Joint Palestinian-Israeli Analysis:

Power and Suffering

The coverage of "Operation Pillar of Defense" in the Israeli and Palestinian media

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This report is a product of a joint media monitoring project by the Israeli organization *Keshev* and the Palestinian International Peace and Cooperation Center (IPPC). The project is unique for two reasons: (a) it is based on cooperation between two organizations from both sides of a perpetual national conflict and (b) it uses original methodological tools, which are aimed at changing problematic patterns of media coverage of the conflict in both the Israeli and the Palestinian media outlets. This joint effort is intended to encourage the media on both sides to exhibit restraint and fairness, and to tone down tendencies such as bias, incitement, de-humanization, and de-legitimization of the other side.

Since the beginning of our joint project, Keshev and IPCC conducted extensive research of the media coverage of issues related to the conflict on both sides. The current report combines the conclusions of two separate analyses prepared by Keshev and IPCC, on the Israeli and Palestinian news media coverage of the recent war on Gaza, codenamed by Israel "Operation Pillar of Defense".

There is no doubt that there is no symmetry between the two sides and that the Israeli and Palestinian media have different characteristics. Israeli media outlets are strong and claim to be professional and independent. The Israeli public is a "heavy" consumer, in any international standard, of both printed and electronic media. Palestinian media outlets, in comparison, are weaker, poorer and have smaller circulation. Most Palestinian media consumers are influenced by international Arabic media and large Arabic TV networks such as *Al Jazeera* and *Al Arabiya*. Also, one cannot ignore the effect of the prolonged Israeli occupation, with the harm it inflicts upon Palestinian civil society as well as the limitations it poses upon Palestinian journalists’ professional liberty.

Precisely because of the ongoing crisis in Israeli-Palestinian relations, and the lack of symmetry between the State of Israel and the Palestinian National Authority and between the Israeli and Palestinian media, we are proud of our ability to produce this joint research on a significant, sensitive issue for both sides. Such a project would not be possible if not for the high level of trust that exists between the two organizations – trust acquired through joint work in circumstances of a perpetual, violent national conflict and through continuous confrontation with deep-rooted beliefs and powerful social-psychological influences.

We view this research as a significant achievement in our struggle against misinformed public opinion and for the creation of peaceful and trustful environment in the region. We are guided by the belief that fair and professional media can play a positive role in the road towards resolution of the conflict.

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Introduction

Background

The war between Israel and Hamas in November 2012, codenamed by Israel “Operation Pillar of Defense”, signified one further round of violence in the long and bloody conflict between Israel and the Palestinians. Over the past century, this conflict caused immense suffering on both sides. Tens of thousands have been killed and many more injured, hundreds of thousands have been uprooted from their homes and millions still live in fear.

In recent years, the armed conflict has centered on the struggle between Israel and Hamas. Hamas has governed Gaza Strip since 2007, while the more moderate Fatah party governs the West Bank. “Operation Pillar of Defense” was the second in a series of wars, preceded by the 2008 Gaza war, codenamed by Israel “Operation Cast Lead”. It began on November 14th 2012, with the assassination of Hamas’ head of military wing, Ahmad Jabari. According to Israel, this was a direct response to the shooting of an anti-tank missile from Gaza at an Israeli army Jeep and the continuous shooting of rockets from Gaza on southern Israel.

The war lasted eight days. During this short time, it had a dramatic effect on the lives of Israeli and Palestinian civilians. Israeli warplanes attacked 1,500 targets in the Gaza Strip and at least 169 Palestinians were killed, 68 of whom were non-involved civilians, whereas the remaining 101 were involved in combat against Israel, according to Israeli sources. Palestinian and international sources claim that the number of civilian casualties was higher. At least 900 Palestinians (civilians and combatants) were wounded in Israeli Air Force attacks, and infrastructures in Gaza as well as its economy sustained heavy damage. On the other side, 1,506 rockets were fired from the Gaza Strip into Israel, 421 of which (according to the Israeli army) were intercepted by the Iron Dome anti-rocket system. Four Israeli civilians and two soldiers were killed by rockets. Dozens were injured, many suffered from anxiety, and residential buildings and businesses suffered substantial damage.

Social-psychology of societies in conflict

In these kinds of circumstances, questions such as which side is to blame for the suffering, and who is the true victim, become fundamental in both societies. Research shows that in societies living in perpetual and violent conflict, the public discourse tends to define “us” as victim and “them” as villain. This simplistic view allows each side to focus on its own suffering, disregard the suffering of the other and renounce blame for the violent situation.

1 The Meir Amit Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (16 December 2012). Analysis of the Ratio between the Names of Terrorist Operatives Killed during Operation Pillar of Defense and Civilians Killed in Error (Hebrew).


3 Israeli Air Force website (21 November 2012). Pillar of Defense Ends in Ceasefire. According to the IDF version, the rocket interception rate was 84%. These figures are under dispute. See: Keshev (18 March 2013), How effective was Iron Dome in reality? (Hebrew) and The Post, (31 March 2013), Israel Security Prize laureate: Iron Dome is a bluff (Hebrew).
The self depiction of both sides of themselves as victims adheres to asymmetrical conflicts, like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as well as to symmetrical ones. Both sides of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict acknowledge its asymmetry. It is agreed that as far as objective criteria is concerned, the Israeli side is stronger than the Palestinian side. For instance, it is undisputed that the number of casualties is much higher on the Palestinian side. But this acknowledgement does not stop Israelis from holding on to the victimhood narrative, along with the Palestinians. The collective Jewish memory of the Holocaust and continuous anti-Semitic persecution is a key element in upholding this concept in the Israeli society.⁴

The role of the press

One of the central mechanisms used to disseminate conflict-related themes is the press, both printed (newspapers) and electronic (television, radio, news websites and blogs). Media consumers in Israel and in Palestine obtain journalistic information from these sources either directly, as they read the newspaper or watch newscasts on television, or indirectly via a link on social media, a satire show on television, or a conversation with friends. This information surrounds Palestinians and Israelis daily and serves as the main source of knowledge on the "current history" that is taking place in front of their eyes.

The present report includes two separate research papers which analyze the way the media in Israel and in the Palestinian National Authority (in the West Bank) handled the question of victimhood and blame during the 2012 Gaza war. The research on the Israeli media focuses on the coverage of the Israeli and Palestinian civilian population during the war, in the main news editions of the two most popular TV channels in Israel. The research on the Palestinian media focuses on the major themes found in the coverage of the war in the three key PNA newspapers, as well as the overall coverage in Palestinian media.

Although there is a methodological difference between the two research papers, they raise shared conclusions as to the similarity of the media framing on both sides. It is demonstrated that Israeli and Palestinian media presented almost a mirror image of each other. Media on both sides presented their societies as strong and simultaneously as victims. Each side saw the civilian suffering in their society as a basis for international legitimization, proving they are the side under a wrongful attack. Both sides presented an appearance of a unified society, and both sides found it difficult to acknowledge the suffering of the other.

The media plays a decisive role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Its recurring dedication to national narratives, on both sides, while repeatedly pushing moderate voices to the margins, does not allow the vicious cycle of violence to break open. The media provokes both sides to war, and does not allow for a new form of thought to come forth. This new form could hopefully calm the violence and move the nations towards willingness to make concessions and arrive at an agreement.

Israeli Media Coverage of "Operation Pillar of Defense"

The following chapter examines the coverage of the Palestinian and Israeli civilian populations in the main Israeli TV newscasts during the “Operation Pillar of Defense”. The research includes an analysis of the 18 main evening newscasts aired on Channel 2 and Channel 10 between the 14th and the 22nd of November 2012. These comprise more than 600 news items whose total length is approximately 1,688 minutes. Channel 2’s central newscast had exceptionally high viewer rating – over 30 percent in the first week of the war, whereas the Channel 10 newscast had only 11.8 percent viewer rating.

