israel justifies the closure of some roads for settlers for "security" reasons. In practice there are frustrating inconsistencies, which make life difficult for Palestinian journalists, who need to be mobile in order to do their jobs.

There are roads that only Israelis may use, which forces Palestinians to take a longer route.

Israeli checkpoints are distributed throughout the Palestinian Authority, and Palestinian journalists report that they are often denied passage by being treated as Palestinians, irrespective of their profession and its needs. What is frustrating, journalists say, is that there is no clear policy explaining why someone is refused passage. IPI was told it often depends on the soldier's "mood" – you can have good luck and bad luck. The soldiers sometimes accept the journalists' international press I.D., issued by the International Federation of Journalists, but sometimes they don't. Sometimes journalists are waved through, while other times they are kept waiting only to be denied.

Palestinians with Jerusalem residence permits and Arab citizens of Israel, who are relatively privileged because they can travel within Israel and the West Bank, also reported that they sometimes have trouble getting through checkpoints.

Traveling to Gaza is possible but difficult. West Bank-based journalists working for international media can receive ten day permits, according to the Israeli Government Press Office, but reporters said this is difficult in practice. Most journalists must travel to Jordan, fly to Egypt and then drive to the Egyptian-controlled crossing. What could be a drive of two or three hours thus becomes a multi-day journey.

Restrictions on Gaza residents

Gaza residents face even tighter restrictions.

Like their colleagues in the West Bank, they are banned from entering Israel.

To catch an international flight, Gaza residents must first get through the Rafah crossing – which involves seeking exit permission from Hamas and getting an entry permit from Egypt.

Men between 18 and 40 years of age need special permission to enter Egypt on the theory that they are more likely to be terrorists, IPI was told. Obviously a large segment of the journalist population falls within this age group.

In effect, all Israeli and Palestinian journalists are subject to restrictions within the region – although these restrictions disproportionately affect Palestinians.



The long passageway into the Gaza Strip at the Erez Crossing.

- 1. Israeli journalists are not allowed to travel to Gaza.**
- 2. Gaza-based journalists are cut off from Israel and the West Bank, and have a difficult time traveling anywhere, especially if they are men between the ages of 18 and 40.**
- 3. The vast majority of Palestinian journalists in the West Bank cannot enter Israel, and are subject to travel restrictions within the West Bank that can hinder their ability to do their jobs.**

Both Israeli and Palestinian journalists would be able to do better reporting if they could cover stories first-hand. More importantly, free movement would give journalists an opportunity to experience and absorb the culture and daily life of the “other side”, challenging stereotypes and misinformation.

Censorship

Military censor

Israeli journalists must submit stories about national security issues to a military censor before they are published. This relationship is regulated by a censorship agreement between the IDF and the media, and the current chief military censor is Brig. Gen. Sima Vaknin-Gil.

But Dalia Dorner, the head of the Israeli press council and a former Justice of the Supreme Court of Israel, said that legally the censorship mechanism is restrained to blocking items that present a “clear and imminent” danger to national security. Decisions can be appealed at the Supreme Court.

Israeli journalists who regularly cover the conflicts said that they don’t really have trouble with the censor. She does her job in a very narrow and limited way, and reporters say they can work with her. More troublesome are gag orders.

Gag orders

Journalists voiced concern about the institution of broad gag orders. These often ban mentioning the gag order itself, so the public is unaware that any information is being withheld. One widely respected correspondent for Palestinian affairs said that there are gag orders imposed on the media “at least once a month”.

The story of Prisoner X was receiving a lot of media attention just as the IPI delegation arrived in Israel. The man referred to as Prisoner X, Ben Zygier, had in fact died three years earlier – but because of a gag order on the story, the news was just breaking.

In 2010, Prisoner X died while in Israeli custody in an apparent suicide. Ynet covered both the arrest of Prisoner X and his death at the time, but both stories quickly disappeared from the news website, reports say.

