



International  
Press  
Institute

I.P.I.

# Flags and Barriers

Essays on Reporting from  
Israel and Palestine



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Institute

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*The views expressed by the authors in the following essays are not necessarily those of the International Press Institute.*

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# Introduction

By Naomi Hunt

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The conflict in Israel and Palestine has continued unabated for over half a century and despite, or perhaps because of, global and regional efforts, no lasting peace has been found.

Into the mix come journalists and the mass media, the channel through which the public receives and interprets news and information about the conflict and about the peace process.

The role of journalists is to provide accurate, fair coverage and context about events that matter. Their job is to uncover reality and hold political leaders on all sides to account. In short, they should serve the public. But in times of conflict, the question is: which public?

Political differences are not the only wedge between journalists in Israel and Palestine. A slew of physical barriers hinder local newsgatherers, who often have less freedom to travel between and within Israeli and Palestinian areas than their foreign colleagues.

Restrictions on movement are coupled with other limitations on journalist rights. Palestinian media workers, in particular, face the threat of raids, imprisonment and attack by both Israeli and Palestinian authorities. Those operating in the Gaza Strip face the toughest conditions of all, from travel restrictions, to fear of reprisals for critical reporting, to the threat of armed conflict.

In the following short essays, journalists from Palestine and Israel were asked to reflect on how local media covers the conflict and other news. These pieces have been organized here into four broad sections. The first chapter explores different ways in which the news is skewed, especially Israeli and Palestinian coverage of the Arab uprisings. The second chapter looks at the tension between being a patriot and a good journalist. The third section describes some of the day-to-day restrictions that hinder reporting and build frustration. In the last section, the authors suggest ways that

Israeli and Palestinian journalists can minimize the impact that these hindrances, both psychological and physical, have on their work.

Several of the authors on both sides asked to withhold their names or write under a pseudonym because of the sensitivity of these issues.

We hope that these essays offer some insight into the challenges that Israeli and Palestinian media face. Moreover, they show that journalists on both sides of the conflict identify many of the same problems and also recognize the same solution: placing professionalism above patriotism, and ensuring that press freedoms are protected.



# Chapter 1

## Skewed News

# Challenging the Army's Narrative of Events in the West Bank and Gaza

By Lisa Goldman

The Israeli media's coverage of events in Palestine is quite poor. Far too often, the IDF spokesperson's statements are reported at face value, with reporters failing to ask difficult questions that might undermine the army's narrative. Editors, too, are reluctant to publish too many stories about Palestinian events because they believe the public is not interested. I wonder, though, if the public has lost interest because the media has failed to make the story of Palestine compelling and nuanced.

Israeli reporters almost never attend Friday demonstrations in the West Bank. Usually, Army Radio and the Israel Broadcast Authority quote the IDF spokesperson's summary of these events as straight news. On many occasions, driving back to Tel Aviv following a demonstration in the West Bank, I've heard the radio announcer report that there was an illegal and violent riot in a Palestinian village (or in several villages), and that the Israeli army was forced to use crowd control measures. Palestinians are never interviewed, and

no questions are ever asked. Why was there a demonstration? Were the Palestinians armed? Did they attack the soldiers? What danger did they present to Israeli security?

For the listener who is unfamiliar with these demonstrations—i.e., the vast majority of Israelis—the impression is that there is some symmetry of violence here. There are never any basic questions asked, such as why the Palestinians are demonstrating, what an illegal riot is, whether it is possible for Palestinians to obtain a permit to demonstrate (no) and so on. Most Israelis have no idea why the Palestinians of Bil'in, Na'alim, Nabi Saleh and other villages are protesting. They don't absorb that the demonstrators are unarmed, and they don't see why there might be a problem with fully armed soldiers entering a Palestinian village and dousing it in tear gas, rubber bullets, and skunk gas. Mainstream Israelis have a vague impression that these demonstrators are potential terrorists who threaten the security of Israel.

When Jawaher Abu Rahmah, a 42-year-old resident of Bil'in, died after inhaling tear gas at a weekly demonstration on 31st December 2010, the army claimed she had a pre-existing condition. The mainstream Israeli media reported the army's version. No-one called the Palestinian physician who had treated her; nor did they interview her family or other eyewitnesses, who included Israeli activists. According to the attending physician, who offered Ms Abu Rahmah's medical records to the media,

she had no pre-existing condition. The army insisted that it had not used unusually large amounts of tear gas, but photos showed that the village was blanketed in clouds of tear gas. The Israeli media did not interview the Palestinian physician; nor did they publish photographs of the tear gas clouds.

The IDF spokesperson's monopoly on the narrative was particularly egregious during Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli military invasion of Gaza in 2008-2009. The media was prevented from entering Gaza, while the spokesman's office inundated Israeli editors with a glut of information: photos taken from drones, statements from officers in the field, and so on. There was no way for the editors to verify the veracity of this information first hand, because there were no reporters in the field. The only way to obtain an eyewitness account would have been to contact a Palestinian reporter in Gaza, which some reporters and editors did do, but not often. Given deadline pressure and competition from rival news outlets, most editors published information supplied by the army spokesman without verifying it.

The result of a longstanding policy of taking the IDF spokesperson's statements at face value is that the media is—intentionally or not—perpetuating the official Israeli narrative and reducing the Palestinians to caricatures. I would like to discuss how we can change this—assuming we want to. And we do, right?

# On Not Depicting the Other Side in Coverage of the Arab Spring

By Lara Habash

When reading Israeli newspapers about the revolutions and demonstrations that took place in the region, and even when looking at what politicians said at international conferences, we noticed that the Israeli reaction towards the Arab Spring expressed clear delight. This is because these demonstrations were supposed to topple dictators and bring in democratic regimes. The democratic countries would not fight with each other, but would cooperate amongst themselves. As a result, the new Arab world would become preoccupied in settling its own internal affairs, and would not think about the Palestinian issue, and would be less hostile towards Israel.

However, this delight soon turned into worry and gloom as Islamists emerged and won elections. Israel realised that the revolutions would not bring about liberalisation, but would rather bring in forms of political Islam that are hostile to Israel. As a result, the Israeli press began talking about the "Arab Winter" or the "Islamic Winter".

On the topic of Syria, there is huge interest in the Israeli media and among its followers, who

rely on Arab media reports from Syria for information. In general, coverage is distinctly hostile towards the current Syrian regime. It is better for Israel if Syria becomes engrossed in a civil war, though Israel boasts that it stands for democracy and freedom of expression.

Israel's main interest in the Arab revolutions, which the Israeli press dealt with at length, is their repercussions on Israeli national security. If the coverage of the Israeli press on the Arab Spring were fair, it would express delight in the democratic change. However, Israeli media has dealt with the Arab Spring from a security perspective alone.