Predictably, the Israeli newscasts covered the Israeli civilian population quite differently from the way they covered the Palestinian population, in terms of both the scope and the nature of the coverage. On the quantitative level, the Israeli civilian population enjoyed massive prominence: out of 125 headlines opening the newscasts, 73 of them (58 percent) were dedicated to civilian events. Civilian life in Gaza, on the other hand, made it to the same headlines only six times (4.8 percent).

On the level of content, the coverage of the Israeli civilian population was sentimental and dramatic. It exhibited deep identification with the suffering of residents of southern Israel, who are most affected by the rockets fired from Gaza. It also generated a sense of an existential threat to Israel, generating sweeping public support for the operation within Israel, support which encourages the military to “do its job” while the civilians suffer bravely. Moreover, civilian suffering was presented as a trump card in the battle over international public opinion.

On the other hand, Israeli TV channels presented civilian suffering in Gaza as relatively limited or even trivial, placing the blame on Hamas and not on the Israeli military, which supposedly took every possible precaution to avoid civilian casualties. Palestinian attempts to publicize civilian casualties were presented as devious and as "propaganda" (as opposed to Israeli "Hasbara" or public diplomacy).

The following two sections deal first with the coverage of the Israeli civilian population and then with the coverage of the Palestinian civilian population in the Israeli TV.

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5 This chapter is one section of a broader research paper Keshev has published on the coverage of “Operation Pillar of Defense” in the main Israeli TV newscasts.

6 Israel’s third central newscast, Channel 1’s main evening newscast, had extremely low viewer rating during the war, therefore we focused our examination on Channel 2 and Channel 10.

7 Mako (19 November 2012), Whole country in front of the TV: sharp rise in viewer rating (Hebrew).
Coverage of civilian life in Israel

A focus on Israeli civilians

The most prominent feature of the coverage of “Operation Pillar of Defense” was the central place given to civilian life in Israel under the rocket attack. Other important issues – such as military actions and their significance, diplomatic efforts, government decisions, goals of the operation and events on the other side of the border – were afforded considerably less coverage. The public’s attention was diverted mainly to events within Israel.

Out of 125 headlines that opened the newscasts we examined, 73 headlines (58 percent) were devoted to events related to the Israeli civilian population. Approximately 45 percent of all items (reports, stories, interviews, commentaries, etc.) that appeared on the newscasts either dealt with the Israeli civilian population or gave it a central place. All in all, approximately 40 percent of the airtime on newscasts during the war were devoted the Israeli civilian population.\(^8\)

Leaving out the first day of coverage, that dealt mainly with the new military developments, and the last day, that dealt mainly with the diplomatic efforts to stop the war, the picture is even clearer: in the course of the main fighting days, the civilian population was featured in 74 percent of the newscast headlines (62 out of 83 headlines) and took up approximately 45 percent of the total airtime.

Noticeably, these figures indicate that the focus on the Israeli civilian population was more prominent in the newscast headlines than in the newscasts items themselves. This means that the editors chose to highlight the civilian population in the headlines, more than other issues that appeared on the newscasts. This emphasis sent a clear message that civilian life in Israel is the primary concern in the military operation, above other questions regarding the conflict with the Palestinians and above questions regarding the Israeli government’s overall political agenda and military policy.

For instance, on Channel 10’s newscast on November 18\(^{th}\), 64 out of 120 minutes and 25 out of 51 items were dedicated to the civilian population. Six out of the newscast’s eight opening headlines referred to the civilian population. These highlighted, for instance, confused parents in Gush Dan (larger Tel Aviv area) who did not know whether they can send their children to school; “A birthday party under fire”; “How women in the south manage without their spouses under the rocket threat”; and “artists under fire”, who volunteer to perform in front of citizens in southern Israel. The two remaining newscast headlines reported on progress in the ceasefire negotiations in Cairo and on 12 Palestinian family members who were killed together in Gaza by an Israeli bombing the same day. Additionally, six out of the eight events included in the "summary of daily events" on the newscast's second minute, described rocket attacks and hits in Israel.

\(^{8}\) This calculation also includes reports and items in which the Israeli civilian population was given a central – though not exclusive – place.
The content of the news items about the civilian population in this newscast was, briefly:^9

3:45 Live broadcast from a building in Ashkelon that was directly hit by a rocket. A rocket hit the exact same place during "Operation Cast Lead".

5:45 Report about rocket hits in Ofakim.

6:55 Report about two successful rocket interceptions by "Iron Dome" and two alarms that sounded in Gush Dan.

16:25 Report from Ashkelon about a decrease in rockets.

16:55 Story: another day of rockets shot at southern Israel. Two parents and their little girl are nearly hit.


33:56 Report from Ashdod about an especially long day the city's residents went through. The authorities and trying to help them get to safer, more relaxed areas.

38:35 Report from an Iron Dome battery in Gush Dan about very high interception rates throughout Israel.

47:50 Story: the bombing sounds of a rocket that was intercepted caused slight panic among parents in Gush Dan who sent their children to school.

59:05 Story: President Shimon Peres joins the battle over public opinion and tells the world about the reality that residents of southern Israel have to face on a daily basis.

1:02:25 Interview with the home front defense minister.

1:06:35 Another report from Soroka hospital. No significant change in the status of the wounded. An interview with the sister of a wounded firefighter.


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^9 The numbers here and elsewhere represent the timing (minutes) of each item within the newscast, as they appear in the recordings on the news companies' websites. Later on, minutes will be indicated by the mark '['. For example, the fifth minute of the broadcast is indicated as 5'.

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A BIRTHDAY UNDER FIRE: HOW DO YOU PERSUADE THE CHILDREN TO LIE DOWN DURING THE ALARM?
Opening headline (Channel 10, 18.11.2012)
1:10:40 Story: the women of southern Israel, who were left alone at home as their husbands were recruited to reserve military service, report that they are surviving. The children are missing their fathers.

1:13:29 Report from Ashdod about the calm in recent hours.

1:18:29 Story: teenagers from southern Israel enjoy a holiday in other areas of Israel and miss their homes. Some dare say that it is fun that school is out.

1:21:00 Promotional piece to a story that documents an Israeli family for 24 hours under fire, using a video camera given to them by Channel 10.

1:27:20 Interview with Iron Dome officers who worked day and night to set up the battery in Gush Dan.

1:29:20 Studio commentary about Iron Dome’s ability to avoid hitting airplanes.

1:30:30 Story: The family that documented the rocket routine in southern Israel using a video camera from Channel 10.

1:37:15 Story: Members of Kibbutz Carmia decided to leave the kibbutz but still maintain their good mood.

1:42:40 Story: The mayor of Ashkelon keeps on as usual despite the alarms and is angry at children who film rocket interceptions using their cellphones.

1:54:00 Story: The singer Rami Kleinstei goes to the South to “hug its people”.

The data reveals, then, that the civilian life in Israel was the top priority for newscast editors. This finding indicates a change compared to previous wars that Keshev examined, in which the civilian population received less coverage. For example, during the second Lebanon War (2006), the civilian population was highlighted in only 42 percent of newscasts’ opening headlines (as opposed to 58 percent in the recent conflict).10

Victimhood and courage

An Existential Threat

The main sensation that Israeli TV channels conveyed during the war was of a great danger to all of Israel’s citizens and especially those in the south.

Newscasts every evening opened with dramatic headlines relating the threat on the Israeli civilian population. For example:

HAMAS THREATENS TO SHOOT ROCKETS TOWARDS CENTRAL ISRAEL (Channel 2, 11.14.2012)

ALARMS SOUNDED ALL AROUND GUSH DAN, ROCKETS LANDED IN THE TEL AVIV AND RISHON LEZION AREA (Channel 10, 11.15.2012)

NONSTOP ALARMS IN THE SOUTH, INCLUDING ASHDOD, ASHKELON AND BE’ER SHEVA (Channel 2, 11.16.2012)

10 Keshev (2007), "War to the Last Moment": the Israeli Media in the Second Lebanon War.
Commentators voiced a claim that this sense of threat may be exaggerated, but only very few times, and deep within the newscasts (as opposed to their opening headlines). For instance a military commentator mentioned on the first day of the operation (Channel 2, 11.14.2012, 4’) that "There is an atmosphere of panic. Here [in Israel], there is slight rain [of rockets]; over there [in Gaza] there's a hailstorm." The next day (Channel 2, 11.15.2012, 15’) he added: "Let's not blow this out of proportion. Something flew in our direction, maybe it landed, maybe it didn't, there's no need to panic [...]". A similar message was conveyed by an Arab affairs correspondent in response to a report from Tel Aviv in which the reporter said that the city was empty: "People in Tel Aviv are not hiding in their homes yet, so let's not blow this out of proportion" (Channel 10, 11.16.2012, 67’).

