



A public service: Dissecting a 'NYT' article on Israel

AT FIRST glance, the *New York Times* news article “For Netanyahu and Israel, Trump’s Gifts Kept on Coming” by Jerusalem bureau chief David Halbfinger seems a straightforward account of US President Donald Trump’s actions that favor Israeli interests. This was in distinction from his predecessor Barack Obama’s actions that favored the Palestinians and were simpatico with the *Times*’ perspective.

So instead of analyzing a biased news story of which there have been many in the *Times*, I chose one that most would consider balanced at first blush, especially if you trust the Gray Lady as the ultimate “paper of record.” This exercise in critical thinking is one every reader should perform on all media outlets as an antidote to the pervasive editorialization found in purportedly straight news stories. Hopefully, it will educate those few of us left who yearn for a return to old-time journalistic standards. There is a vast gulf between unbiased reporting and what we experience today.

Consciously or unconsciously over the last 30 years, *The New York Times* has moved from traditional news reporting to advocacy journalism, an editorialization of the news to provide its readership with their “correct” understanding of the story. This does not happen all the time, but it is not confined to their Middle East coverage. Many *Times* investigative pieces provide an invaluable service and are factually in context. Unfortunately, the growing instances of advocacy journalism have crossed a dangerous line, necessitating a warning label be affixed to their news stories – danger, you are reading an opinion, not news.

Finding the truth amid the *Times* cherry-picked facts and using like-minded “experts” who reinforce their viewpoint without a counterbalanced perspective requires readers to digest their “news” with a jaundiced eye. This applies to many journalistic outlets from Right to Left. The problem with the *NYT* is that far too many people read the Gray Lady’s news reporting expecting the

unvarnished truth. Therefore, analyzing an article by its Jerusalem bureau chief, one that doesn’t reek of prejudice at first glance, would be a service to their readership.

The *Times*’ sad state of affairs was best exemplified this past summer when eight hundred *Times* staffers’ “safe space” was invaded by an op-ed of US Sen. Tom Cotton, whose opinion was supported by 57% of the American public. Yet they demanded not only a retraction but more consequentially, were allowed to cross the line into the supposed independence of its opinion pages. Never mind this violated the *Times* and journalistic standards, all because it offended their social justice sensitivities.

Initially, the *Times* management defended its publication. Still, it quickly succumbed to the “wokesters” cancel culture, culminating in firing the opinion editor, a person of the left who just wasn’t progressive enough. Shades of the French Revolution’s Jacobins, as the incident was described as an “open revolt” by the Daily Beast.

The resignation of *Times* columnist Bari Weiss, who dared not to toe the Progressive Palestinian grievance narrative of her news and opinion colleagues, was the most visible sign of the paper’s rot. The *Times* editorial and newsrooms’ toxic atmosphere chased away an essential voice from its opinion page, which is precisely what the *Times* cancel culture set out to do.

“For Netanyahu and Israel, Trump’s Gifts Kept on Coming” is a catalog of American actions that support the *Times* thesis that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu wagged the American dog. A legitimate opinion, but it is not news; it attempts to influence the reader’s understanding of the information, which is called opinion writing. The description of Trump’s actions as “noteworthy gifts... long list of prizes... nothing short of lavish” are adjectives to advance an opinion. Suppose the article valued Israel’s contribution to US security interests. In that case, it could have used words like shared values, justified and warranted.

The article says, “Palestinians consider East Jerusalem, which Israel seized in the 1967 war, the capital of their future state.” The reader would be better served if the next sentence said, “Palestinian intentions regarding a division of Jerusalem may be suspect, as they refused to accept East Jerusalem as their capital at Camp David, Taba, and from Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, instead their response was violence or silence each time.”

The piece continues, “Seeking to compel the Palestinians to drop their demand for millions of their refugees’ descendants to be able to return to what is now Israel – a demand Israel has always rejected – the Trump administration cut all funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency, which provides aid to Palestinian refugees across the Middle East.” This appraisal omits mention of the Taylor Force legislation that compels the US to end funding because the Palestinian Authority transfers hundreds of millions of taxpayer dollars to convicted terrorists and their families, some with American blood on their hands. Surely the writer is aware of this, but “the only news printed is one that fits.”