The gag order, which banned Israeli media from reporting on the existence of the gag order and from quoting foreign media coverage of the story, constrained Israeli reports for three years. Then the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) broadcast a piece about it and several Knesset ministers, who had reportedly seen the TV program and were unaware of the gag order, asked questions about it in parliament, effectively breaking the silence.

The session was broadcast live on Knesset TV, and then rebroadcast by other stations, reports said. With the cat partway out of the bag, the Justice Ministry issued a statement acknowledging that a high security prisoner had died in custody in 2010, and partially lifting the gag order.

Investigations by Australian and German media revealed much of what came to be known about the case of Prisoner X: It was revealed that the Australian-born Zygier became an Israeli citizen in the 1990s and was later recruited to Mossad, where he was eventually given an unexciting desk job. To prove his value in the field, Zygier allegedly made an unauthorized attempt to recruit a Hezbollah

contact as a double agent. But he botched the job and ended up revealing the names of key Israeli agents working in Lebanon, who were later jailed.

Journalists questioned the value of keeping this gag order in place even after foreign media and social media were abuzz with the news. Israel's citizens and enemies already had full access to the story online. Moreover, the fact that the government would request a gag order on a story only confirms to journalists that it is important.

Most journalists accepted that, because of the conflict and Israel's position in the region, official restrictions on publishing sensitive information might be necessary sometimes. However, journalists said there are problems with the way gag orders are implemented in practice. Firstly, some journalists had the impression that officials sometimes use the gag order system for political rather than national reasons.

According to Amir Oren, writing in *Ha'aretz* in Feb. 2013, a gag order "is signed by judges who have been persuaded by arguments from the police, the Shin Bet security service or the state attorney's office; or alternatively following requests from the defence, or civil litigation parties. The orders do not go into the particular reasons that persuaded the judges."

Therefore it is not always clear why a gag order was justified.

The second problem is that gag orders often delay rather than block news. One Israeli chief editor described a usual scenario, in which journalists believe that a certain gag order is too broad. Journalists protest and start reporting around the edges of the order, chipping away at it. Eventually the ban "collapses," and a more narrowly defined order is instituted (if at all). This simply delays the publication of news.

Moreover, only mainstream Israeli media are informed of these gag orders. When the story comes out on media that were unaware of any muzzle, such as blogs or foreign media, it creates a dilemma for local journalists. One journalist asked: "Can you ignore a story that has been online for two weeks?"

Because the bans effectively fall apart once the news breaks elsewhere, Israeli journalists can also circumvent gag orders by feeding information to their foreign colleagues. On the other hand, the gag order on Prisoner X remained intact for years, so clearly it is possible for a country to keep a secret.

Representatives from the Jerusalem Association of Journalists suggested that one way to encourage the imposition of more narrowly defined gag orders would be to have a media representative in court when they are being discussed. At the moment, the party seeking a gag order deals with a judge without any journalist present to provide input on the scope of the order. A media representative could make arguments in favour of press freedom, and help the court to understand whether a particular ban would be feasible.

Online Censorship

In April 2012, the Palestinian Authority was found to be blocking access to several websites that were critical of its policies. The Bethlehem-based Maan News Agency first broke the story, reporting that “Amad, Fatah Voice, Firas Press, In Light Press, Karama Press, Kofia Press, Milad News and Palestine Beituna” were all blocked. While none of the websites was particularly well known, all reported on daily news, Maan said. The censorship move was met with international condemnation, and the sites were later unblocked.

In September 2012, Hamas ordered ten local Internet service providers in the Gaza Strip to block access to pornographic websites, the Times of Israel reported. The Times quoted a columnist for the pro-Hamas newspaper *Felsteen*, who reportedly wrote: “We have learned that pornographic websites ... have been receiving many views in Palestinian society over the past two years, surpassing social and news websites, including official ones like the Wafa news agency [the official Palestinian News Agency].”

There have been no reported instances of web censorship in Israel.