Stories of suffering and bravery

The news editions broadcast empathy and identification with the citizens of Israel, suffering bravely from the missile attack.

Reports on Israeli civilians appeared in two types of news items: Live updates from multiple locations, and features on personal stories of civilians under fire. Reports of the first type were usually aired immediately at the opening and then often throughout the newscasts. Features were usually aired later on, yet were consistently highlighted in the headlines.

TV correspondents reported from multiple locations under fire, mainly from the south, about current events on ground. Naturally, newscasters referred to correspondents at the scene for reports on alarms, rocket landings and interceptions. In addition, they did so when correspondents had little new information for the viewers. For instance:

**Correspondent**: we are here in Sderot, and as you can see behind me, the city is virtually empty. The last alarm was sounded here at about 3pm, there was one interception, and one rocket landed in an open area, and since then it's been quiet, in fact. People prepared themselves for Shabbat, went to the synagogues, we saw them walking past us on their way to the synagogue and back home for Friday dinner, and now it's quiet here, we hope it will stay like this.

*Newscaster*: we certainly hope so; no one wants to give up Kabbalat Shabbat.

(CHANNEL 10, 11.16.2012, 27’)

**Newscaster**: Turning to our correspondent in Sderot, how has your day been over there? **Correspondent**: like you can probably see behind me, the city has been quite empty, a ghost town, no one went out for a walk in the street, there were no cars [...] This was also the case in other places in the “Gaza envelope” area, this is how things are at the moment, about 40 people left their homes and went to relax in the center or the north of the country, hoping to come back soon.

(CHANNEL 2, 11.17.2012, 43’)

The constant reports from correspondents on site, with real news or without them, created a sense of a constant need to stay tuned in view of the danger that may erupt at any moment. Furthermore, the fact they did not always have an important update to report on,
created a sense that the news edition for is just “checking in” with the civilian front, out of concern and empathy for Israelis in cities suffering from rocket strikes.

Stories featuring personal experiences of civilians under fire were of two kinds: some focused on the suffering and hardships of Israeli civilians, while others focused on their endurance. A good example of the first is a story about children growing up in southern Israel. The newscaster introduced the story as follows:

Some children are about to celebrate their Bar Mitzvah, but they’ve never known a different reality [...] Someday, someone will conduct research on how this affected their soul.

(Channel 2, 11.17.2012, 87’)

The story focused on four children whose stories were already covered by the channel before. It was accompanied by melancholic music and portrayed the life of children in southern Israel as a continuous trauma. The reporter presented a child named Ofek:

Ofek was born to the sound of Qassam rockets, the sound of the alarm. He is used to accelerated heart beats and to staying and sleeping in the security room. Today, at age 10, he sometimes manages to overcome his fears and go out to the open, to the backyard, from which he can run back to the security room within 15 seconds.

The reporter then said that a month earlier a Qassam landed in Ofek's yard, making it the third rocket to hit the house.

But the deep trauma Ofek carries with him is from that Qassam hit five years ago, when the rocket penetrated the bathroom in the second floor and severely wounded his mom Collette. Ofek, who was only four years old then and stood by the window, was also wounded from shrapnel.

The reporter concluded the story, referring to the other children too:

Almost 12 years since the first Qassam hit Sderot, the children who grew up with the rockets cannot really imagine the end of their routine of anxiety, which deepens within them and spreads to more children throughout Israel.

On coming back to the studio, the newscaster added: "Indeed, as we said, terrorism injures the soul, first and foremost".

“Ofek was born to the sound of Qassam rockets, the sound of the alarm”. (Channel 2, 17.11.2012)
Feature stories that stressed, through people's personal stories, the endurance of the Israeli civilian population in face of the harsh circumstances were also prevalent. These kind of stories also featured a strong emotional emphasis, but in this case of optimism and strength. See for example the following segment from a story highlighted the newscast headlines (Channel 2, 11.20.2012, 81’), which tells the story of people who keep on working although they have nowhere to run to when rocket alarms are sounded:

Israel Electric employee (working on a 30-meter-high crane): I don't have time to go down to the sheltered room, it's scary but like I said earlier, this is the reality.

Reporter: Ronny can see Gaza directly in front of him, six kilometers to the south, his job is to unload charcoal from the ships unto the conveyor belt, en route to the production of electricity, which means leaving work is not even an option for him.

A letter carrier: [...] Even during World War II they delivered mail, no matter the situation.

Tnuva retail delivery man: [...] We have to do our job, someone has to deliver products to our clients, to the consumers, and also I didn't feel I had to stay at home.

Reporter: [...] His [Egged bus driver] job is to go down last from the bus, help the elderly and the children and calm down the passengers, which isn't simple on a day when a bus was directly hit in Be’er Sheva.

Egged bus driver: You have nothing to fear, nothing to be afraid of, there will be an alarm, we've got time, we get off the bus, take shelter and get back on the bus [...]
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IN SPITE OF LIFE UNDER FIRE, THE PEOPLE IN THE SOUTH SUPPORT THE ATTACK (Channel 10, 11.15.2012)

The message of sweeping civilian support of the operation was repeated dozens of times, in reports, feature stories and recurring interviews with mayors of southern cities, who promised that their residents will let the military "do what it has to do".

Voices of those opposing the military operation appeared only rarely and deep within the newscasts. For example, a story about life in the kibbutz of Re'im, five kilometers from Gaza included the following dialog (Channel 2, 11.16.2012, 64’):

Kibbutz member: After this round too, and even if we hit them hard, and even if they feel we have the upper hand, we will have to talk to them, we will have no choice.

Reporter: Should we talk to Hamas?

Kibbutz member: we should talk to everyone.

The only time civilians opposed to the operation got their own story (and not just a random mention within a story), they were not residents of the south, but rather student demonstrators in the northern Haifa University, many of whom were Palestinians (Channel 2, 11.19.2012, 68’). The newscaster referred to the demonstrations as "another explosive front, on the verge of actual violence, between Jews and Arabs". In the story itself, it was incidentally revealed that among the anti-operation protesters there were also Jews. Obviously, many Israeli Jews strongly opposed the operation too, but were not given stage in the media. This emphasis on the oppositional position of the Palestinian citizens of Israel created the false impression that there is unanimous support of the operation in Gaza among Jewish Israelis, while framing the Palestinians as being outside the Israeli national consensus.

The theme of unquestioning and unified Israeli support of the military operation was reintroduced with even greater emphasis towards its end, during the last three days, when the ceasefire seemed at hand but the fighting continued. During these days, almost every broadcast from the south included reports on protests against the ceasefire agreement and criticism, at times harsh, against the politicians who were about to approve it. This message was repeated in feature stories and interviews with mayors of southern cities. For example, a newscast on the day the ceasefire came into effect was filled with numerous protests in view of the pending agreement. First, a woman wounded in a terrorist attack on a Tel Aviv bus that same day was interviewed:
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Reporter: And still it seems that the wounded from the south and from Tel Aviv speak in one voice and keep asking decision makers:

Wounded woman: Hit them with all our strength, it's time to do something instead of saying there's a 72-hour ceasefire and meanwhile they bomb the south and conduct terrorist attacks here. (Channel 10, 11.21.2012, 22')

"Hit them with all our strength"  
(Channel 10, 11.21.2012, 22')

Later in the newscast (77') the message was repeated in a report about a protest that was taking place behind the reporter:

Reporter: if you thought you would see cries of joy here about going back to normal life, then it is really not the case, you can see what goes on behind me and this is more or less what happens in all southern cities, people are not happy about this ceasefire agreement, they wanted the army to enter the Gaza Strip and end rocket shooting once and for all, the mayors are also not content with the ceasefire, they say "this is not what we hoped for", the mayor of Ashdod Yehiel Lasri says "it's a temporary ceasefire", and here as well you hear what people are shouting [...].