The *Times*’ approach to Palestinian refugees conjures up images of desperate stateless people without explaining that Palestinian refugees are treated differently from every other refugee. In effect, it advocates for a Palestinian position instead of the more challenging task of explaining the refugee situation’s complexity. It never attempts to explain the vast majority of Palestinian refugees do not satisfy the international standard (UNHCR) applied to other refugees in the world. Then the Palestinian claim that descendants of refugees should have refugee status would evaporate. Nowhere does the *Times* explain the contradiction of counting millions of Palestinians who hold Jordanian citizenship as active refugees.

Opinions belong on the op-ed page under the bylines of the usual Israel critics, Roger Cohen, Paul Krugman, Peter Beinart, or the



Mike Hisey dressed as US President Donald Trump in a prison jumpsuit reads 'The New York Times' in front of its office in Manhattan on September 28, after the paper reported that Trump paid only \$750 in federal income taxes in the year he was elected president

Times editorials.

On the issue of isolating Iran, Halbfinger stated, "Mr. Trump's ordering of the killing Iranian General Qassim Suleimani eliminated one of Israel's most feared adversaries." No explanation that this person was one of the world's most notorious terrorists; instead, this is phrased in such a way as to make it appear that this targeted assassination was a "gift" for exclusively Israeli interests.

Even worse, it perpetuated the antisemitic stereotype of Israel wagging the tail of the American dog. It omitted that Soleimani had American soldiers' blood on his hands, providing improvised explosive devices to Iranian supporters in Iraq that maimed and killed hundreds of Americans. Through his Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps., he was complicit in the attack on the American Embassy in Baghdad and on a US base, killing an American civilian.

As a final example, the article says, "the Trump administration has increasingly equated anti-Zionism with antisemitism." That is undoubtedly true, but again, the writer insinuates that this is a Trump-invented fantasy. Our State Department and many

other democracies use the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism that unambiguously equates anti-Zionism with antisemitism.

Sometimes photo-journalism is the most striking way to reveal overt prejudice in a news article. The section dealing with "Pressuring the Palestinians" shows a photo of terrified Palestinians on the Gaza border fleeing Israeli tear gas. The image has not been doctored, but does it tell the truth? Hardly. Nowhere in the article does it even make the most meager attempt to explain why Israel's army released tear gas at these Palestinians. To the *Times* writers, this manipulation allows them to convince their readers that Israel is the brutal occupier who, without cause, attacks Palestinians as a matter of policy. Anyone familiar with the history knows that the anti-Israel leaders have for many years orchestrated photo-ops to give the appearance of Israelis bullying helpless Palestinians.

There is no mention of Palestinians sending incendiary balloons into Israeli civilian areas or that the Palestinian people elected a terrorist Islamist government, Hamas, that supports these attacks and whose goal

is to destroy Israel. Not addressed were the thousands of rockets over the past 20 years launched to terrorize Israeli civilians, who live with constant traumatic stress, while the Palestinians use their people as human shields.

A few years ago, I spoke with one of my friends, a chairperson of an important committee in the US House of Representatives. This person is kind and fair, but seemed always to have a limited breadth of facts on the Middle East. When I asked where they got their news coverage, I was told the *Times*. I tried to explain that I too read the *Times* as an essential read. Still, I also need to read many other sources of information to form a fully balanced and comprehensive picture of the day's news.

So few of us today are willing to go outside of our echo chambers to discomfort ourselves with other "facts" that would challenge our preconceived notions of what happens in the world. A good part of the American populace intuitively knows that today's news is not balanced. A recent Knight Foundation/Gallop poll revealed, 86% of Americans say that "news organizations advocate political viewpoints rather than report the news free of bias."

This is not healthy for American democracy or any democracy. Israel too has its issues with its advocacy journalism masquerading as news. Just open up *Haaretz*, where I asked a former editor if he was troubled its news articles were opinion. He didn't deny it, but said if I didn't like the news, read another paper. This is the paper English-speaking journalists in the Middle East read.

It is time for the American and Israeli public to acknowledge we are part of the problem. We are so lazy, gravitating to news and social media sources that make us feel better and make us worse citizens. Once we acknowledge that, whether you are a Democrat or a Republican; a Likudnik, Lapid, Sa'ar, Bogie or Blue and White supporter, you need to prioritize making an effort to be better informed. Let your friends know that we are being duped, and demand a change from our media in how we are presented with news. ■

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