Arab media depicted Israel as the main benefactor of the old despotic regimes, which were shown to directly serve the strategic interests of Israel. Consequently, change poses a threat to Israeli national security. This change will weaken Israel's position in the region and increase the influence of Islamic movements including Hamas. Additionally, a democratic transition will cause Israel to lose its ability to claim that it is a democratic island in a sea of totalitarian regimes.

In my opinion, the Arab press makes do with official statements issued by Israeli agencies and think tanks. I have not seen a single article or analysis (including research and investigation) dealing with the way Israeli press covered, or the stance of Israel on, the Arab revolutions.

# The Earth is Shaking in Egypt

By Gal Berger

Friday, February 11, 2011, six p.m. The country's televisions are tuned to Egyptian TV. Expecting a dramatic announcement, we wait. Omar Suleiman appears on the screen. This man, head of Egyptian Intelligence, who until now has been seen in Israel as one of the strongest men in the Middle East, seems, for the first time, worried. Low spirited, dejected. He makes a short announcement lasting just a few seconds, no more. A few seconds that will change the Middle East forever: Mubarak has resigned, has succumbed to the masses. Thirty years at the helm couldn't overcome the protesters in the public squares. That's it. The end of an era. On my Facebook page, I commemorate the moment with one word: history.

Friday, February 11, 2011 was, in the eyes of average Israelis, the tragic nadir of what is now known as the Arab Spring. Mubarak was never perceived here as a dictator, or as a tyrant oppressing his people; we always saw him in a two-dimensional, some would say self-serving, way. After all, he's the man who preserved the peace with Israel, as cold as it had become. For us it was enough. We had always respected him: the media referred to him as President of Egypt, Hosni Mubarak, unlike his contemporary to the west, Gaddafi, whom

we called "ruler"—a title normally reserved for tyrants. Maybe our gratitude to Mubarak for helping preserve the peace had blinded us over the years, but even on the day he resigned, we couldn't see him as a dictator. In our blindness, we hadn't seen his people's burning hate, which suddenly erupted in front of our eyes like a volcano.

Losing our strategic ally, our gatekeeper of peace on Israel's southern borders, Black February took us by surprise. We were angry with the Egyptian masses. Why did they do this to us? We felt betrayed. And in our heads we wondered if he could really be hated that much, and where all that hate came from. Was it possible that we knew better what was good for the Egyptian people? We were also angry with Mubarak for letting us down and not saving the day. He left us alone in the centre of the Middle Eastern ocean, in the eye of the storm.

None of the commentators here predicted it; no-one believed that Mubarak would give up so quickly, without a battle. The arrogance, decisiveness, finality of many journalists and commentators here turned to silence, embarrassment, and self-flagellation. In an attempt to calm things down (or perhaps to calm themselves down), some said the day belonged to the Facebook and Twitter generation, who kept popping up on foreign channels claiming that this was a democratic revolution of young people with a modern, Western orientation. So despite all the radical sermons heard in Tahrir Square, the calls against the Jews (Khaybar,

KhaybaryaYahoud), the anti-Western slogans, journalists and commentators were blind to the facts once again. There were those who were quick to call this the Islamic Revolution, a Khomeini-style revolution. In Egypt, they crowned the Muslim Brotherhood a rising force, the country's next rulers. But during the parliamentary elections a year after the fall of Mubarak, everyone was surprised by the rise of another force, more radical still—the Salafi movements, which no-one here ever took into account. In Egypt, apparently, they thought differently.

In Israel, our understanding of both Egypt and the rest of the Arab world comes through a smokescreen. Israeli journalists still cover and explain news from afar, from a convenient distance, far from reality. Nobody can predict the future, in the same way that nobody was aware of the undercurrents bubbling there for so many years. The sensible lesson—humble news coverage—was not learnt in the case of Egypt. We still view Egypt through a narrow-angle lens: is what's going on there good for us Israelis, or is it bad? Is Egypt joining the bosom of Islam? What will happen to the peace agreement? These questions are asked, for example, in reports about any of their presidential candidates. We need to know if he is for us or against us. And what about whether this or that candidate would benefit Egypt or not? Well, sorry, those are their problems, not ours. But is that really so?

"Bashar al-Assad massacres his people."  
This, phrased in various ways, is the headline

seen recently in the Israeli media. Sometimes I wonder how we would have covered a similar event in Egypt, had Mubarak not succumbed to the masses but started bombing towns and villages in the region of Cairo. I wonder what the reaction of the Israeli media would be in that scenario. Would the headlines also scream "massacre!", or would it have been something along the lines of "Mubarak attempts to defeat the rebels"? With Assad, there's no dilemma; everyone knows we have much less love for him. But what if it was Mubarak? We'll probably never know.

# Israeli Media Serving the Official Narrative

By Muhammad Yunus

*(Note: This essay was written several months before the November 2012 conflict in Gaza)*

No sooner had the latest Israeli military operations been launched in Gaza last March 2012 than another, similar war was launched in Israel's media.

The pictures, reports and interviews in Israel's media during the military operations seem as if they were same ones that we saw, heard and read when the Second Palestinian Intifada broke out: Israeli officials wearing military uniforms discussing war operations and progress in killing the "terrorists" who were planning to kill Jews, analysts commending the army and presenting information from security services, pictures of the Iron Dome and columns of smoke rising from cars, blown up bodies...

The Defence Minister, Ehud Barak, looked down at us from the screens of every television station, announcing, "We will strike all those who strike us with an iron fist...the Iron Dome gives us the power to fight back..."

Analysts followed him on those stations and in those programmes and news bulletins, echoing his words: Ehud Yaari on Channel Two described the Palestinian Popular Resistance Committees as "the Mafia", and another analyst talked about the success of the army in making the Islamic Jihad Movement pay an enormous price...

I was always an admirer of Israeli media because it dealt with internal affairs with an audacity not found in Arab media. I worked on this when I entered a career in journalism. I often used the model of the Israeli media to train Palestinian and Arab journalists to conduct bold interviews with government officials, and to conduct bold investigations into governmental institutions, banks and religious communities. But the Israeli media goes to war on the side of the army when the issue at hand is related to Palestinians. Then most news consists of pictures, reports and statements from military and political institutions.

In the latest military operation, this media presented Israelis with a fake, made-up image of the war that was real only in the minds of the government and the army commanders who directed the attacks in Gaza to fulfil their military and political aims.

Israeli analysts working for newspapers and research centres present more reasonable reports, but television and radio stations and even basic news reports are another story –

the army's story. They show officers, pictures and reports that strengthen that narrative and present the Israeli public with an illusion called the War on Terror.

In every confrontation with the Palestinians, Israeli media renounces its role of conveying information to the Israeli public, and voluntarily takes on another role, by helping officials fabricate an illusion and sell it to the Israeli public.

In every new confrontation with the Palestinians, Israeli media hastens to switch from a modern form of media to a form of media found in third world countries, the countries among which Israelis are constantly fighting to prove that they do not belong.