And finally, a story that summarizes the day of battle (81'), included a report about a protest under the slogan "Bibi, wake up, the south is worth more":

Reporter: [...] Despite the difficulty of dealing with the alarms, the bombings, the children who can barely go outside, residents of the south don't want a ceasefire [...].

MK [at the time] Uri Ariel: [...] We all have the power to go on, mister Prime Minister, let the IDF win [...]

Southern Israeli: [...] [what is being done is] merely a painkiller, what we want is a root canal
Between these items, in every report from the scene, protesters gathered behind the reporters holding signs that say, for example, "Let the IDF win".

A headline at the opening of a newscast that same day (Channel 2, 11.21.2012) also stressed the opposition to the agreement: the Inspector General of the police is heard saying "As you can understand, the talk about ceasefire only caused more attacks".

Other opinions were extremely rare and did not appear in the headlines, even if included in reports. Thus, for example, 24 hours after the ceasefire came into effect, the opening story of a newscast (Channel 10, 11.22.2012, 1’) presented controversy over the decision to end the operation, including voices of civilians who were glad about the ceasefire:

Resident of Ashdod: There are some very smart people up there like Bibi and Lieberman and I fully trust what they're doing. If they made such a decision when the army was ready to go in [to Gaza], they probably had their reasons.

However, the first headline on the newscast's opener sent the opposite message and framed such voices as dissenting with the general consensus: CHANNEL 10 SURVEY: CLEAR MAJORITY AGAINST THE AGREEMENT WITH HAMAS.

### Civilian suffering in the public opinion front

The coverage conveyed a clear message that the Israeli civilian population has an important role to play in the international public opinion battle. Newscasts repeated time and again that highlighting Israeli civilian suffering serves Israel's interests in the international arena.

For example, a headline on a newscast opener promised the viewers a story about a day in the battlefield with a foreign correspondent. On her introduction to the story, the newscaster marveled at the fact that "As per now, as opposed to previous times, the Israeli view often receives more sympathy [than the Palestinian view]". The reporter elaborated:

This time they are covering not only the rockets and artillery but the story of the civilians as well. Dozens of reporters arrive each day to kindergartens in bomb shelters in Sderot, Be'er Sheva and Ashkelon, and see the implications up close. When this is the picture and they
begin to comprehend that there is civilian suffering here as well, it is not so surprising that this time we too are getting sympathy. (Channel 10, 11.19.2012, 56')

One of the foreign correspondent concluded:

The problem in Israel always has been Hasbara [international publicity] and it's a complicated issue, and the Palestinian story is easier to tell. Now you've got a very simple story to tell, which is that we have 3.5 million people, half our country, is being attacked, for nothing.

Another newscast described President Peres' aid in the battle over public opinion:

Reporter: Peres is now calling upon the children of the south to share their personal stories on his Facebook page, where they will be translated into English in order to reach the entire world. (Channel 10, 11.18.2012, 62')

Similarly, in a newscast the following day, the newscaster reported that hundreds of Israeli civilians volunteered to help the public diplomacy effort alongside the military effort:

Armed with a single computer and a lot of patriotism, they bomb the net in order to win the battle over public opinion". At the end of the story, the newscaster remarked: "It turns out that everyone can do it. (Channel 2, 11.19.2012, 52')
Coverage of civilian life in Gaza

As shown, the coverage of the Israeli civilian population during the war was far greater than that of any other issue on the news agenda. Israeli TV channels mostly conveyed to their viewers a sensation of grave danger to everyone in Israel and especially in the south. The coverage was colored by deep emotions of identification with and empathy for residents of the south. While it emphasized the difficulty of living under the rocket threat, it also stressed that the Israeli civilian population was backing up its military and playing an important role in the battle over international public opinion. Other important aspects concerning the war in the south, and their significance, where pushed to the sidelines.

The significance of such coverage becomes clear when comparing it with the coverage of the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza. Unlike the immense coverage of the life under the rocket threat in Israel, the life of Gaza residents under the threat of Israeli attacks received meager coverage in Israeli newscasts.

Throughout the entire war, only 14 out of 627 items (two percent) were dedicated entirely to life at war on the other side of the border. All in all, the Palestinian civilian population was mentioned in 66 items, 33 in each channel. Newscasters sometimes referred briefly, in the opening of newscasts, to Palestinians casualties, but the subject made it to the opening headlines only six times, five of which were on Channel 2.

"The damage is negligible"

The meager coverage complemented the main message that underscored Israeli TV channels, as to events on the other side of the border. Viewers got the impression that the damage inflicted by Israeli military activities in Gaza was negligible. And so, it seemed that Israel is managing to wage a war without severely interrupting the daily routine of civilians in Gaza. It seemed that due to moderate and "sterile" IDF conduct, the moral cost of injuring civilians on the other side is not so high.

As opposed to the emotional, empathic coverage of civilian suffering in Israel, the Israeli media barely acknowledged the suffering of the Palestinians. For example, a newscaster told MK Ahmad Tibi:

Newscaster: Approximately 600 Israeli air raids [of Gaza]. It's an amazing, crazy number, tons of explosives. About 20 Palestinians killed, most of them armed. Maybe you should also praise the IDF for trying hard not to harm innocent civilians? (Channel 2, 11.16.2012, 105')

The 20 Palestinians killed, according to this statement, are a small negligible number. Later in the interview MK Tibi raises the questions of Palestinian suffering:

MK Tibi: I categorically object, politically and morally, to the shooting of rockets at civilian population in southern Israel. But not just to that, I don't stop there like some politicians and members of Knesset. There are Palestinian people on the other side. children in Gaza don't have an alarm system, the ceiling just crashes down on them ... children in Gaza are killed. Not a single Israeli child should be hurt...

At this point the newscaster cuts Tibi short and belittles his claims, while pointing out the supposedly moral inferiority of Arab countries:
"Operation Pillar of Defense" in the Israeli and Palestinian Media

Newscaster: Nearly none [killed], nearly none. And you know, what's going on in Gaza now is equivalent to one single hour in Syria, more or less [...] we see protests against Israel, less against Syria.

Israeli military correspondents repeated the claims that Palestinian death is of negligible scope, as in a military correspondent's report of the same day:

Throughout this day the Air Force continued its strikes, not less than 600 targets were attacked: rocket storage sites, launching units, storage sites of Hamas and Islamic Jihad ... and this time it's the complete opposite of Cast Lead, only 22 people killed until now in the Strip, only three non-involved civilians killed in the attacks, according to the Palestinians. It is a great success for the Shabak [Israeli General Security Service], the military intelligence and the Air Force. (Channel 10, 11.16.2012, 31')

"The responsible party: Hamas"

It seems that the Israeli TV channels' attempt to reconcile the reality of Palestinian suffering – caused by Israel's actions – with the notion that Israel acts morally, led them to blame Hamas directly for the suffering of Palestinian civilians. The main argument that they put forth was that Hamas targets civilians intentionally, while Israel does its best avoid civilian casualties. This representation of Hamas as morally inferior in comparison with the Israeli military appeared frequently in reports and stories.

Here, for example, is how a reporter describes it:

Everybody knows that the [cease fire] agreement is near, everybody tries to achieve the maximum: for them it's about harming civilians, for the IDF – it's about hitting launchers and infrastructures. (Channel 10, 11.20.2012, 44')

Immediately afterwards Prime Minister Netanyahu was presented saying:

This is the enemy that we are facing; it shoots at our children and hides behind its own children. We reach out to those who wish to have peace with us, while our other hand strongly holds the sword of David against those who wish to eliminate us.