Restrictions on access to official sources

Editors Committee

In some instances, the government works directly with the editors of major news outlets, briefing them on sensitive issues and asking their help in suppressing certain stories. This practice is not unique to Israel. For instance, in Feb. 2013, *The New York Times* and the *Washington Post* admitted that they withheld information about an American drone base in Saudi Arabia for months at the request of the United States government – earning them a share of criticism for their collaboration.

In Israel, an informal gathering of editors from major media, termed the Editors Committee, regularly meets with the prime minister and other top officials.²¹

Officials will provide updates and off-the-record information on events to top editors. On the flip side, this privileged access can be withdrawn, which gives editors a reason to heed government requests that they withhold certain information.

GPO cards

Without a Government Press Office card, it is impossible for any journalist to cover to government press events in Israel.

According to the GPO, Palestinian journalists can apply for entry permits to conduct short term reporting trips. The application process takes up to seven

²¹For example, Leibovitz, Liel. “What the People of the Book Can’t Read.” *Tablet Magazine*, Feb. 12, 2013. Accessed April 19, 2013.

days, and the permit is then valid for two days to one week, IPI was told. (Israeli journalists, by contrast, only have to re-apply for accreditation every year or even every two years, in some cases).

To qualify for a card, journalists and their media houses must meet certain criteria. According to the rules available on the GPO website²², organizations defined as “media” must have a certain minimum circulation. Additionally, media may “not [be] a publication of a body whose primary activity is not news media,” which is confusing because it seems like it could broadly exclude a number of legitimate news organizations, at least in theory (for example, media owned by political parties or run by government ministries).

With respect to Palestinian media, there is simply no mention of them at all. The document defines procedures for GPO cards to be issued to “local media” and “foreign media,” but it is not clear how Palestinian media would be categorized.

The rules also state that a GPO card “will not be given under these rules to any person convicted of an offence against state security,” which explains why some individual Palestinian journalists are excluded.

Furthermore, the document says a GPO card “will not be given to residents or citizens of enemy states, or to a resident of an area which is in an armed conflict with the State of Israel [my emphasis], unless the GPO Director is of the opinion, after consultation with security authorities, that the possibility of the existence of danger from such a resident or citizen to the welfare of the public and security of Israel, may be ruled out.”

Foreign citizens working at Ma’an News Agency in Bethlehem noted that as of November 2012, their passports contain stamps limiting their residence to “Judea and Samaria only [West Bank]”. They considered applying for permission to work in Israel, but balked when they read on the GPO website that their passports could be held for up to 90 days, they told IPI.

There does appear to be positive change afoot at the Government Press Office. Officials there indicated that they are now more willing to give Palestinian journalists in the West Bank permits to enter Israel on reporting trips. Additionally, foreign journalists anecdotally reported that they have had an easier time getting permission to enter Gaza.

The IPI delegation has encouraged journalists from Palestinian news organizations to apply for permits to report from Israel to test this new openness.

The restrictions on Palestinian journalists’ freedom of movement are a violation of press freedoms. Moreover, they affect the kind of reporting that appears in Palestinian media. Unsurprisingly, the travel ban is a source of tremendous frustration for Palestinian journalists, who justifiably feel that their rights are being violated and that they are subject to discriminatory treatment compared to their Israeli colleagues. The ban also makes reporting about Israel worse: It is

²²Government Press Office website. Accessed April 4, 2013.
[http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/PrimeMinistersOffice/DivisionsAndAuthorities/Pages/TheGovernmentPressOffice\(GPO\).aspx](http://www.pmo.gov.il/English/PrimeMinistersOffice/DivisionsAndAuthorities/Pages/TheGovernmentPressOffice(GPO).aspx)

impossible for the vast majority of Palestinian journalists to be familiar with Israeli civilian society or do in-depth stories from Israel.

Hamas restrictions on cooperation with Israeli media

As of December 2012, the Hamas-led authority in the Gaza Strip has refused to communicate with Israeli journalists, and has forbidden journalists working in the Gaza Strip from cooperating with Israeli media outlets.