# About Women

By Anat Saragusti

It happens every time. An invisible hand working behind the scenes weaves the unified image. The all-male picture. The picture we have all become accustomed to, and we do not even ask ourselves why. That moment when the entire TV screen is painted with men and only men.

It happens always at events of national or international importance. The events that require seriousness, authority, maturity, professionalism, interpretation, stern expression, and national responsibility. We all know them. These events glue us to our TV screens and radio receivers as we track the drama taking place in the here and now.

It happens when the prime minister meets with the president of the United States; it happens in events related to the conflict with the Palestinians, in negotiation meetings; it happens with coverage of the Arab Spring; it happened when the Palestinians submitted to the UN the request to be recognised as a state. It happens so often that we no longer notice it.

The moments when television screens, radio channels and newspapers are filled with faces, voices, and names of men who enter and leave TV studios explaining and interpreting events.

Yes, there are some women, but on the all-male sets, these women are often perceived as ornaments or gimmicks rather than anything important, although most of these women are serious, articulate, and prominent journalists. But their presence does not change the picture; it simply highlights the absence of women.

And of course next to these excellent women, there is a long, long list of commentators, scholars, experts, broadcasters, journalists, speaker—and they are all men.

Why does it matter? This question is asked automatically. Indeed, what does it matter who says what, who presents the report, the data, who helps us understand reality?

But I want to argue that this is important. It is important for several reasons:

The first reason is that the all-male picture does not reflect reality off-screen, where there is a female majority.

The second reason is that this all-male image subconsciously conveys the message that only men can be authoritative, only men can interpret reality, only men are professional enough to give us the full picture. Only men can. And this influences how we, unconsciously, as a society, treat men as authoritative, active, and superior, and women as inferior and passive.

The third reason is that this all-male parade into our lives delivers us a very specific reality—the reality of men. And we all know that men and women see things differently: women's reality differs to the reality of men. Anyone in an intimate relationship with someone of the opposite sex knows that; we don't need piles of research to prove gender difference.

Does this dominant focus on the all-male image come from the fact that most of the producers, editors and directors in the media are men, and they are not familiar with another image? If so, it's time to make a change.



## Chapter 2

# The Job of Journalists

# Identity Crisis – Being a Journalist in a State of War

By Uri Blau

The most widely circulated Israeli newspaper today, *YisraelHayom* (Israel Today), runs under the motto 'Remember we are Israelis'. But what does this actually mean? That we should always take the side of the state? That we should know to make the right choice when a journalistic truth we are about to print might offend Israelis? That we shouldn't publish things that might harm the Israeli spirit?

In March 2009, I published a feature in *Haaretz* revealing certain Israel Defense Forces soldiers' design choices that were printed on shirts ordered to mark the end of their training. I learned that images of dead babies, mothers weeping on their children's graves, a gun aimed at a child, and bombed-out mosques were common. The slogans accompanying the images were not exactly anaemic either: a t-shirt for infantry snipers bears the slogan 'Better use Durex' next to a picture of a dead Palestinian baby, with his weeping mother and a teddy bear beside him. A sharpshooter's t-shirt from the Givati Brigade's Shaked Battalion shows a pregnant Palestinian woman with a bullseye superimposed on her belly with the

slogan, in English, '1 shot, 2 kills'—and these are only a few examples.

A few months ago, I gave a lecture to a group of young Israelis and presented them with this feature for discussion. The most common reaction did not relate to the content and meaning of the article, rather to the effect the feature would have on the image of Israel: 'You are an Israeli, so why do you choose to write about these topics? It serves the enemy', they said. Looking back, I realise I cannot count the number of times I've heard this sentence following an article I published. It comes from friends, family, and people I don't know, sometimes with an additional curse for emphasis.

Unfortunately, it is not only the general public that expresses this attitude, but also journalists and editors. They, too, are members of Israeli society, many of them believing in it and acting upon their beliefs. Others simply think that most of their readers don't want to deal with such negativity, so why annoy them? This kind of approach leads to the current situation, found in most of the Israeli media today: very limited coverage and an ethnocentric approach, which means that most of the public sees only one part of the picture.

I can understand this dilemma is difficult. Each of us possesses an endless list of identities that define us: I, for example, am a Jewish male, an Israeli citizen, and resident of Tel Aviv. I am also a son to my parents, brother to

my siblings and cousin to an IDF soldier. I am many other things, and, yes, I am also a journalist. And as part of the media, when you write about the Israeli–Palestinian conflict, IDF activities, the West Bank, the settlements, and many other topics, the clash between the "Israeli" and "journalist" identities is almost inevitable.

I think I can formulate my own solution to this schizophrenic problem with a slogan that can be used as a vision in any newspaper: 'Remember you are a journalist—and remember what that means!' I am afraid many working in the media have forgotten one truth: a journalist has the responsibility to provide as much information as feasible for the public and to provide the public with as many tools possible to judge its surroundings. This means you have to publish the truth, any truth, no matter what the truth is, whether you like it or not.

# Autoimmunity

By Wadea Awawdy

The media tends to emphasize negative phenomena and to colour reality in black or in “black and white”, but usually it reflects the truth.

The data from a socio-economic survey published by the Galilee Centre in 2011 showed that Arab society in Israel is not well and is suffering for a number of objective and subjective reasons.

This was clear from the number of school drop-outs, from poor academic records, and an epidemic increase in the number of smokers, chronic illnesses, violence and unemployment, especially among women.

In addition, the numbers warned of an unprecedented housing crisis in the next decade, which will not only affect those who cannot find shelter.

These negative results didn't cause a stir when they were published, because socio-economic and political crises serve to remind us of the everyday reality. There is a possibility for progress despite official racial discrimination, and to blame all of our problems on Israel and the occupation without looking at our own faults will lead to nothing but talk.

The conclusion reached by following up on the Galilee Centre's data and the daily news in the newspapers is that giving social education classes a deserving space in the school curriculum could have lessened the number of dangerous occurrences, such as children being run over outside their homes, or the number of vehicular accidents, which occur twice as frequently among Arabs in Israel as among the general population.

The same goes for workplace accidents, which have begun to claim a victim per week. These are not the result of fate, and could be avoided with due caution and better safety measures, despite the conditions of low-paid jobs. Sometimes, it is enough to just don a helmet to save the life of a worker. And these are just a few examples.

But much of Arab society in Israel is still stuck in a rut blaming discriminatory Israeli policies and being part of the “we are right” group. They do nothing but blame Israel without really trying to break through its barriers in order to achieve some gains.

Fighting on the external front may be easier than trying for self-improvement, but will the political and local leadership succeed in making serious gains externally if the internal front is weak, chaotic, fractured, and if the individual comes before the group?

Most of the challenges today and tomorrow that are revealed by the Galilee Centre

survey and others present a new reason to change upper leadership and rework its priorities, starting with education reform and local governance.

This will only become a reality by electing the High Follow-Up Committee for Arabs in Israel in a direct manner, because even though it has been reformed and reconstructed, in its current form, based on quotas, and with a dated outlook, it is too weak to make any real progress. It is not capable of tackling challenges, retaining any gains made, or ploughing a way towards building a real citizenship in Israel.