The image of Hamas as "hiding behind its children" – or of Palestinians in the Gaza Strip as offering children in order to aid Hamas – persisted in Israeli TV newscasts. Such arguments were sometimes stated clearly and unequivocally, as in the following example from an IDF Spokesperson's press conference that was aired live in the newscasts of both channels:

The IDF operates precisely, surgically, in order to achieve "clean" hits as much as possible with minimum harm to non-involved people. Unfortunately [...] some of the rocket launching sites and some military bases are located near kindergartens, mosques, and other facilities – intentionally. An orchard should be used to grow oranges, not to launch rockets. A school is meant for studying, not for caching rockets. A mosque should be a place of prayer and not a warehouse for weapons, rockets and bombs. (11.14.2012, 10')

In other cases, the newscasters challenged Gaza residents and journalists on the question of responsibility for civilian suffering, and the latter had to defend themselves against the newscasters' accusations. For example, a story was introduced as follows:

In Gaza, on the other side, 102 people were already killed, according to the Palestinians, since the operation began. Today all the members of the Al-Dalu family who were killed when their house was bombed yesterday were buried... The residents of Gaza do not point the finger at Hamas; they claim the IDF [the newscaster pauses silently] and this is what brings them together. (Channel 10, 11.19.2012, 33')
Immediately after the story was aired, the newscaster interviewed the Gaza journalist Mustafa Ibrahim:

**Newscaster**: we are here, you are there, so for you Israel is the enemy, we are at the two sides of a war; but still, in the Palestinian street, don’t they think that Hamas is responsible for the current situation because it has been shooting rockets into Israel for months?

**Interviewee**: [...] People say we defend ourselves. Yes, there are casualties in Israel including innocent people – but with all the people killed now, until today we had more than 90 people killed, many houses that crashed on people’s heads, and you heard what happened yesterday to the Al-Dalu family, four children and three adults were killed...All of this scares people here and they say “what are we going to do?”

**Newscaster**: the question is whether when asked what may be done, is it legitimate in your eyes that Hamas is shooting rockets at Israeli civilians? Not soldiers but rather women, men, and children?

**Interviewee**: In wars there are always things that are not legitimate, I cannot say whether Hamas or Israel act legitimately, no, Israel is a state that occupies the Palestinians in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip and people are silent, I cannot say that Hamas does not have the right to defend itself, no, it has the right to defend itself. But through what means? In which ways? They should ask themselves that.

**Newscaster**: their answer is unfortunately clear [video of rocket launched at Israel] Thank you Mustafa Ibrahim in Gaza.

In addition, the few stories that dealt specifically with the harsh living conditions in Gaza always included threatening or defying statements towards Israel, in a manner that suggested that the Palestinian stance forces Israel to hurt Gaza residents. In these cases, the headlines and introductions focused on threatening statements and not on reports about civilian hardship.

For example, a story included a touching depiction of life on the other side of the border:

**Gaza resident**: We are very very very scared, we don’t know how we can sleep, we don’t know how we can eat, we don’t know how we can move, we don’t know how our cousins are and how our sisters are, whether they are even alive or safe. Sometimes we can’t even contact them, there’s no electricity, there’s nothing, we can’t leave the house. *(Channel 2, 11.20.2012, 36’)*

However, the newscaster’s introduction to the story was:

Moving on to Gaza, there are reports on more people killed, including civilians who were caught in airstrikes. Meanwhile, in a conversation with Channel 2 news, a Gaza resident boasted that when the Israeli air force drops leaflets that call the people to stay away from Hamas militants, they use them to wrap Falafel.

In another incident, events on the other side made it, remarkably, to the newscast’s opening headlines, but were accompanied by a defying message:

**14 PEOPLE KILLED IN GAZA SINCE LAST NIGHT; THOUSANDS ATTEND JABARI’S FUNERAL; HAMAS CONTINUES TO THREATEN TEL AVIV: “THE OCCUPATION ALONE STARTED THIS WAR BUT IT WILL NOT DETERMINE WHEN IT WILL END” (Channel 2, 11.15.2012, 36’)**

The juxtaposition of the report on life in Gaza and Hamas' threat insinuates that although civilians in Gaza may suffer, Israel has no choice. Sometimes, as in the following examples, this message appeared directly and bluntly:
Minister Israel Katz: one tear in a Jewish child's eye is worse for me than the possibility that all the residents of Gaza will have to evacuate and run away to Sinai (Channel 2, 11.15.2012, 24’).

Commentator: Minister Eli Yishai not only objected to a ceasefire but also to a ground operation, he suggested something else, a sort of tariff for Hamas, to take down a building for every rocket shot or something like that, that was his suggestion. (Channel 2, 11.21.2012, 71’).

"Hamas is presenting it as if Israel killed children"
Many times, even when the newscasts dealt with the Palestinian suffering, it was not the suffering itself that the reports focused on, but rather on the fact that it undermines the international legitimacy for Israel's military operation.

Newscaster: At the moment, we should say, Israel has [international] support, but this can change, we saw it happen in other operations too, if suddenly a rocket hits the wrong place, but at the moment there is support (Channel 2, 11.15.2012, 74’)

Political correspondent: […] In order to continue this operation for at least another 48 hours, they really really ask us, to the extent that we can control it, to avoid errors like the ones that occurred in the past, not to hurt innocent people; if this goes on as it is now, with "clean" actions, for another day or two or three – the world will back us up. (Channel 10, 11.15.2012, 56’)

Major General (ret.) Eitan Ben Eliyahu: [the operation] brings with it all kinds of Goldstone reports[1] and complexities on the ground.
Military commentator: Of course, do you have any doubt that there will be a Goldstone report on… never mind. (Channel 2, 11.14.2012, 85’)

Attempts by Hamas to undermine international legitimacy for Israel's actions, using images of destruction caused by the Israeli military, were reported with great disapproval. An Arab affairs commentator, for example, criticizes Hamas on the day when 12 family members were killed as a result of Israeli airstrikes, saying that:

Hamas is presenting it now as though Israel killed children (Channel 10, 11.18.2012, 11’)

Another reporter on the same day highlights the same “propaganda” issue:

Reporter: The incident in which the Dalu family house in Gaza was hit was covered extensively by international media and underscored by Hamas local media teams. As a result of the hit the house was destroyed and 13 dead were pulled out of the rubble so far including women and children, 10 of whom were of the same family. Hamas uses the images tonight to mobilize the world against the Israeli operation:

Video of Palestinian girl: Nations of the free world, we call upon you today from among the remains of our home, destroyed by the occupation, we call upon you from among the toys soaked with our blood, we call upon you today from among the Zionist rockets and bombs. (Channel 2, 11.18.2012, 29’)

A reporter voices similar criticism when he reports the visit of the Egyptian Prime Minister to the Gaza Strip:

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[1] The goldstone report is the final product of the committee appointed by the UN Human Rights Council in order to examine Israel's military activities during Operation Cast Lead as well as Hamas’ actions that led to the operation. The report is considered biased by official bodies in Israel who claim it severely damaged the Israeli position in the international arena.
In operation Pillar of Defense the number of Palestinian casualties is considerably smaller in comparison with any other operation that took place in Gaza in the past decades, but Qandil is nevertheless immediately presented with a bleak illustration – the body of a baby, in order to convey a clear-cut message (Channel 2, 11.16.2012, 59').

Note the stark difference between the critical tone of this coverage and the opposed coverage, of Israeli suffering as a public diplomacy front. While Israel’s efforts to convey its message were described as "public diplomacy", such efforts by the Palestinians were presented as cynical, unworthy "propaganda".

"Thank you very much for reporting on what is going on in Gaza"

Only rarely did newscasts feature items that presented Palestinian suffering without placing blame on the other side.

An unusual example is part of an interview with a Gaza journalist:

**Newscaster:** This has been the hardest day in the Strip since the IDF started its operation, with the largest number of fatalities. How do things look at the moment? How has this day looked in general?