Israeli journalists said that their calls to official Hamas sources now go largely unanswered. Israeli news outlets that worked with Gaza-based stringers now find themselves without those employees, and those employees find themselves without a job.

Ihab El Ghussain, head of the Hamas Government Media Office, argued that Hamas has decided to no longer prioritize winning over Israeli public opinion, because they have concluded that most Israelis “believe in killing Palestinians”. He said Israeli media make fake stories and have an agenda.

In terms of allowing Israeli journalists to enter the Gaza Strip, El Ghussain said that while there had been reporters who came to visit, Hamas could no longer guarantee journalists’ safety.

IPI expressed its concern about the Hamas ban on cooperation with Israeli media, which we hoped would be reconsidered. Both Israel’s ban on allowing its journalists to travel to Gaza, and the Hamas-imposed ban, are restrictions on the right to freedom of movement and are detrimental to reporting on the conflict.

Indeed, journalists across the board criticized the policy.

Israelis said they would prefer to have their reporters – and their sources – working for them again because it would improve their journalism about events in Gaza.

If anything, Israeli media are eager for more sources in Gaza – especially during times of conflict, and especially sources that speak good Hebrew. The importance of Hebrew-speaking sources should not be underestimated, especially for broadcast journalists. For example, during the November conflict Israeli media relied heavily for the Hamas perspective on a Gaza resident named Ribhi Rantisi, who speaks fluent Hebrew – although as it turns out, Rantisi no longer has any official affiliation with Hamas at all.

Ultimately, Hamas’ media ban makes it look worse, not better. Palestinian journalists said they felt the decision to cut communications had been hastily made, without proper thought of the consequences.

One journalist said the move demonstrated that even in its communications, Hamas demonstrated a security or police mentality that was “a little childish”, and which contradicts freedom of speech. Another Palestinian reporter described it, simply, as “stupid”.

A journalist from a pro-Hamas station argued that although you need a policy for dealing with international and Israeli media, it doesn't work to simply cut them off.

One *Ha'aretz* editor said that the decision to cut contact was ultimately Hamas' loss, because *Ha'aretz* gave Gaza issues more coverage than "all other media combined".

Across the board, journalists hoped that Hamas' harmful policy would soon be reworked.

Abeer Ayyoub, who wrote for *Ha'aretz* newspaper until the ban was imposed, explained how she sees this problem in an April 10, 2013 interview with the London-based Index on Censorship. She said: "Basically I think the gap between civilians on both sides will be widened. We only know about their government, and they only know about ours. The things that I wanted to write about were what normal, everyday people are doing — people like me or my family and friends: we hate the on-going conflict. We believe in resistance, but things are not like the normal depiction of Palestinians in the media, which is likely to portray us as inherently violent."

Lack of journalist solidarity

Need for concerted action by Israeli journalists

There are a number of bold journalists in the Palestinian Territories and Israel who go out of their way to speak up on behalf of media freedom for all journalists, and ensure that their colleagues from "the other side" have the access they need to do their jobs.

These efforts deserve much praise, especially because they are the exception rather than the rule.

The IPI delegation had the impression that although individual journalists and media houses cooperate on a strictly professional basis to help each other report stories, and although representatives of journalist institutions have made strong efforts on behalf of their colleagues on the other side, there is almost no public solidarity between the sides on broader press freedom issues.

While some Israeli media do sometimes report on press violations against Palestinian journalists carried out by Israel, there is little coverage of the frequent and systematic rights abuses carried out against the Palestinian media. While Israeli journalists have made serious efforts to help Palestinian colleagues, the delegation was not aware of any public statements issued on behalf of Palestinian journalists' rights to freedom of movement.

The IDF is frequently implicated in raids on Palestinian media, the physical attack of Palestinian journalists, and other press freedom violations, but these receive little coverage in the Israeli press.

Further, restrictions on freedom of movement for Palestinian journalists should be of great concern to the Israeli public (and thus the Israeli media) because they ultimately affect how the conflict is covered.

