

## ANALYZING DISCREPANCIES IN U.S. MEDIA COVERAGE OF RUSSIAN AND ISRAELI INVASIONS

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



The conflict in Gaza has become a focal point for public discourse on all media platforms. Individuals, driven by their perceptions, are actively engaging with and responding to this issue. Today's youth is characterized by a heightened sense of rationality, critical thinking, and keen observation. They meticulously analyze and compare historical facts, contributing to a global audience that is closely monitoring the coverage of international news by Western media.

Many globally notice double standards in how conflicts like Israel-Palestine and Russia-Ukraine are depicted in Western media, especially the U.S. Users on social media highlight inconsistencies, particularly in the language used to describe resistance efforts. These disparities fuel discussions on media fairness and objectivity, drawing scrutiny from audiences seeking analytical and nuanced perspectives on global events.

Throughout the Russia-Ukraine conflict, President Biden and his administration have maintained a clear stance. They emphasize that if Russia stops its invasion of Ukraine, the conflict would end. Conversely, they argue that if Ukraine ceases its defense against Russia, it would lead to Ukraine's downfall. Conversely, the same administration has frequently labeled the resistance and fighting of the people of Gaza against Israeli occupation as 'acts of terrorism.'

In news broadcasts, anchors are chosen for their adeptness at manipulating language and using tones that evoke emotions in the audience. They strategically craft narratives to vividly describe scenes of war. For instance, when reporting on Israel, they use words like, Israeli civilians 'tragically

killed' in ' Hamas attacks,' describing the deaths of Israelis as more horrifying and brutal than those of Palestinians, using the language to further the propaganda of dehumanization of Palestinians.<sup>1</sup> However, in contrast, when covering Palestinian news, the language used is significantly different describing Palestinian victims as 'casualties' resulting from 'collateral damage' in the conflict's war zones.

The language utilized in news coverage reveals a significant contrast. There is a tendency to employ intense and harsh terminology specifically aimed at Hamas, whereas Israeli actions are often portrayed using more neutral terms, often framed as mere retaliation. This imbalance in the intensity of language can deeply influence viewers, subtly fostering unconscious biases. The framing of the narrative may inadvertently shape individuals' perceptions, predisposing them to particular biases without conscious awareness of the underlying nuances. This technique is a hidden weapon used to stop and hide the extent of damage that Israel has caused in Gaza.<sup>2</sup> There has been a recent observation regarding New York Times changing the headline from 'Israeli attack' to 'just explosion' in the context of incidents in Gaza's hospitals, and further attributed these explosions to misguided missiles launched by Hamas.<sup>3</sup>

Another tactic involves the consistent use of the term 'Israel-Hamas war' in all media platforms. This framing implies that the conflict is solely between Israel and Hamas militants, categorized as a terrorist group. Consequently, it suggests that Israel's primary targets are terrorists within Gaza rather than civilians. This rhetorical strategy, termed euphemism, contributes to shaping a perception of Israel primarily engaging in self-defense rather than causing harm to civilians. Additionally, news coverage highlights the events of October 7, depicting it as an unprovoked and forceful occupation of the holy land by Hamas militants. The narrative suggests their aim was to establish an Islamic Palestine state within Israel's borders attributing the current crisis in Israel primarily to Hamas. This narrative offers a limited perspective and neglects crucial aspects such as historical context, piling casualties, issue of illegal settlements, and Israeli systemic control.

This media bias, emphasizing a singular narrative, initiates a form of information warfare where words serve as weapons. The battle on social media platforms revolves around shaping perceptions, omitting crucial details, and steering public understanding. This deliberate manipulation of language

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1 Maqsood and Ong, 2023, "Language Is a Powerful Weapon in the Israel-Palestine Conflict", News Lies Magazine,

<https://newlinesmag.com/argument/language-is-a-powerful-weapon-in-the-israel-palestine-conflict/>

2 John Shobha, "Israel Palestine war: Lopsided Language in Media Coverage", Outlook, December 10, 2023, <https://www.outlookindia.com/international/israel-palestine-war-lopsided-language-in-media-coverage-magazine-335592>

3 "After Hospital Blast, Headlines shift with changing claims", *New York Times*, 18 October 2023, <https://www.nytimes.com/2023/10/18/business/media/hospital-blast-gaza-reports.html>

and information often leads to confusion, frustration, and a lack of comprehension regarding the fundamental issues and realities of the conflict. Furthermore, this media bias serves political objectives by subtly diverting public attention from achieving a comprehensive understanding of the situation. Consequently, individuals may become indifferent or apathetic, allowing political agendas to advance without significant opposition. The war of words in the media sphere not only impacts public opinion but also plays a pivotal role in the broader geopolitical landscape.

A notable tactic involves actively limiting pro-Palestinian content while simultaneously boosting pro-Ukrainian content on Facebook, X, and Instagram. Observations reveal that these social media platforms restrict and delete pro-Palestinian content, citing reasons like spreading misinformation and displaying violent material. For example, Meta recently removed the Facebook page of Quads News Network (QNN). Moreover, bloggers and social media activists have noted a decrease in the visibility and engagement of their video posts, indicating the application of tailored algorithms aimed at suppressing interaction with pro-Palestinian content.