**Sami Ajrami, a Gaza journalist:** It has been the hardest day, with dead and wounded civilians, people think it is very severe and they know that what Israel is doing here, as Hamas said today, is genocide. It is very hard, very hard in Gaza […]

**Newscaster:** thank you very much Sami Ajrami for reporting to us what is going there in the Gaza Strip. (Channel 2, 11.18.2012, 41’)

Another example is a newscaster’s emphatic introduction to a story on Gaza:

We are, as stated, in Tel Aviv, but how do the lives of the residents of Gaza look like, a million and a half Palestinians living, of course, without alarms and shelters and of course the streets are empty and there is no electricity, so we want to get a report. This is a special report for the Friday broadcast which was transferred to us by Aude Marcovitch, she’s a reporter for the Swiss RTS network and for the French newspaper Libération, here is what she is reporting this evening.

**Summary**

The analysis of Israeli TV channels during “Operation Pillar of defense” reveals, predictably, a clear cut presentation of an Israeli "us" and a Palestinian "them". While Israeli civilians were presented as suffering for no reason, Palestinian civilians were presented as responsible for the blows they sustained; while the Israeli military was presented as a moral military that does whatever it can to avoid hurting innocent people, the other side was presented as "shooting at our civilians and hiding behind its children"; while Israeli suffering was magnified, Palestinian suffering (that was much larger in terms of loss of life and damage to property) was disregarded by the Israeli media. And finally, while Israeli TV channels reported positively about the sympathy that Israel gained through the presentation of its civilians’ suffering, they presented similar attempts to gain sympathy by the other side in a disparaging manner and called them "propaganda".

The next chapter analyzes the Palestinian media coverage of the war. Expectedly, perhaps, the coverage on the other side was quite alike, only the other way around: “Us” being the Palestinians and “them”, the Israelis.
Palestinian Media Coverage of "Operation Pillar of Defense"

This part of the report examines how the Palestinian media in the West Bank covered the war on Gaza. It opens with an overview of the Palestinian media coverage at large, followed by an in-depth analysis of the three key Palestinian daily newspapers in the west bank (i.e. in the Palestinian National Authority: PNA). The Gaza Strip daily newspaper Falasteen was not included in the focused analysis, since its structure of coverage and its link to political issues differs greatly from the West Bank newspapers.

The Palestinian media followed the second war on Gaza vigorously, in a way that was different in many aspects from its regular coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. This includes the coverage of the previous war on Gaza Strip in 2008, codenamed by Israel “Operation Cast Lead”.

The three West Bank newspapers, Al-Quds, Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida depended largely on foreign and Israeli news agencies for feature stories and analyses. Notwithstanding, these newspapers unprecedentedly relied on their own reporters on site as first sources of information. Local official and independent sources such as the Palestinian News Agencies Wafa and Maan came in second as sources of information. Reliance on international news agencies came in the third place. Hence, priority in epistemic framing was given to local Palestinian sources rather than external ones. Consequently, the media coverage was essentially mobilized behind the Palestinian resistance.

The Palestinian satellite channels also played an important role in covering the war. The coverage was live on Al-Aqsa, PBC, Al-Quds and Falasteen Al-Yawm and was markedly highly emotional and tense. Nonetheless, the satellite channels provided an ongoing analysis of events, and were important sources of information and breaking news from their reporters on site. It is worth noting that these channels did not play such an important role during the previous war on Gaza. Some even claim that this new coverage was the reason for Israel’s bombing of the media building in Gaza on the 18th of November 2012.

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<th>Local Palestinian Dailys</th>
<th>West Bank</th>
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<th>Gaza</th>
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<tr>
<td>Al-Quds</td>
<td>Al-Ayyam</td>
<td>Al-Hayat Al-Jadida</td>
<td>Falasteen</td>
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<td>West Bank</td>
<td>Falasteen Al-Yawm</td>
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<th>Palestinian Satellite Channels</th>
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<td>Al-Aqsa</td>
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Regarding the Arab satellite channels, while the Lebanese *Al-Mayadeen* and *Al-Manar* both broadcast live footage from Gaza, *Al-Jazeera* and *Al-Arabiya* did not give the war on Gaza the coverage it deserved, focusing instead on the events in Syria. Hence, these last two channels lost much of their audience in the West Bank and Gaza Strip.

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<tr>
<th>Arab Satellite Channels</th>
<th>Al-Mayadeen</th>
<th>Al-Manar</th>
<th>Al-Jazeera</th>
<th>Al-Arabiya</th>
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The many Palestinian radio stations also offered coverage of the war. They provided detailed and professional information, without being subjected to political pressure, unlike the daily newspapers. On the radio, there was Intensive use of patriotic music to mobilize public opinion against Israeli aggression. The patriotic songs, which were played around the clock, positioned the radios as responsible for the “national spirit”.

Palestinian social media networks also played a very important role in the coverage of the war. They constituted sources of information, even posting original videos and pictures. The political discourse on these sites was enthusiastic and in support of the Palestinian resistance. They closely followed the firing of rockets on Tel Aviv and Jerusalem. They posted pictures of Israeli army personnel in states of fear and panic, adding sarcastic remarks on Israeli civilians and troops. They posted pictures of Palestinian children, the killed and the wounded, extensively. Their proclaimed purpose was to provoke discussion against Israel as an occupying country and to revenge for the victims. Thus, they became a war zone between Palestinian factions and the Israeli army, as reported on in the following headline in *Al-Quds* newspaper:

HAMAS IS FIGHTING ANOTHER WAR AGAINST ISRAEL ON THE SOCIAL NETWORKING SITES
(*Al-Quds*, November 17, 2012 page 4)

Many Palestinians, including the Palestinian media, followed developments through the social media, including online statements of the Israeli army spokesperson and reports and pictures from the resistance factions. Nonetheless, the mainstream media did not make full use of the abundant material on the social communication sites. They stopped at what they received from their reporters and the local and international news agencies.

This research recognizes four main themes in the discourse in the Palestinian media at large, as presented above, during the war on Gaza: **national Unity, power, victimhood and criticism of the Arab reaction**. These themes, characteristic of all Palestinian media during the war, are demonstrated in this research by an in depth analysis of the three key Palestinian daily newspapers, which includes all war coverage between November 15th and 18th 2012.
The Palestinian division between the West Bank and Gaza Strip was at a climax point during the previous war on Gaza in 2008. This had influenced the coverage in the West Bank, which is pro-PNA, and the coverage in the Gaza Strip, which is pro-Hamas. The West Bank media had largely focused on published statements by the Palestinian leadership in Ramallah and shunned the Gaza narrative.

In 2012, the atmosphere was quite different. Unprecedentedly, the war greatly enhanced the unity of the political and factional discourse in Palestine as well as the call for unity of the West Bank and Gaza Strip. This was clearly expressed by a cry for solidarity with Gaza in the West Bank newspapers, as evident in these headlines:

- **MARCH AND SIT IN STRIKE IN RAMALLAH AGAINST THE ISRAELI AGGRESSION ON GAZA** (Al-Ayyam, November 16, 2012, page 6)
- **CALL FOR BOYCOTTING ISRAELI PRODUCTS IN RESPONSE TO THE AGGRESSION** (Al-Ayyam, November 16, 2012, page 2)

The cry for solidarity was also evident in photos of demonstrations against the aggression:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Headline: CLASHES IN THE WEST BANK AND MARCHES IN PARIS, LONDON AND TEL AVIV</th>
<th>مواجهات بالضفة ومسيرات في باريس ولندن وتل أبيب</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Picture subtitle: Demonstrators in Paris against the aggression on Gaza.</td>
<td>متظاهرين في باريس ضد العدوان على غزة</td>
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<td>(Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, November 18, 2012, front page)</td>
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In addition to the discourse of solidarity, the West bank newspapers were filled with cries for political Palestinian unity, by official and unofficial figures. The unity was portrayed as a means to face a “common enemy,” which is the Israeli occupation and the policies of the extreme right wing government headed by Netanyahu. This theme appeared in many headlines on front and inner pages of the three newspapers. In essence, the entire media was focused on the new political discourse of unity.