But this issue is rarely addressed and certainly doesn't seem to have received sustained attention by major Israeli journalism institutions.

Palestinian Journalists Syndicate in the West Bank

Distressingly, some members of the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate (PJS) in the West Bank are now urging Palestinian Authority officials to tighten restrictions on their Israeli colleagues who come to the West Bank.

As of May 2013, Israeli journalists were reportedly going to be forced to apply for press credentials if they wished to report from the West Bank, where they had previously been free to enter. In response to a petition signed by 200 Palestinian journalists, who were protesting what they perceived as preferential treatment for their Israeli colleagues, the Palestinian government said it will now require Israeli journalists to apply for passes, leading to fears among Israeli journalists about what the colour and extent of the restrictions will be.

The PJS basic law also contains troubling clauses that forbid its members from “any activities of normalization in the field of journalism and media” with Israelis, on threat of expulsion. Obviously, this policy hinders the ability of individual journalists to cooperate professionally with Israelis, although journalists on both sides would benefit greatly from the contacts, information and insight of their colleagues. This provision not only hinders journalistic solidarity; it directly contradicts that principle and the principle of free association – and indeed journalists who appear at events with Israeli colleagues have been threatened or harassed.

Journalists already say that human-interest stories about Palestinians are under-reported, so the thought of restrictions that might make coverage even more superficial and political is deeply worrisome.

Need for stronger institutions

Journalists show much more solidarity with colleagues on their own side of the conflict, with journalist associations in Israel and the Palestinian Territories holding strikes, and staging demonstrations and walk-outs in support of press freedom and journalist rights.

It should be noted that there are more Israeli institutions set up to deal with journalist rights and press freedom than there are in the Palestinian Territories, including journalist associations, the Press Council, and several NGOs.

Unfortunately the network is not as broad for Palestinian journalists. Certainly there are key NGOs, such as the Palestinian Center for Development and Media Freedoms (MADA) in the West Bank and the Doha Centre for Media Freedom in Gaza, that raise awareness of press freedom violations. However, several

journalists remarked on the need for a Palestinian press council and a Palestinian organization to monitor local media coverage.

The PJS, which recently undertook steps to update its enrolment, has taken steps to speak out against press freedom violations by the Palestinian Authority, and appears to be more active than before, according to local journalists. Because of the West Bank PJS's perceived affiliation to the political party Fatah, and because journalists said they didn't feel they could rely on the PJS to help if they were in trouble, many have not updated their membership with the group for years.

Palestinian Journalists Syndicate in Gaza

Following the rift between Fatah and Hamas, the Palestinian Journalists Syndicate also split, and so the institution in Gaza, on the other hand, is perceived as being close to Hamas. They work on separate issues; for example, the Gaza group said they are working to help Palestinian journalists more freely cross the border with Egypt.

The PJF representative also noted the PJS in Gaza would be open to working on freedom of movement between Israel and Gaza on a reciprocal basis, for example if Gaza journalists could travel to Jerusalem on one hand, and Israeli journalists to Gaza.



Camera operators in Gaza get ready to film a demonstration on Feb. 17, 2013. Photo: KjetilHaanes.

Conclusion and IPI Delegation Recommendations

Not all of the factors that shape conflict coverage are problematic. It is to be expected that media will display a certain level of patriotism and that they will define what is in the interest of their audience, especially in a situation of conflict. It is also to be expected that media will reflect the priorities and values of their owners. Individual journalists should also be allowed to exercise their conscience in their reporting. It is clear that the philosophies and values and the people who own and work for a particular news organization will give it its individual character.

So long as journalists make sure that they scrupulously adhere to ethical standards of fairness and accuracy, and painstakingly avoid incitement and hate speech, there is nothing wrong with media having a particular perspective.

More problematic are external forces that affect editorial decisions against the will of journalists. Unfortunately, market forces are a reality for news companies around the world, and there is no simple solution to the fact that news consumption habits are changing and that the resources available to many newsrooms are shrinking. People cannot be convinced to pay for products that they don't want.