This process will not, as some believe, lead to the isolation of the Arab citizens or a deepening of tensions with the Israelis; on the contrary, this is a launch pad for dialogue with the Jewish majority in search of different configurations that will serve both parties' goals.

The real test of the Jewish majority of democracy is how much they respect the rights of the minority. However, the minority has to give reassurances. Despite the difference in numbers we are behaving like a majority because we are surrounded by Arab countries, whereas they are behaving as a minority for the very same reason.

The weakness of the local Arab media and its lack of critical perspectives are exacerbating the situation. It should offer broader perspectives as a first step to creating the necessary change.

# Distractions: Wag the Dog

By Lily Galili

*(Please note: This essay was written in early 2012)*

Sometimes I wonder if we, the media, are terribly lazy, slightly stupid, or simply gullible. None of these options are particularly pleasant, but each could explain why it is so easy for any establishment—the politicians and their advisors—to distract our attention away from what is unpleasant but really important and focus it on news that is easier for them to deal with. Piece of cake, really. In the everlasting competition over agenda setting between media and politics, the media rarely has the upper hand. One totally irrelevant statement made by a second-degree politician, not to mention the Prime Minister or Minister of Defence, and we immediately drop the agenda we considered crucial just five minutes ago, and walk eyes wide shut into yet another trap prepared especially for us.

In Israel, it's usually the peace process with the Palestinians—or rather the lack of it—that is hidden by distraction created by shrewd politicians. A recent example: Some time ago Israel was up in arms against a segment of the Orthodox population that had forced women to sit at the back of the bus. For

days, this disgusting incident dominated the media, which had, until then, been busy trying to raise a feeble voice against the stalemate in the peace process. All officials were more than happy to condemn the incident in sound bites. They nurtured the story intentionally, knowing the gullible media would eat right out of their hands. And indeed we did. We followed them like an obedient herd. Who even remembered the failure of futile negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians in Jordan, let alone bothered to ask hard questions about what had happened there? Most Israelis had no idea this meeting even occurred. Yes, we can blame the fatigue factor—who wants to hear more of the same?—but it's certainly not a valid excuse for the media to just drop the issue when it's convenient.

The peace process is not the only example. Let's look at Iran. I have a confession to make: I don't know if Iran has a nuclear bomb, and I don't even know if Israel has any real intention of bombing Iran. I only know that, whenever in distress, like when the renewal of social protest threatens in Israel, politicians, Netanyahu in particular, opt for the bomb. Verbally, at least. At a carefully chosen moment, some politician who knows absolutely nothing makes noises that make him sound terribly important and existential, and suddenly the social agenda, poverty, and unbelievable income gaps disappear off front pages to make room for the "bomb". Another victory for politicians who have no idea what to do with the social programme (and don't really want

to deal with it); another failure for the media. A classic case of Wag the Dog, the must-see movie for every journalist, in which a smart producer makes up a virtual war to save the failing campaign of an American president. The nation—with the help of its patriotic media—unites around its president fighting a just but non-existent war.

I often feel like the dog being wagged. I'm just afraid that in some not-remote future a real war might be triggered just as a distraction, a spin. Peace? Political agreement? When was the last time the media raised the issue or started a public debate with focus on THE question that defines our life in the Middle East?

Politicians and their entourage are getting more and more cynical. Media, on the other hand, are getting poorer and weaker. It's a dangerous equation if we stick, out of fear or simple laziness, to the formula offered by Wag the Dog.

# Missing the Point in Arab Spring Coverage

By Yana Suryadnaya

Just a couple of years have passed, and already the phrase 'Arab Spring' has become quite banal. The power of the tens of thousands of human beings that sacrificed themselves on behalf of the Arab Spring has been lost. When an Israeli reads that tens of thousands have died in the past two years in Syria's civil war, it doesn't particularly impress him; he doesn't stop to consider the huge number of people, each with his own life story that disappears behind a brief headline reporting unfathomable death, unless that individual's death confronts us in a shocking photograph. We see the thousands as a single bloc of people without any significance, without any value—all similar, all the same. And the way we perceive a story in Israel is based on how the media presents it.

A journalist tells the story, and the average person sees that story only through the journalist's eyes. But often, as in the case of Syria, a journalist in Israel first gets the story through someone else's eyes, either through those of a foreign journalist who managed to enter the burning country, or through those of opposition leaders who conveyed their version of the truth to him.

Media coverage of events in Arab countries has been reduced to daily reports on the number of army deserters and refugees, of people killed and of cities bombed. It's difficult to rely on the material from news agencies to tell the story in the way that you might like to tell it. It's also difficult, two years after the never-ending tumult and confrontations in the ravaged country, to continue to produce personal stories about those who were killed and those leading the revolution, and still to stir emotions, to shock. But without emotional stories, there is no way to have an impact, to genuinely influence the way a journalist ultimately should.

Without those stories, it is impossible to reach the heart of the viewer/reader, or to influence leaders' decisions. The Arab Spring has, again, clearly shown us how hypocritical the world is, how much of what in the West is called democracy is a game of interests. In places in which it is convenient and financially and politically profitable to arbitrate, the West intervenes and begins, ostensibly, to build a so-called "democracy". Recent incidents are condemned. This is accompanied, at the most, by economic sanctions, which can't really have any impact in a short period of time. Other places—many African countries and Syria—are ignored. As one of the rebels in Homs asked: Why isn't anyone intervening in the slaughter here? Is it because we don't have oil?

Recently, the situation has changed a little. World powers are now more worried about the situation in Syria, but for the wrong reasons.

What troubles them is a possible transfer of chemical weapons from Syria to Lebanon and the rise of radical powers, a fear that is forcing world leaders to negotiate with each other. But not enough is being said about the hypocrisy of those superpowers, and their real faces are not being sufficiently exposed; the pressure that the media should exert is not being sufficiently exerted. Even from the media's perspective, with the story of the Arab uprisings being relegated to the sidelines, not enough is being said in order to shame leaders.

It's true that here in Israel we do not have many ways of relating to individual aspects of the overall Syrian story. It's true that for a journalist to get a close-up look at what is happening there could cost him his life. But with the means at our disposal, as journalists, we should do more, say more, and try to be more influential.

# Israeli Media Can't Imagine a Partner for Peace

By Anonymous

It's easy for Israelis to say that the end of the peace process was in 2000, when former Prime Minister Ehud Barak announced, upon his return from the Camp David peace talks, that "Israel had no partner for peace." And indeed, since then there has been no reason for that feeling to change.

People usually choose their views from a number of available options. Yet only a few ask questions and challenge the framework in which they live. The rest get their views from the media. Yet ever since that Camp David event, and even more so since the unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip, the media doesn't talk about peace. Neither the process nor the possibility of it. So no option is placed before the average Israeli.

