



Academic Paper

Transformations in International Public Opinion and Operation al-Aqsa Flood



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Transformations in International Public Opinion and Operation al-Aqsa Flood

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Introduction

Media in its various forms (written, audio and visual), both traditional and contemporary, constitutes the most influential tool in shaping public opinion in any country, region or on the global stage. Without delving into the details of media theories, its function can be summarized in three central dimensions:²



- ▶ 1. Framing: Crafting a cognitive framework through which the recipient interprets information. This involves promoting a particular problem definition (e.g., Gaza war, terrorist attacks by Hamas, Al-Aqsa Flood, Palestinian resistance attacks, iron swords, etc.), making causal interpretation by Israel (e.g., Israel claiming that the cause of the war in Gaza Strip (GS) is the resistance's attack on October 7th), making a moral evaluation of the issue (e.g., terrorism, resistance, self-defense, aggression, etc.), and then treatment recommendation (e.g., two-state solution, GS occupation, relocation of its residents to Sinai or the diaspora, etc.). In essence, framing involves shaping a cognitive system around a specific subject in a way that directs the recipient's understanding toward desired perspectives by the frame maker.
- ▶ 2. Priming: Setting standards that people use to make evaluations of a phenomenon or its repercussions (e.g., difficulty in avoiding harm to civilians in urban warfare, the resistance launching missiles from among civilians, Iran being responsible for igniting this war, violent nature of Islamic thought, etc.).
- ▶ 3. Agenda-setting: making some issues more salient in people's mind. If a state faces a particular problem, it raises issues to divert public attention from an undesired perspective to a one it seeks to establish. This might involve downplaying the impact of occupation on Palestinian society, emphasizing normalization as evidence of Arab understanding of Israel's right to exist, neglecting discussions on UN resolutions supporting Palestinian rights, or highlighting specific facts over others.



There has been a significant transformation in the effectiveness of these “three dimensions,” with a shift from monopolization (official, elite or institutional) to participation by any individual (from constrained democracy to free democracy).³ In previous periods, especially in political media, information was monopolized by state apparatuses or specific tools wielded by elites, alongside private institutions associated with companies or financial institutions, etc. The general characteristic was that the majority of society was recipient. This aided official, elite or private institutional monopolies in “framing” the collective mind in one way or another, directing reactions and their consequences in a specific direction. However, the revolution of social media in its various forms has transformed the world from the era of monopolization to that of public participation. The recipient has become a producer of news, images, articles or videos, and the transmission of news has become faster and more widespread.⁴ Consequently, there is no longer the ability to monopolize and adapt the recipient’s reactions according to the content published or broadcast by the monopolizer. Media has become more democratic, limiting the scope of the “manufactured narrative” by the monopolizer. Specialized studies have revealed⁵ that public opinions in Western countries have a clear impact on the “political discourse” of Western politicians, leading them to modify their political texts to ensure public support.

Based on the above, this study attempts to explore the aforementioned transformation of media impact on public opinion worldwide, by observing the change of global public opinion after Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, that started on 7/10/2023 and is still ongoing to date.⁶



First: Israel and Its Allies’ Strategy in Dealing with the Resistance Military Operation:

When examining how Israeli media covered the military operation, we find that there has been an evident collaboration between Israeli and Western experts, especially those with previous connections to the Middle East, in order to set an Israeli media strategy that would win international public opinion, particularly that it is not possible anymore to monopolize the narrative. The following points are noted:⁷

- ▶ 1. Israel repeats that the resistance’s attack on October 7th was not preceded by any Israeli provocation or hostile action towards GS. This aims to establish the idea that the resistance instigated the event, warranting condemnation. In response, Palestinian media should focus on Israeli policies before the operation, emphasizing that Operation Al-Aqsa Flood is a response to Israel’s rejection of all “peace” initiatives

proposed by Palestinians and the international community. It has been 16 years since the complete siege of GS, not to mention the closure of its airport, the disruption of its ports, the prevention of its fishermen from practicing marine fishing in GS's territorial waters, the constant flying of aircraft in its skies, and the repeated attacks on its citizens, in addition to the continuation of settlement activity in the West Bank (WB), arrests, and the demolition of homes, and the constant violation of the holy sites of Palestinian Muslims in *al-Aqsa* Mosque and other Islamic and Christian places.



- ▶ 2. Israeli propaganda emphasizes that the central goal of the Israeli attack is against “resistance-terrorism,” not the Palestinian people or the official Palestinian Authority (PA).