But there are policies and practices that are bad for reporting because they violate press freedoms, which can be changed. There are far too many instances in which security forces in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, as well as members of Hamas, have been involved in the harassment, intimidation, physical attack, and jailing of journalists. Censorship and self-censorship are of concern across the region. Restrictions on freedom of movement affect reports by Israeli and especially Palestinian media, as do policies that block journalists from accessing officials on the other side. Lastly, journalists and journalists associations in Israel and the Palestinian Territories would be well served by consistently and systematically defending the rights of their colleagues across the Green Line.

To that end, IPI and the IPI delegation make the following recommendations.

Recommendations:

1.) End restrictions on freedom of movement for Palestinian and Israeli journalists in Gaza, Israel and the West Bank.

- A.) The Israeli government should take steps to formally recognize the existence of Palestinian media organizations, and grant journalists working for those organizations appropriate accreditation that can be recognized by the Israeli military, for example GPO cards, and should provide Palestinian journalists with the necessary permissions to report from Israel.
- B.) The Israeli army should conduct sensitization training for soldiers working at checkpoints in the West Bank so that they are aware of the rights and duties of journalists. Soldiers should accept that press accreditation cards

- issued by the International Federation of Journalists (IFJ) confer the rights of journalists on their bearers, including the right to freedom of movement.
- C.) The Palestinian Authority should continue to allow Israeli journalists to report freely from the West Bank
 - D.) Foreign and Israeli journalists should be able to report from the Gaza Strip.

2.) End efforts to influence editorial content through censorship or threats

- A.) The Palestinian Authority should refrain from attempting to control Palestinian media and journalists through rewards and punishments. Government owned media should serve the interests of the public, and not the political interests of the government.
- B.) The Palestinian Authority must end the practice of jailing journalists on accusations of defamation or insults. It is the role of media to criticize the President and other public officials, and press freedom rights protect that criticism – even when it is ribald or offensive.
- C.) Hamas and the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah should end the practice of intimidating or jailing journalists. It should ensure that rules on how the media is regulated are determined through an inclusive process that takes press freedoms into account, and are not a result of political decisions taken to benefit the authorities.
- D.) The Israeli government and its ministries should refrain from exercising political control over the publicly owned media. Government owned media should serve the interests of the public, and not the political interests of the government. The Israeli public broadcaster has a reputation for independence and it would be a loss to the people of Israel for it to be weakened now, especially when so many commercial media outlets are struggling.
- E.) Israel and the Palestinian Authorities should commit to investigating alleged attacks by Israeli or Palestinian security forces against journalists, in order to end the cycle of violence.
- F.) The Israeli courts should consider permitting a journalists representative to be present when gag orders are being instituted, in order to ensure that press freedom is taken into account and that gag orders are instituted only when absolutely necessary for national security.

3.) Improve journalists' access to official information

- A.) All branches of the Israeli government should make sure that key speeches, statements and press conferences are always translated into Arabic. This also prevents misunderstandings.
- B.) Hamas should reverse its policy of banning cooperation and contact with Israeli journalists and media, because it is a violation of press freedom, and because it will have a negative impact on reporting about the Gaza Strip.

4.) Journalists should show solidarity on press freedom issues. A violation of press freedom for one journalist is a violation for all journalists.

- A.) Palestinian journalist institutions should defend their Israeli colleagues' right to work freely in the West Bank and Gaza, and should defend their

own right to work with any contacts and sources they want in order to do their jobs properly, including Israeli journalists.

- B.) The Palestinian Journalists Syndicate in the West Bank should lift its ban on cooperation with Israeli journalists, because this ban does not further the goals of journalism.
- C.) Israeli journalist institutions should consider taking a formal, concerted and public stand in favour of Palestinian journalists' rights.
- D.) All media should adhere to a code of conduct and refrain from hate speech and incitement, which serve no useful function. They should do their utmost to ensure that all reports are accurate and fair.