It is true that the peace process is dying. It's also true that, along the way, we helped it die. In the past decade, the peace process has barely been aired for public debate, and certainly not in a way that would allow people to consider the two-state solution. And, for the most part, no attempt has been made to challenge the "no partner" perception. This is

the case despite several other prime ministers who've said during the past decade, and not just once either, that there is a partner for peace on the Palestinian side.

Yossi Verter, political commentator for Haaretz, said at a conference a few years ago: "In Israel, we think that if the situation is calm, there's no need to talk about and promote a peace process. And if there's a conflict, why should we speak of peace?"

He is right. But there's more to it than that. The media doesn't have to report on the process when it's not there, and doesn't have to come up with the idea of peace when there's a conflict around. But it definitely could look at things a bit differently and broaden the scope of the discussion.

Barak's concept of "no partner" has taken root so well mainly because there was no attempt, either before or after Camp David, to look inside Palestinian society. Reporters who cover Palestinian matters are usually those also covering the Israeli settlements. Mostly they are males from a religious/traditional background. (I can only think of two women who have covered that region at some stage, but both are not doing that anymore.) The motive behind this is clear: the reporting is based on good relations and an ability to understand the settlers, their issues and ambitions, etc. And that is fine. But not when there's only one such reporter.

How different could the reporting have been if a woman was doing it? We can only guess. There's a small clue if we look to reporters covering military affairs. These days there are two women in the mainstream media doing this job. One of them, as well as being a military correspondent, has also become known for her focus on the service conditions of soldiers and the interrelations of various elements within the IDF. So here we have more than mere coverage of military affairs; we have a broader picture.

We would have enjoyed exactly the same picture had it also been applied to the Palestinian population, reminding us that maybe, just maybe, a partner may actually be spotted on the horizon. With reports about village people, on how things are in Ramallah, on the daily life of common people and on their economic, security-related and educational hardships, perhaps, by chance, we would have also discovered a partner. Or at least would have allowed our viewers, listeners, and readers the option of imagining that one might exist.

# The Power of Pictures

By Danny Rubinstein

More than ten years ago, two photographs were taken in the Palestinian Territories that had a crucial impact on Israeli and Palestinian public opinion. The photographs were published across the media in Israel, the West Bank and the Gaza Strip, in Arab countries and around the world. Their political importance cannot be overemphasized.

The first photograph is of the killing of two Israeli soldiers who inadvertently entered Ramallah. They found themselves in the midst of a funeral of a young Palestinian who had been killed in a confrontation with the Israeli army. The soldiers were taken to the Ramallah police station, where a frenzied mob entered and killed them in front of a large crowd that had gathered on the street.

In Israel, and not only in Israel, everyone is familiar with the photograph that is called The Lynch in Ramallah, which shows a horrific picture of a soldier being thrown from the second-floor window and a mob of youngsters beating him to death. After this, a young Palestinian appeared in the window of the police station from which the soldier was hurled, showing his hands covered with the blood of the Israeli victims.

This photograph etched itself in the consciousness of the Israeli public as proof that the Palestinians are cruel barbarians. Since then, whenever there is a dispute, however small, between Jews and Arabs, the Israeli announces, 'I thought the Arabs were about to lynch me'. This often gives Israelis the right to harm the Palestinian, in the belief that they were in danger of being lynched.

A further consequence is the lucid, graphic image of blood on their hands, which the Israeli authorities use as a reason to refuse the release of Palestinian security prisoners.

Since then, Israel has done everything possible to publish these horrific photographs worldwide, while, from the beginning, the Palestinian Authority tried to prevent it. The Italian television reporter who photographed the event also became embroiled in the recriminations.

The second, possibly even better known photograph, is of the child Mohammed al-Dura, who was shot dead in the arms of his father at the Netzarim intersection south of Gaza city. The shocking photograph made a tremendous impact in the Arab world and presents Israeli soldiers as being unbelievably cruel. The name Mohammed al-Dura is widespread in the Arab world; films have been made about him and various institutions have been named in his honour.

A legal battle has been raging for years

about this photograph, with many people in Israel claiming that it is a fabrication concocted by a French television station. The film remained controversial in 2013: a new report commissioned by Israel claimed to have evidence that the footage was doctored and that the boy had not been killed during the incident; on the other hand, Mohammed's father and TV channel France 2, which had originally aired the footage, said that Israel's findings were biased and wrong.

These examples are proof of the power the picture has in the communications discourse in our conflict.



# Chapter 3

## Obstacles

# The Role of the Arab Revolutions in Press Freedom

By Anonymous

By liberating the press from some restrictions, not least self-censorship and subordination to the ruling regime, the Arab Revolutions have reminded the Arab world of values that had disappeared. For decades dictators sacrificed press freedom, creating a wide gap between the media and the masses, which have a right to know the truth. But now, both in Tunisia, where the revolutions and the Arab Spring started, and in Egypt, several newspapers and private and independent television and radio stations have since surfaced, courageously adhering to professional media ethics.

In Palestine, though, the media did not take advantage of the Arab Spring. This was not least because of the unique situation in the Palestinian Territories, which is divided between the two opposing parties, Fatah and Hamas, as well as the West Bank and Gaza.

Despite the positive vocational and technical progress made by Palestinian media, many media houses line up behind specific opposing factions; several publications are still instruments for one party or another. At the expense of the truth, this direct political

participation expands the gap between the media and the people and saps the trust it should instill, leading to press freedom being further thwarted and suppressed.

Journalists are variously summoned for interrogation, arrested, and prosecuted in Gaza and the West Bank, usually on criminal allegations that are often proven to be far from the truth. In the first quarter of this year, many were optimistic that press freedom horizons would broaden after the agreements for Palestinian reconciliation in Cairo and Doha, but then violations by the Israeli army against journalists through arrests and strikes during the coverage of events, particularly in the West Bank, killed that hope.

Israel's policy of restricting movement deprives journalists, foiling their ability to report effectively. In the Gaza Strip, only a very, very small number of the approximately 1100 journalists are allowed to travel to the West Bank, and in the West Bank most journalists are not allowed to go to Jerusalem or Israel, or to travel between cities in Palestine.

Palestinian journalists need freedom of movement, and must fight against the restrictions imposed by the local and Israeli authorities; just as their colleagues in free-press countries, Palestinians should have the right to stability in work and daily life.

# Slow Down, Stop... There is a Checkpoint Ahead

By Anonymous

My daughter was not yet three years old, and it seemed to me that her difficult questions had started too soon. We were on our way home from a celebration in Bethlehem, a distance of not more than five minutes from our house in Jerusalem. We had spent an enjoyable time in the city, an enjoyable time with our daughter.

On our return journey, we chose the quickest route to our house, the Checkpoint 300 road, as they call it in their language. Many of our roads have been named after the checkpoint found on them, or vice versa, the checkpoint adopts the name of the nearest street, village, camp, or tunnel. It is necessary to name the checkpoints to distinguish them for there are many in our country.