In contrast, content related to the Russian invasion has faced less stringent restrictions and has been disseminated more freely on these platforms. This asymmetrical treatment in content moderation raises concerns about potential bias and the selective promotion of certain narratives, influencing the discourse surrounding these geopolitical events.

### **Double Standards, Denial, and Disparity**

Following the Russia-Ukraine conflict, the U.S. implemented a series of sanctions against Russia, including measures such as targeting Russian-led businesses, imposing an oil embargo, instituting trade and banking restrictions, freezing assets, and endorsing a boycott of social interactions with Russia and its citizens in both the U.S. and Europe. However, in contrast, the U.S. did not take similar actions against Israel. Instead, it enacted Anti-Boycott laws, commonly known as anti-Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction laws (Anti-BDS laws). These laws are strategically used to maintain and strengthen U.S. influence and hegemony in the Middle East, particularly through its alliance with Israel. Stemming from the Palestinian initiative, the BDS (Boycott, Divestment, and Sanction) movement against Israel prompted the U.S. to respond with anti-BDS laws, to preserve friendly relations with the State of Israel.

The United States consistently employs assertive measures, among which are the Anti-Boycott laws.<sup>4</sup> Discussions are often silenced, and sometimes individuals may avoid starting conversations

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<sup>4</sup> "Israel, Palestine, BDS, and the right to boycott in the US", *Aljazeera*, Take, January 5, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wQTGUAB-ZUo>

altogether. Many are obligated to abide by contracts that explicitly forbid boycotting or expressing dissenting opinions against Israel. Compliance necessitates either endorsing Israel or remaining silent on the issue. This requirement forces employees to conform to avoid potential penalties like sanctions, job loss, or other serious repercussions.

A parallel situation is observed for businesses, investors, and all U.S.-based enterprises, where refraining from boycotting Israel's business propositions, particularly those associated with illegal settlements in the occupied West Bank, is a prerequisite.<sup>5</sup> This directive extends to every governmental entity, encompassing police departments, universities, and other institutions, necessitating compliance with legislation that prohibits engagement in political boycotts or related campaigns.

Presently, anti-boycott laws are adopted by 37 states in the United States. Numerous entities, such as the American Legislative Exchange Council (ALEC), have played a pivotal role in the advocacy and implementation of these laws.<sup>6</sup> ALEC's model bills have had a profound impact on each state, leading to the widespread adoption of anti-boycott legislation throughout the country. However, ALEC has come under increased scrutiny for its role in promoting controversial legislation, including anti-BDS laws. The organization's political influence is evident in its successful navigation of these bills through various states, partly due to support from influential lobbying groups such as the American Center for Law and Justice (ACLJ), a right-wing Christian evangelical organization. The interconnected relationships between these groups have facilitated the passage of these bills with minimal opposition.

This underscores the influence of lobby groups committed to shielding Israel from accountability. These laws not only impact equity and justice movements but also significantly restrict freedom of speech. Ideally, individuals, political entities, and organizations should have the right to express their political views and engage in nonviolent boycotts without fear of legal repercussions. However, in reality, anti-BDS laws are undermining the fundamental democratic principle of freedom of speech in the United States.

## Conclusion

For several decades, the U.S. has held the mantle of media power and global narrative building.

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<sup>5</sup> McGreal Chris, "Rightwing group pushing US states for law blocking 'political boycott' of firms", *Guardian*, November 11, 2022, <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2022/nov/11/alec-anti-political-boycott-state-legislation>

<sup>6</sup> Mansoor, "Laws Preventing Boycotts of Israel Are Sweeping the U.S. This New Documentary Chronicles the Fight" *Time*, March 3, 2023, <https://time.com/6260083/israel-boycott-documentary-eliminate-act/>

However, historical evidence reveals that this hegemonic role was often pursued in the pursuit of national interests. U.S. is strategically deploying its influence with the help of media, and narrative building against its competitors and enemies as evident from its media duplicity to the Russia-Ukraine conflict and in its approach to the Palestinian situation.

In today's world, media literacy is essential. Understanding how various media channels, including electronic mediums, news outlets, and social media, shape perceptions during wars and crises is crucial. Warring factions often manipulate narratives to serve their political interests, distorting historical facts and invoking emotions. To avoid being misled, it's important to stay focused and employ strategies for discerning accurate information. This includes researching conflicts from diverse sources to gain insights into different perspectives. For conflicts like Israel-Palestine and Russia-Ukraine, a comprehensive understanding of history is vital to grasp the roles of perpetrators and victims.

Governments, driven by a desire for popularity and control, often manipulate media to justify their actions, particularly in times of war. In the realm of international relations and global politics, internet-enabled communication channels have emerged as crucial instruments. Political actors and economic elites adeptly utilize these channels to construct and propagate tailored narratives, aiming to cultivate public perceptions favorable to their interests while dampening opposition. The U.S. employs a strategic tactic of backing Israel in the Gaza conflict while opposing the Russian invasion of Ukraine to advance its national and international agendas.