Media Bias Against Israel

Where to Begin?

The media's treatment of Israel has been among the Jewish State's most vexing challenges. Most major media organizations have reporters based in Israel, an open society that affords journalists – domestic and foreign – access to policymakers, the military, and the general citizenry. Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza are, globally speaking, a very confined area. When conflicts arise, hundreds of additional journalists flock to Israel and rush to the border, sending back reports on the fighting in real-time.

It should be no mystery to reporters based in Israel that the Jewish State faces implacable enemies. And yet that message rarely gets through. If it does, it's done grudgingly. Simplistic explanations abound, including the “Palestinians as David, the Israelis as Goliath” underdog argument, which translates into “understanding” of violent “resistance to the occupation.” Or maybe the media organizations that the reporters represent hew to an ideological viewpoint – which just happens to be identical to those writing or broadcasting the stories themselves. The editors and the headline writers back home, far removed from the action, seal the deal by summarizing already biased stories.

The early summer demonstrations in Gaza last year produced a Washington Post story headlined “A day of gas inside a Gaza ambulance,” which focused on Palestinian medics who treated the wounded near the border fence separating Gaza from Israel. The opening lines in this seven-paragraph story tell you immediately, without reading further, where this story is going:

The first patients don’t come until 5:39 PM. They crowd around the ambulance, choking on tear gas. Israeli soldiers, just a few hundred yards away on the other side of the boundary fence, had fired a volley of hissing canisters at the protesters.

The article includes an interview with a Palestinian paramedic, which included the following – not a quote, but the reporter’s own paraphrase of the interviewee: “It doesn’t compare to the stress of the 2014 war, though, when he spent his days in the ambulance worrying about his family’s safety as Gaza came under heavy bombardment from Israel and Hamas fired rockets back.”

Wait a minute: wasn’t it Hamas that fired the rockets into Israel first, and then Israel that defended itself with airstrikes against Hamas targets?

Playing fast and loose with hearsay and unsubstantiated charges was rife during the Friday protests in Gaza. Casualty numbers were attributed to “Gaza health officials.”

Let’s consider an egregious example of bias, carried by multiple media organizations: the case of Layla Ghandour, the Palestinian baby said by the press to have died from tear gas inhalation during the demonstrations. It was later reported that the baby had actually died due to a heart condition and Hamas had paid the family to lie about the circumstances. Try to find more than a few “clarifications” of this story, in print or on the air. You won’t.

For days, the press reported on the carnival-like atmosphere of the demonstrations, mentioning picnicking families and ice cream vendors. Even after a Hamas official boasted that more than 50 of those declared dead in the demonstrations were Hamas operatives, most media organizations went with their “mostly peaceful protest” stories, rarely mentioning the revelation about the 50, and playing down Hamas’ central role in the whole affair, including the torching of Israeli farmland and nature preserves by fiery kites and balloons.

Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran publicly call for and seek Israel’s destruction. Terrorists can strike anytime at Israelis, ramming pedestrians with cars and bulldozers, stabbing people on the street, or attempting to kidnap civilians and soldiers. Israel’s right to defend itself and be at peace with its neighbors should not be in question. But many journalists don’t report it that way, choosing many times to give those who seek to destroy Israel a free pass.

It is our right to call out those who engage in advancing a tainted narrative and set the record straight – sometimes multiple times a day – when the media does not present the full picture.

This opinion piece is adapted from an article appearing in The Algemeiner in August 2018.

Daniel S. Mariaschin has spent nearly all of his professional life working on behalf of Jewish organizations and is the Chief Executive Officer of B'nai B'rith International.