We arrived at the checkpoint. There was not a long queue of cars waiting to be searched, so we decided to stay and not drive to the quicker checkpoint further away, which is named the Tunnels Checkpoint, through Beit Jala. At the Tunnels Checkpoint, the settlers also cross into the West Bank, so the checkpoint is more elegant than Check-

point 300: the lanes increase in number and the checkpoint is more like the border between two countries. There things happen more quickly.

You can sometimes get lucky and convince the soldiers you are a settler, so you are not forced to stop at all. If your features betray you and one of them doubts your identity, he will stop you and ask you in Hebrew, "How are you?" If you have perfected the reply in Hebrew and say you are excellent, or at least very good, you will pass the checkpoint safely. If you stutter and reply with hesitation, angry after waiting for so long, speaking Hebrew with an Arabic accent, you will usually be asked the next question, "Where are you from?" Your answer this time will settle the issue.

If they discover you are Arab, you will definitely be moved to the right lane, the lane for Palestinians and foreigners. There you will stop and wait again for your turn to be searched. There, no one will ask you, "How are you?" There, they do not care how you are, or about your anger, your mood, your joy, your grief, your illness, or about how much time you have spent, or rather wasted, at the checkpoints. There, they don't care.

More than a quarter of an hour passed while we were waiting and our daughter began to get restless.

"Dad, why have you stopped?"

"We're at the checkpoint, darling."

"Where is the accident?"

"Checkpoint, darling, checkpoint. Not accident." (The two words are similar to each other in our language, and to a child the word for checkpoint sounds like the word for accident).

"What does checkpoint mean?"

"Darling, the checkpoint is where soldiers stand and inspect people and their identities."

"Why?"

"Because... (God damn it)..."

"Come on, Dad, just go..."

After this, first came the tears and then...

"Dad, I need the toilet!"

How could we convince her to relieve herself in the open, or at the checkpoint, or in any place not designed for that purpose? It had only been a short while ago that we had taught her that one should only go in a specific place. How could we explain to her why there was a checkpoint and what the occupation is? How could we teach her not to hate the other, when she saw the other dominating her playtime, her joy and the place where she relieved herself? Our daughter's crying increased, our anger increased, and our wait was long.

# Getting Across to the Seventy Percent

By Anonymous

*(Please note: This essay was written in early 2012)*

The Gaza Strip is a story untold, a question mark for many Israelis, because its story is almost totally silenced in the Israeli media. Israelis interested in the reality of living by Israel's southern borders need to know the truth about Gaza, but neither Israeli media nor the world media report the Strip's narrative. But this is not due to the media's laziness or lack of interest: the blockade on the strip and Hamas's rule of fear against the media prohibit Israeli journalists from entering the area and prevent Israeli newspapers from using local freelance journalists on the ground.

Yet it was at the height of a military conflict some years ago that the Israeli public got a rare glimpse into the Gaza Strip, into the home of one Hebrew-speaking Gazan doctor, Dr Izz A-Din Abu el-Ayash. A regular guest on Israeli Channel 10, Abu El-Ayash's distraught voice dramatically penetrated the Israeli conscience when he called Channel 10 reporter Shlomi Eldar live on air just moments after the his house was bombed by the IDF, and his three daughters killed. In horror, he called his friends and contacts to beg for help. Shlomi Eldar, broadcasting to the nation at the time,

held his phone to his microphone, bringing to the Israeli public, for the first time in years, the raw tragedy of innocent Palestinians dying.

Abu El-Ayash spent most of his life treating patients in both Israeli and Palestinian hospitals and was a well-known voice on Channel 10, so both the harrowing broadcast and the empathy he received from his Israeli friend, I believe, influenced Israeli opinion regarding the bombings in Gaza.

This, however, was an isolated incident, a lone voice screaming from behind the blockade. Unfortunately, Gazan authorities outlaw social media to stop dissenters from mobilising local and international support, and lean on local reporters to use their reports to preclude any popular uprising. Similarly, Israeli authorities prohibit journalists entering the Gaza Strip, citing safety and related political considerations. So, while open and direct coverage of events in Gaza could encourage internal pressure on the Hamas leadership, the possibility of rational news coverage is neutralised.

According to a 2011 poll, 70% of the Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank opposed the Gaza rocket launchings. If journalists were able to approach the population freely, giving dissidents the freedom to express themselves, public opinion might influence leaders, pushing them toward political pragmatism instead of Islamist radicalisation. As long as the blockade continues—internally by Hamas, externally by Israel—we will not know.

# Freedom of Movement and its Effect on Media Coverage

By Lara Habash

Freedom of movement is the fundamental condition for the freedom of expression, which is the basic principle behind freedom of the press. Having physical access is essential, as the journalist is then the first witness to the event that is taking place. Restricting freedom of movement for a journalist has an impact on his credibility and on his ability to report what is happening around the world, because he cannot get to the source of the event to report the information and facts as they are. Consequently, what he does report will not be authentic. If the journalist depends on a witness other than himself—for example, if he covers events via television, or if he relies on wire reports—his credibility is weakened. Coverage from the heart of the arena always differs entirely from coverage from outside.

I would like to address three aspects of the freedom of movement for a Palestinian journalist:

*Firstly: Freedom of movement within the Palestinian Territories:* Palestinian journalists face several obstacles in being able to move

freely within the Palestinian Territories. For example, when the Second Intifada broke out in 2002, Israel prevented several foreign and Palestinian journalists from accessing the location of events with the barriers it had put in place, and it declared the hot spots closed military zones. Israel thus placed restrictions on the movement of the foreign and Arab press, which all then began to rely on what other agencies were reporting. Thus the coverage was not objective, accurate or complete, particularly with respect to humanitarian issues.

For example, when clashes were at their peak in Jenin and Nablus, as well as in Palestinian regions, it was impossible for the Arab press and the foreign press to access those regions, take pictures of the victims and convey the image of the real humanitarian situation. On the other hand, when the explosions – the suicide operations – took place in an Israeli region like Jerusalem, all the roads would be open for the foreign press to get to the area of the explosion. As a result, the West thought that most of the victims were Israelis. This in turn led to Western public opinion sympathising with the Israeli people, as it was the Palestinians who were targeting unarmed Israeli civilians!

*Secondly: Freedom of Movement from the West Bank to the Gaza Strip and vice versa:* The restrictions that Israel has imposed do not give journalists of the West Bank access to Gaza, and vice versa. It is ironic when we say that Palestinian journalists can travel to all the

countries of the world except Gaza! Israel's refusal to give them permits to enter the Strip has an impact on the unity of the Palestinian people as a whole. It is the right of journalists from the West Bank and Gaza to exchange information, as it is this information that will form public opinion and allow the residents of the West Bank to get to know about the Palestinian community in Gaza and vice versa. If I, as a Palestinian journalist, were allowed to enter Gaza, there are several issues I would like to write about, such as the economy, social customs, the political balance and the difference between Hamas in the West Bank and Hamas in Gaza.