Here are some examples from *Al-Quds* newspaper:

- **FACTIONS: ENDING THE DIVISION IS THE BEST RESPONSE TO THE OCCUPATION * HAMAS**
- **CALLS FOR PROTEST IN THE WEST BANK**
  (Al-Quds, November 15, 2012, front page)
- **PALESTINIAN LEADERSHIP IN A STATE OF NON-STOP MEETING**
“Operation Pillar of Defense” in the Israeli and Palestinian Media

PRESIDENT [ABBAS]: ISRAEL HAS A PLAN TO HIT THE NATIONAL PROJECT, WE HAVE TO BE UNITED
(Al-Quds, November 17, 2012, front page)

19 ARRESTED, A LADY IS HURT IN A PROTEST IN AL-AQSA MOSQUE IN DAMASCUS GATE, THE
MUFTI CONDEMNS THE AGGRESSION ON GAZA AND CALLS FOR REGAINING UNITY
(Al-Quds, November 17, 2012, front page)

THE ASSASSINATION OF JA’BARI UNITES PALESTINIANS
(Al-Quds November 17, 2012 page 3)

The cry for unity was even expressed by President Abbas himself, as in the next example:

PRESIDENT [ABBAS]: NOW IS THE TIME FOR RECONCILIATION.
WE ARE READY TO GO TO THE UNITED NATIONS NO MATTER WHAT
(Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, November 17, 2012, front page)

The support for Gaza in the West Bank was also evident in the caricatures published by the
three newspapers. These were an important way to express the newspapers’ message. On
November 18, Al-Hayat Al-Jadida published the following caricature on page 24. It depicts a
dead Palestinian fighter with a rifle, being embraced by the hands of the united Palestinians
from the West Bank and Gaza Strip, despite the Hamas – Fatah divide. This sentiment of
supporting the militant resistance to Israel in Gaza, was not expressed in the media during
the 2008 Israeli war on Gaza.

The media stated clearly that the resistance to the occupation had reached a "new formula",
through the firing of long range rockets that hit the Israeli towns of Tel Aviv and Jerusalem.
This had never happened before in the history of the Arab-Israeli conflict, notwithstanding
the rockets Saddam Hussein fired at Israel in the early 1990s. Even Hezbollah didn't have the
power to reach Jerusalem during the war with Israel.
This new development, which gave the Palestinian resistance a boost of pride and strength, was reflected in the coverage in two main ways: By an exaggeration of the fear and panic in Israel, and by an exaggeration of the power of the Palestinian resistance.

**Fear and panic in Israel**

The fear and panic in Israel was reported on repeatedly and accentuated during the war. This was evident in dramatic headlines and pictures of scared Israeli citizens and soldiers on the front and inner pages of the newspapers. The language used to describe the horror among the Israelis was exaggerated and similar in all three newspapers. Here are a few examples:

**Picture subtitle:** Sderot – an Israeli citizen inspects her home, which has been hit by a rocket fired from the Gaza Strip yesterday.

*Al-Quds, November 16, 2012, front page*

**Picture subtitle:** Israelis fleeing to shelters after the fall of rockets at the town of Kiryat Malachi yesterday.

*Al-Ayyam, November 16, 2012, front page*

**Picture subtitle:** Israeli families at a shelter in Kiryat Malachi.

*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, November 16, 2012, front page*

**Picture subtitle:** Sirens terrify Israeli occupation soldiers and make them cry.

*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, November 18, 2012, front page*
"Operation Pillar of Defense" in the Israeli and Palestinian Media

Headline: Picture from southern Israel: Netivot streets are empty with pedestrians fearing rockets

Picture subtitle: Israeli families hide in a shelter in the town of Nitzan in southern Israel for fear of Palestinian rockets.

Al-Ayyam, November 16, page 8, 2012

Headline: Snapshots from Israel ... fear and panic

Headline: Strong shock in Tel Aviv, Netanyahu hides in a fortified room

Text: Tel Aviv - severe shock prevailed in the city "Tel Aviv" following the rocket launched yesterday evening in response to the assassination of al-Qassam Brigades commander Ahmad Al-Jabbari. The Hebrew Maariv newspaper said on its website that a severe state of shock dominates the city "Tel Aviv", writing that Israelis living in a state of fear and anxiety.

Al-Quds, November 16, 2012, front page

Such scenes, as shown in the examples above, are a new development in the media, since Israel has always been portrayed as a mighty and undefeatable power. This coverage signifies a change of tone in the Palestinian media, which embraced the newly found feeling of Palestinian power and the apparent capacity to fight back the powers of the occupation.
**War between equals**

The headlines of the three local newspapers exaggerated the power of the Palestinian resistance, as if the war was between two equal opponents. They did this by publishing the news of the rocket strikes in Israel and Palestine side by side, as in the following headlines:

"STONES OF BAKED CLAY" HIT “PILLAR OF DEFENSE"
*(Al-Quds, November 16, 2012 front page)*

13 PEOPLE KILLED INCLUDING AN INFANT AND 4 CHILDREN, 3 ISRAELIS KILLED IN KIRYAT MALACHI
TEL AVIV SOUNDS THE SIRENS AFTER BEING HIT BY TWO ROCKETS
*(Al-Ayyam, front page, November 16, 2012)*

ISRAELI SHELLING CONTINUES AND ROCKETS FIRED AT JERUSALEM
*(Al-Quds, front page, November 17, 2011)*

11 PEOPLE KILLED, ROCKETS HIT JERUSALEM AND TEL AVIV
*(Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, front page, November 17, 2012)*

NUMBER OF PEOPLE KILLED RISES TO 32, INTENSIVE NON-STOP AIR RAIDS ROCKETS HIT JERUSALEM, SIGNS OF A CLOSE GROUND ASSAULT
*(Al-Ayyam, front page, November 17, 2012)*

THE ROCKETS OF THE RESISTANCE CONTINUE TO BE FIRED AND 4 ISRAELI TROOPS ARE WOUNDED
THE [ISRAELI] AIR RAIDS DESTROY THE HEADQUARTERS OF THE “DISMISSED” GOVERNMENT AND POLICE, 46 PEOPLE KILLED AND 400 WOUNDED
*(Al-Quds, November 18, 2012, front page)*

The media overstated the news of long range Palestinian rockets aimed at Jerusalem and Tel Aviv, while creating an impression among readers that the rockets actually hit these cities. The purpose was to exhibit the new Palestinian power. Thus, the resistance and the power of the Palestinian factions in Gaza were glorified.

This theme was evident in the caricature section as well. The caricatures aimed to encourage people and mobilize Palestinian public opinion in support of the resistance, as seen in the following examples from Al-Ayyam newspaper:

This caricature was published on page 24 on November 16, depicting Netanyahu launching the Pillar of Defense. The caption reads “Are you sure you are up to this?”
The same idea is repeated in Al-Ayyam on page 24 on November 17. This time the focus is on the state of confusion in the Israeli security and political agencies after the failure to stop the rockets from hitting Israeli towns. The caricature depicts Israel’s Prime Minister Netanyahu and defense minister Barak arguing over the military operation. The caption reads “things are out of control.”

Al-Ayyam published another caricature on November 18 on page 20 depicting the failure of Operation Pillar of Defense. The caricature shows Netanyahu holding a pillar of smoke (the literal translation of the Hebrew name of the operation). The caption reads “a word of advice” and the man says to Netanyahu “bite your pillar and get lost”.

Al-Quds published the following caricature on November 15, 2012 on page 18. It depicts an Israeli tank with a gun spilling liquid instead of missiles. The caption reads “Cast Lead?”