Annex: List of People & Meetings

This report would not be possible without the generous support of the Norwegian Foreign Ministry.

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Jerusalem

- Tehilla Schwartz Altshuler, Head of Media Reform Project, Israel Democracy Institute
- Gal Berger, Palestinian Affairs Correspondent, IBA (Kol Israel Radio)
- Dalia Dorner, President, Israeli Press Council
- Ruth Eglash, Journalist, *The Washington Post*
- Shaike Komornik, Foreign Relations Committee, Jerusalem Association of Journalists
- Rula Manassa Bassal, Head of Arabic Press Branch, Government Press Office
- Hanoch Marmari, Chief Editor, *The Seventh Eye*
- Oren Persico, Journalist, *The Seventh Eye*
- Nidal Rafa, Producer, France24
- Nicolas Rosenbaum, Senior Editor, IBA (Kol Israel Radio)
- Daniel Rubinstein, Columnist, *Calcalist*
- Najwan Simri Diab, News Producer, Al Jazeera
- Haim Shibi, Foreign Relations Committee, Jerusalem Association of Journalists
- Ronni Shaked, Columnist, *Yedioth Ahronoth*
- Danny Zaken, Chairman, Jerusalem Association of Journalists

Ramallah

- Wadea Awawdy, Editor, *Hadith al-Nas*
- Walid Batrawi, Director of Projects, BBC Media Action
- Mohammed Daraghmeh, Correspondent, Associated Press
- Hossam Ezzedine, Correspondent, Agence France-Presse
- Mohammed Hawwash, Correspondent, *Annahar*
- Aref Hijjawi, former Chief Editor, *Al Hayat Al Jadeeda*
- Nabhan Khraishi, Communications Officer, Palestinian Journalists Syndicate
- Abdelnasser Najjar, Chief Editor, *Al Ayyam*; President, Palestinian Journalists Syndicate

Bethlehem

- Nasser Allaham, Chief Editor, Ma'an News Agency
- Fadi Abu Sada, Correspondent, *Al Akhbar*
- Fadi Al Assa, News Editor, Radio Bethlehem 2000

- Charlotte Alfred, Journalist, Ma'an News Agency
- George Canawati, Manager, Radio Bethlehem 2000
- George Hale, Senior Editor, Ma'an News Agency
- Nida' Ibrahim, Journalist, *Jerusalem Post*
- Bishara Kuttab, Administrative Director, Palestine News Network
- Monjed Jadou, Chief Editor, Palestine News Network

Tel Aviv

- Rotem Avrutsky, Chairman, Tel-Aviv Journalists Association
- Uri Blau, Journalist, *Ha'aretz*
- Yoel Esteron, Chief Editor, *Calcalist*
- Lily Galili, Author & Journalist
- Joseph Jackson, Committee Coordinator, Tel-Aviv Journalists Association
- Yossi Melman, Journalist, Walla! News
- Anat Saragusti, Executive Director, Agenda
- Yana Suryadnaya, Correspondent, Knesset Channel

Gaza

- Ali Abu Afash, Programmes Manager, Doha Centre for Media Freedom
- Sakhre M. Abu El Oun, News Editor, Agence France-Presse
- Yasir Abu Hean, Head of Palestinian Journalists Syndicate - Gaza
- Rami Abu Qamar, Al Quds Voice
- Mohammad Al Rais, Engineer, Al Aqsa TV
- Ibrahim Barzaq, Correspondent, Associated Press
- Ahmed Dawoud, Production Director, Al Aqsa TV
- Suad Abu Dayya, Correspondent, Kuwait TV
- Wael H. Dahdou, Correspondent & Gaza Bureau Coordinator, Al Jazeera Network
- Wesam Maqoussi, Al Quds Voice
- Abdullah Meqdad, Al Quds Voice
- Nagham Mohanna, Correspondent, CCTV
- Said Radwan, TV Director, Al Aqsa TV
- Naser Sharkawi, Al Quds Voice