*Thirdly: Freedom of Movement inside Israeli Territory:* Israeli journalists are the only ones in Israel who can move completely freely in Palestinian regions except Gaza, while Palestinian journalists do not enjoy such freedom of movement, and cannot even access Israeli regions. As a result, the Palestinian press receives information from the Israeli press and translates it into Arabic. If a Palestinian journalist was allowed to move freely in Israeli territories, he could write about the Israeli community, its ethnic make-up and more.

There is another important issue I wish to point out, that of self-censorship, which restricts some topics being published. The existing conflict between Fatah and Hamas and the restrictions that the two parties impose on the press have an effect on the quality of the reports and the stories that Palestinian journalists publish. The journalists have several

considerations that make them refrain from publishing news, such as their fear of threats from the party or the centres of power in society, or their fear of accusations of using terminology that harms the reputation of the nation. This contradicts journalistic principles. I can say that a Palestinian journalist does not have complete freedom of expression. Self-censorship has increased, particularly after the divide.

As for Israel, it has two standards in dealing with press issues. Regarding internal Israeli affairs that are not related to security, there is a lot of freedom of expression. However, when the matter is linked to a security issue, specifically relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict, Israel changes into a security state that imposes rules and regulations on both Arab and Israeli journalists. If a Palestinian journalist wants to report news relating to Israel, he faces several obstacles and challenges, the most important of them being the inability to access sources of information, especially sources for security issues. A Palestinian journalist does not receive information from an Israeli politician as easily as an Israeli journalist does.

There is also no room for comparison, as Israel deals with Israeli press differently to the way it deals with foreign and Palestinian press.



# Chapter 4

## Steps in the Right Direction

# Cooperation to Bypass Barriers, Censorship and Silencing

By Danny Zaken

Long before the Internet era, in which nearly everything is revealed and open, we needed other ways of bypassing prohibitions and censorship. The most enjoyable was, and still is, cooperation between reporters on both sides of the barrier.

Initially this wasn't a conscious decision. As a correspondent for the Itim news agency, I received stories from Palestinian colleagues. For example, a journalist from Jenin once told me how traders in the city had criticized a number of strikes that were affecting their livelihood. The item was published the next day in an Israeli newspaper, and a day after that it was covered in two Palestinian newspapers that used a quote from the Israeli media. The journalist who had given me the story worked for one of those Palestinian papers. At first, I didn't make the connection, but the penny dropped when I discovered more and more instances: the journalist who had given me the information didn't publish until I did.

After I realised what was happening, things only got better and took on different forms. When Palestinian journalists could not obtain confirmation from the Israeli security authorities because they did not have access to them, they worked through me. It was easier for me to verify the stories, or at least to obtain a reaction, and after I published them, they were transferred to the Palestinian media.

This also worked in the opposite direction, albeit differently. News items from Israeli sources that I was unable to verify on the Palestinian side were transferred to my fellow journalists, who checked them, obtained answers, and of course published the story in their newspapers if possible. The restricted freedom of the press became the freedom to copy, and the problematic access to sources on the other side didn't really disturb the process if there was someone who had better access to them.

In extreme cases, Palestinian sources would pass a story on to an Israeli journalist, like me, to serve their own interests. At the beginning of the 1990s, for example, a Palestinian figure in Ramallah gave me a list of the names of candidates for a parliament that had not yet been established. The aim was to get the list published first in Israel and then reprint it in Al-Fajr and, in this way, to examine reactions in Ramallah to a list that apparently

came from outside. My publishing it caused quite a storm, and the person who gave me the list, a Fatah member, was indeed elected for parliament.

This method bypassed restrictions from both Israeli and Palestinian authorities that limit freedom of the press, and minimized threats to the journalist's personal safety that would have arisen if he himself published sensitive information, instead of ostensibly copying a news item that was published by someone else.

The method requires trust and reliability between the partnering journalists because, in fact, this is a co-production. The publishing journalist is dependent on a source that is actually more than a source: he is a journalist with a story that has been examined and cross-checked. As this transfer is indeed a two-way street, with stories running in both directions, journalists on both sides have an interest in maintaining credibility, and they will not send a story to the other side that is not precise and trustworthy, or that, heaven forbid, is false.

One story will serve as an example: an officer in the Israeli Civil Administration used to demand and receive bribes from Palestinians in return for entry permits to Israel. One journalist who needed a permit approached the officer, was told to pay the bribe, and refused. He didn't receive the permit, but his name

was entered on a list of those prohibited from entering Israel, allegedly for security reasons. Although he wanted to publish the story, he feared that he would lose his chance to ever obtain an entry permit. I got the story and examined it discreetly with a reliable security official. An investigation was conducted, and the corrupt officer was arrested and jailed. The story was published without the name of the Palestinian journalist – who subsequently applied for and received a permit.

In conclusion, cooperation of this kind has enormous advantages. It creates a win-win situation, without which it is impossible to cover the other side properly.

# Unprofessional Media Terminology Strengthens the Culture of Hate

By Anonymous

It may be that the relationship between Palestinian and Israeli media is based more on enmity and disharmony than on convergence and mutual understanding. You often feel that you are in a battle whose soldiers are numerous journalists. It is as if they are fuel for the politicians. Many of the terms used by media on each side increase the hatred and bring us further from peace, which we are otherwise striving towards.

Among these terms are the words “resistance” and “terrorism”. Palestinian media considers its citizens armed resistance fighters, while Israeli media describes them as terrorists. A significant increase in the culture of hate between the Palestinians and Israelis has appeared simply based on these differing terminologies.

It appears that political rhetoric between Israel and Palestine makes the culture in the region's official and semi-official media very difficult to change. However, it could be possi-

ble to encourage independent journalists and independent media institutions to use professional terminology that is more neutral, in the same way international news agencies do, by developing an effective and creative initiative, led by journalists, academics, and lawyers who have influence in their communities.

There are whispers of change, but any change is difficult and risky because each community bears enmity and prior hatred, and is further hindered by the failure of political leaders on both sides to achieve a breakthrough in the settlement process. All the avenues open to an independent politician feel closed, and the possibilities for journalists striking out alone are limited.

In light of the complexities of the situation, individual initiatives seem the best option for bringing about change in popularised media terminology in Palestine and Israel without neglecting to demand that politicians remove obstacles on the road to freedom of the press. Therefore, European journalists are of utmost importance in pushing towards press freedom and providing the necessary climates, such as the IPI has, for example by organizing workshops to discuss similar issues.

# Israeli Journalists Should Defend Press Freedom for Their Palestinian Colleagues

By Lisa Goldman

At almost every demonstration I have covered in the West Bank, I have seen Israeli security forces harass Palestinian journalists—even when they show their press credentials. I've seen soldiers smash photographers' lenses; I've seen them shove journalists, threaten them, arrest them and shoot tear gas directly at them.