Here it is necessary to emphasize that if the attack was only on the Hamas movement in GS, then why were hundreds of Palestinians killed, thousands arrested, homes demolished and homes confiscated or demolished in WB and Jerusalem during and before the Israeli operations in GS, knowing that Hamas has no institutional or structural presence in WB.



- ▶ 3. Israeli media attempts to convince the international public opinion that the conflict with Palestinians is a cultural struggle,⁸ exploiting the perception of Palestinian resistance as an extension of “Islamic extremism and terrorism,” and continuously mentioning ISIS, Al-Qaeda, attacks on civilians in Europe, Israel, Arab and Muslim countries, September 11th, etc.

Palestinian media must counter this by highlighting the statements of extremist Israeli ministers such as Itamar Ben-Gvir and Bezalel Smotrich, and Israeli clerics,



particularly concerning the displacement of the Palestinians; their description of Palestinians as animals; the draft law that legalizes executing Palestinian prisoners (currently the Knesset is set to discuss it); the number of detainees who die in Israeli prisons, and the number of those who are administratively detained without any charges.



- ▶ 4. Israel promotes the idea that GS is not occupied, emphasizing its withdrawal in 2005. Palestinian media must remind the international community of Benjamin Netanyahu's policies against Palestinians; his desire to absorb the Israeli anger against him, and that his rejection of a ceasefire and his refusal to lift the siege is an attempt to achieve military success in order to restore confidence in him, after Israeli public opinion polls indicated a significant decline in his popularity and that of his party.⁹
- ▶ 5. Israeli propaganda suggests that the war is an extension of Western policy in Ukraine, framing it as a confrontation against anti-Western liberal values. Here, one must pointing out that most Western countries have become more inclined to impose a humanitarian truce in GS, and some of them are even calling for an end to the fighting, but Israel has not responded to these calls, evident in the voting in the United Nations (UN). Hence, Israel does not take into account the interests of Western countries to the same extent that these countries take into account the Israeli interest. These ideas have begun to be echoed in Western writings since 2010, especially in the United States.¹⁰



- ▶ 6. Israel asserts that the war aims to destroy Hamas's military capability, not to reoccupy GS or displace its residents. Thus, it is necessary to reiterate former National Security Council President Giora Eiland's statements on displacements from WB and GS, and even some suggestions to get rid of the Palestinians from the 1948 occupied territories.¹¹
- ▶ 7. Israeli propaganda claims that Hamas has seized power, restricting freedoms and imposing its religious ideology forcibly. Palestinian media must remind the world of the 2006 elections and Hamas victory then, which sparked anger in Israel followed by incitement against the movement, and also made Israel emphasize the importance of security coordination with the PA to stifle and besiege the movement.



- ▶ 8. Israel should restrain the extremist statements of some of its ministers or prevent their circulation. Palestinian media should publicize these statements, organizing discussions on television and in seminars.¹²
- ▶ 9. Continuous Israeli media emphasis on “Israel’s concern for the lives of Palestinians” should be countered by broadcasting images of Israeli destruction, killing and restrictions on citizens’ movement. It is crucial to highlight Israel’s refusal to cooperate with international organizations to improve living conditions for Palestinians in the WB and GS, especially human rights organizations, international relief agencies, Amnesty International, and Israel’s media attack on the UN Secretary-General. Addressing these points would confirm the inhumane situation in the non-occupied territories, according to public opinion polls of Palestinian society conducted by a US research institution.¹³

| The Living and Psychological Situation | GS (%) | WB & Jerusalem (%) |
|---|---------------|-------------------------------|
| Struggled to Afford Food | 57 | 28 |
| Unable to Afford Shelter | 29 | 17 |
| Anger and Stress | 53 | 40 |
| Anger due to confinement | 44 | 36 |
| Loss of hope among youth | 28 | 36 |

Second: The Shift in International Public Opinion with Operation Al-Aqsa Flood:

Israel has recognized the danger of transition, we mentioned, from media dominance to popular participation. It has realized that the end of media dominance is shaking its international image. Many Israeli officials and writers have acknowledged this. When reviewing the shifts in international public opinion in favor of the Palestinians, the Israeli concern becomes apparent, and it can be seen in the following:¹⁴

- ▶ 1. Former Israeli Prime Minister Naftali “Bennett pointed out that pro-Palestinian content is 15 times more than pro-Israeli content on China-based social media platform TikTok.”¹⁵