It is important to note that the Arab Spring had a big impact on the Palestinians, bringing hope for a “Palestinian Spring” that would unite Fatah and Hamas and free Palestine. The following caricature, published on page 20 of Al-Hayat Al-Jadida on November 17, is an example of this sentiment. It glorifies the Palestinian power by referring to hitting Tel Aviv, the most important Israeli town. Aviv in means spring so the writing reads “Tel-Spring”. The blossoming flower implies that out of the resistance will grow the Palestinian spring.
“Operation Pillar of Defense” in the Israeli and Palestinian Media

Victimhood

Notwithstanding the message of Palestinian power, the Palestinian media also showed the Palestinian civilian population as vulnerable victims. This was done in two main ways. The first was describing Israel as the aggressor, and the second was focusing on the Palestinian victims through photos. It is interesting to note that there was a lack of private stories.

Israel is the aggressor

The three newspapers chose similar lexical selections in defining the Israeli attack on Gaza Strip in the aftermath of the assassination of Ahmad Al-Ja’bari. The attack was described as war or aggression, with a focus on Palestinian civilian victims. See for example the following headlines:

- 8 PEOPLE KILLED, INCLUDING AN INFANT, AND DOZENS WOUNDED * THE RESISTANCE RESPONDS BY FIRING ROCKETS AT ISRAELI TOWNS
- AL-JA’BARI ASSASSINATED IN AN ISRAELI AGGRESSION ON GAZA
  Al-Quds, November 15, 2012, front page
- 9 PEOPLE KILLED AND DOZENS WOUNDED IN CONTINUOUS AIR RAIDS AND THREATS OF GROUND INCURSION
  ISRAEL STARTS A WAR ON GAZA BY ASSASSINATION AHMAD AL-JA’BARI
  Al-Ayyam, November 15, 2012, front page
- 8 PEOPLE KILLED INCLUDING AL-JA’BARI * THE AGGRESSION CONTINUES
  THE PRESIDENT CALLS UPON THE SECURITY COUNCIL TO END THE AGGRESSION
  OBAMA SEEKS JUSTIFICATIONS FOR THE ISRAELI AGGRESSION
  Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, November 15, 2012, front page

The Palestinians are the victims

The three newspapers relied heavily on visual semiotics to show the results of the Israeli aggression on Gaza Strip. This included pictures of the victims, dead and wounded, mostly children. Some media entities stopped at the coverage of the massive destruction of civilian property and infrastructure resulting from the Israeli air raids. The pictures occupied large areas of the front and internal pages. The outcome was a portrayal of a violent and a bloody attack on the civilian population of Gaza.
"Operation Pillar of Defense" in the Israeli and Palestinian Media

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<tr>
<th>Image 1</th>
<th>Image 2</th>
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<td>Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, 18 November 2012, page 1</td>
<td>Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, 17 November 2012, page 1</td>
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<td>Al-Ayyam, 18 November 2012, page 1</td>
<td>Al-Quds, 16 November, 2012, page 1</td>
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The following caricature was published by *Al-Quds* on November 15 on page 36. It is a drawing that comprises the three letters of Gaza in Arabic. They are drawn separately as bleeding doves, a symbol of the death of the prospect of peace.

![Caricature](image)

In the next caricature published in *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* on November 15, page 20, the Israeli bombs turned the Gaza homes into coffins:

![Caricature](image)

**Criticism of the Arab reaction**

The three newspapers depicted harsh criticism towards the Arab world, for not coming to the aid of the Palestinian people in Gaza and acting against the Israeli aggression. This was overtly evident in the caricatures. For example, the following caricature was published by *Al-Quds* on November 16 on page 18. The caricature shows black clouds and Israeli fighter jets shelling Palestinian homes. The title reads: Reactions. The woman on the right says “Protests and a major country withdrew its ambassador.” The woman on the left says “And ...”. This implies that the reactions are not up to the level of the Israeli attack.

![Caricature](image)
"Operation Pillar of Defense" in the Israeli and Palestinian Media

On November 15 Al-Ayyam published a caricature on page 24. It looks like a question mark. The title reads “Operation Pillar of Defense.” The caricature depicts Netanyahu in a fighter jet. The word in red reads “where are the Arabs?”.

![Caricature of Netanyahu in a fighter jet with a question mark and the word “where are the Arabs?”]

Al-Quds published the following caricature on page 36 on November 17. It depicts the Arab Spring as a small plant over a smoking gun of a tank. The caricaturist expresses disappointment with the Arab Spring.

![Caricature of a small plant over a smoking gun with the caption “disappointed Arab Spring”]

Summary

The Palestinian media extensively covered the war. As opposed to the past, the newspapers relied on their own reporters on site as first sources of information. Local official and independent sources such as the Palestinian News Agencies Wafa and Maan came in second as sources of information. Reliance on international news agencies came in the third place.

An in-depth analysis of the three key Palestinian daily newspapers in the west bank - Al-Quds, Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadida - reveals that four main themes dominated the newspapers’ coverage. The first is national Unity: the media emphasized a message of renewed unity and solidarity between the West Bank and Gaza. Second, power: An amplification of Palestinian military power over Israel. Third, victimhood: Israel was presented as the aggressor, and Palestine as the victim. Fourth, criticism of the Arab reaction: Anger towards the Arab world for abandoning Gaza.
Conclusions

In an asymmetrical conflict, where one side is clearly stronger than the other, there is a foreseeable difference in the journalistic coverage in each side. Such was the case in the late war on Gaza, in 2012. For instance, Israeli civilian suffering, which was presented in the Israeli media as an outcome of an immoral and unjustified assault by the Palestinians, was presented in the PNA media as a symbol of renewed Palestinian strength against the Israeli aggression. On the other hand, Palestinian civilian suffering, which was interpreted in the Israeli media as a sadly unavoidable and relatively low price that Palestinians civilians paid for the violence that they forced upon Israel. Thus, each side managed, by different forms of coverage, to justify the violence it perpetrated against the other side.

The comparison of the two analyses also reveals many important similarities. Recurring themes appeared in the coverage on both sides, as mirror images, identical yet opposite. What was assumed about “us” and the “other” in the Israeli media was similarly assumed about “us” and the “other” in the PNA media. The comparison especially reveals these shared themes in the media coverage of both sides:

- Intense, dramatic and broad coverage of the war.
- A strong focus on the “our” civilian suffering.
- Presenting civilians as suffering and simultaneously as capable of withstanding anything.
- A strong sentiment of national unity and of unified support of the war efforts.
- A presentation of the other side as accountable for the war and to blame for the suffering it is causing.
- Presenting the civilian suffering as a means to international legitimization.

These findings correlate with previous studies, which claim that in a state of perpetuated conflict that causes immense suffering on both sides, the public discourse tends – maybe naturally – to present “us” as victims and “them” as accountable. Social-Psychologically, this dichotomist perception is vital, both internally, in order to justify military actions to the public, and externally, in order to gain international legitimacy for these actions. Presenting "me" as the victim and "the other" as the aggressor strengthens internal unity, provides legitimacy for violent actions against "the aggressor", allows for self-presentation as morally superior, and enables the suppression of self-guilt.

One of the central mechanisms used to disseminate conflict-related themes is the press. Moreover, the press – as opposed to the often heard view – disseminates not only information but also emotions, experiences and worldviews. Numerous coverage instances

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“Operation Pillar of Defense” in the Israeli and Palestinian Media

put together create a “coverage tone”, an atmosphere, which media consumers absorb and tend to adopt even when they do not delve into the facts brought by the press. This atmosphere naturally echoes the psycho-social infrastructure of the society in general, and questions regarding victimization, guilt and responsibility in particular.

In the case examined here, Israeli TV channels and Palestinian newspapers disseminated a dichotomist and militaristic worldview of "black and white", while blurring out the points of similarity between the two sides. They disseminated an atmosphere of mistrust, accusations, self-pity, and disregard for the suffering of the other. Essentially, the media recruited and motivated both nations to the war. Moderate voices calling to calm the situation were pushed to the margins.

The media plays a decisive role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Its dedication to an extremist presentation of national narratives traps civilians of the region in a vicious cycle of violence. It increases the prospect of war and diminishes the chance to reach reconciliation and an agreement. We must appeal the media to act with restraint and fairness, so that it fulfills its professional obligation to provide reliable and unbiased information.