I've also seen Israeli security forces harass Israeli and international correspondents, but far less frequently. But I've never seen soldiers arrest them. A Palestinian journalist, if arrested, is treated just like a political prisoner. As a Palestinian Authority resident, s/he can be held without charge for weeks, denied an attorney, and even be tried at Ofer Military Court.

Palestinian journalists have been ineligible for Israeli Government Press Office

cards for more than a decade. There are a few exceptions—mostly amongst Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem, such as Atta Awisat, a photojournalist who works for Yedioth Aharonoth. Awisat has suffered violence and humiliation at the hands of Israeli security officers, but he told me that his GPO card is more important than his national identity card. As a Palestinian, he explained, he cannot roam around Jerusalem with sophisticated camera equipment. Soldiers automatically stop him and demand to see his identification; but once he shows his GPO card, they let him go. The same is true when he passes through military checkpoints.

Three years ago, during the routine annual renewal of GPO cards for Yedioth Aharonoth reporters, Atta Awisat was suddenly, without explanation, denied a new card. This would have meant the end of his professional career. Photography is all he knows—he has been a professional for more than 20 years—and he supports a wife and two children.

Shilo De Beer, who was then editor-in-chief of Yedioth Aharonoth, responded to the GPO by announcing that none of his staff would accept GPO cards until Atta's was issued, and that if the GPO refused to issue him a card, then Yedioth would issue its own press cards. Ultimately, Danny Seaman, who was then the director of the GPO, backed down and issued Awisat a new card.

True, Yedioth could afford to make a strong statement because it was the biggest and most important mainstream newspaper in Israel. But I do feel that Israeli journalists can do much more to speak up on behalf of their Palestinian colleagues—particularly in cases when we are all covering the same event but only the Palestinian journalists are harassed. And I think we should consider a boycott of the GPO, pending reversal of its policy to refuse accreditation to Palestinian journalists.

# Time for New Voices in Israeli-Palestinian Peace Negotiations

By Ruth Eglash

*(Note: This essay was written in early 2012)*

The meetings between Israelis and Palestinians initiated by Jordan earlier this year were met in the region with a wide range of disparaging views, from tired apathy to utter disdain and downright cynicism.

However, as the media reported only glimpses of the closed meetings and focused mainly on the disputes and disagreements between the two parties, what seemed sorely missing in the discourse was a critical look at how the same old players are keeping us in paralysis, and how there needs to be a way for younger, perhaps more hopeful, voices to be heard.

Just days after Israeli-Palestinian peace negotiators Yitzhak Molcho and Saeb Erekat clashed yet again in one of the Jordan meetings, thousands of young people from across the Middle East gathered together online, for

an event that seemed to set a new standard for mutual understanding and partnership between Israelis and Arabs.

The virtual conference, which was the organised by the Facebook-based group YaLa Young Leaders, brought together more than 12,000 people from across the region and attracted some high-level dignitaries, such as Jordan's Prince Hassan bin Talal, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, blind opera superstar Andrea Bocelli and Barcelona football coach Pep Guardiola, among others.

While the event only lasted two days and was a one-off meet, the YaLa movement, which is supported by Peres Center for Peace in Israel and the Ramallah-based NGO Yala Palestine, has an overwhelming 63,000 supporters on its Facebook group indicating that there is a solid base of people committed to finding a way to resolve the on-going conflict.

The movement is not only about the one-click "like" button but it continues to foster interaction and discussions in a non-threatening tone conducive to future similar endeavours. Already Yala is working to create other forums that can bring all Middle Easterners together to learn more about the interests they have in common.

In other areas online too there are groups of young people who have come together

to express their wish to find peace, despite the fact that the same old leaders continue to fight over the same old points. Just last month, Facebook developed a new app that could monitor interactions between Israelis and Palestinians; in one day there were more than 36,000 connections!

In another instance, two ordinary Israelis reached out to the Iranian people via Facebook with an anti-war message. The grassroots initiative received heart-felt responses from the Persian nation and garnered great support in Israel too, the message from both sides was that it is the leaders who cannot make peace, not the people.

While editors might roll their eyes at reporting again and again on such co-existence initiatives, especially those that exist only in the virtual realm, the truth is that the virtual conversation is slowly becoming a reality for many people, and perhaps it is time for the media to boost these grassroots movements, giving them more credibility than those leaders that continue to meet and rehash the same points without any solid conclusions.

As expressed recently by President Shimon Peres, while peace might not have stood a chance in the past, thanks to Facebook there is now hope!

# A Modest Suggestion for a Simple Guide

By Yoel Esteron

Let us remind ourselves what we can do and what is beyond us. Journalists should remain journalists, not soldiers in the battlefield and not politicians in official negotiations. We should not fight, and we should not aspire to solve the historical conflict between Israelis and Palestinians. It is not our duty. At the same time we need to be accurate and honest, fair and humane and especially careful not to make the conflict even worse with inflammatory words and images on our screens and pages.

For many years Palestinian journalists have rallied to the national cause. They have operated under the premise that they should represent their people, whom they perceive as the only victims in this conflict. Unfortunately, many Palestinian media outlets have been publishing lies and falsehoods meant to portray Israelis as monsters, and have praised terrorist acts and showed jubilation over the deaths of Israelis in gruesome attacks.

At the same time, the Israeli media cannot absolve itself of all blame. Many Israeli jour-

nalists and editors have simply given up trying to understand the Palestinians. The views of the Palestinians have not been given fair representation and almost no one has bothered to describe their suffering. The TV channels downplayed, and sometimes hid, the losses of the Palestinian side from their viewers. In the newspapers, dead children don't get as much as a line on the front pages.

The media on both sides have allowed the distinction between terrorists and innocent citizens to become hazy. They have deprived the victims on the other side of their humanity. Often, victims were forgotten, lost in translation. Many have died without their names or photographs ever making it into the papers.

Now, as Israelis and Palestinians are exhausted and would not even care to listen to politicians trying to advance reconciliation between the two peoples, the media must rethink its role. It is too easy to demand that Palestinians and Israelis commit themselves to "ending the incitement". That would be too general. As I said in the horrible days of the second intifada, we need a kind of a guide for journalists that will serve them in the coming years, especially at critical moments when enemies of the peace plan try their best to drown it in blood.

To formulate a guide for journalists, we don't need the masters of vagueness. The issues are clear. They can be compressed into a few simple rules. Let's try a modest suggestion:

The media on both sides will: (a) report on all incidents in an impartial and factual manner; (b) refrain from publishing rumors and baseless accusations; (c) give fair representation to the opinions and views of the other side; (d) portray the suffering of the other side and treat its victims with dignity and sensitivity; (e) refuse to become a sounding board for individuals and organizations that promote terror and violence.

These are sketchy rules, of course, and we can amend the language to everybody's satisfaction. But we need to agree that we are willing to adopt some rules. A simple guide for journalists could be a start.





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