- ▶ 2. The change in the attitudes of public opinion in the United States over approximately a month from the outbreak of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood is evident in the following indicators during the period of 12-13/10/2023–14/11/2023:¹⁶
 - ▶ a. The percentage of those demanding support for Israel decreased from 41% (at the beginning of Operation Al-Aqsa Flood) to 32% (after 41 days of the confrontation). Additionally, 68% of Americans support a ceasefire, contrary to the official US and Israeli positions. Those calling for the US to be a neutral mediator rose to 39% from 27% a month earlier.
 - ▶ b. When comparing the support for sending weapons to Israel and Ukraine, the results were as follows:

| | Yes (%) | No (%) |
|----------------|---------|--------|
| Ukraine | 41 | 32 |
| Israel | 31 | 43 |

And this clearly indicates that the approval rate for Ukraine is significantly higher compared to Israel.

- ▶ c. Support for Israel among Republicans was higher than the approval rate among Democrats, especially among the youth.
- ▶ 3. The stance of Jews worldwide and their participation in protests: “Who are the Jews who turn their backs on Israel?” This was the title of an article in the Yedioth Ahronoth newspaper by the Israeli writer Attila Somfalvi, who stated, “The most eye-jarring among them are Jews participating in a campaign of defamation against their own nation, which is mercilessly attacked by human monsters,” adding, “The stark historical ignorance on display is heart-wrenching, compelling us, Jews, to reflect on the how and why of this miserable reality.”¹⁷



- ▶ 4. A report from the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) indicated the number of demonstrations supporting Israel and the Palestinians worldwide during the period 7–27/10/2023:¹⁸
 - ▶ a. In the United States: 182 demonstrations supporting Israel compared to 402 demonstrations supporting the Palestinians and opposing Israel.



- ▶ b. The number of demonstrations supporting Israel worldwide during the same period was 359 demonstrations, compared to 3,482 demonstrations supporting the Palestinians.
 - ▶ c. Another study indicated that the number of demonstrations during the same period was 3,761 demonstrations supporting the Palestinians compared to 529 supporting Israel, meaning that the support was around 86% in favor of the Palestinians.¹⁹
- ▶ 5. Content analysis of newspapers and websites (non-Arabic and non-Islamic):²⁰ 1,080 headlines from Western, Asian, African or Latin American newspapers and websites were collected. These headlines were categorized based on the content's implications, whether it supports Israel or the Palestinians. The sample was randomly selected, and after sorting, it was found that:
- ▶ a. 726 headlines supported the Palestinians, accounting for 67.2%.
 - ▶ b. 317 headlines supported Israel, accounting for 29.3%.
 - ▶ c. 37 headlines either supported both parties or opposed them, accounting for 3.5%.

- ▶ 6. Operation Al-Aqsa Flood brought the Palestine issue back to the forefront of international concerns after other international problems, such as the Ukraine crisis and the possibilities of a U.S.-China confrontation over Taiwan, began to get more attention. A polling conducted on 20–23/10/2023, explored this amongst British adults:²¹



- ▶ a. 69% of respondents said that they are following the conflict in Israel and GS very or fairly closely, compared to 62% that say the same about the Ukraine issue.
- ▶ b. 74% of respondents are concerned about the impact of the conflict on Palestinian civilians, compared to 71% who are concerned its impact on Israeli civilians.
- ▶ c. Regarding the UK role in the war, 37% wanted it to be a neutral mediator, 16% to not be involved at all, 13% wanted it to support Israel, while 12% wanted it to support the Palestinians. However, the striking point in these results is as follows:

- Those aged 18–34 are more likely to want the UK government to support the Palestinians (23%) than the Israelis (7%).
- Those aged 55–75 are more likely to want the UK government to support Israel (22%) rather than the Palestinians (4%).



Third: Future Implications of These Results:

The prevailing trend in Western and non-Western media suggests that Israel lost the media war²² in Operation Al-Aqsa Flood. Moreover, most reports from international organizations or those conveyed by various media outlets are starting to view Israeli narratives with considerable skepticism, especially regarding hospital issues and justifications for killing civilians, including children and women. The most significant implications of these results might include:

- ▶ 1. The “terrorist” image of the Arabs presented by Israel has become less credible, with the continuous increase in civilian casualties among Palestinians in GS and WB. This means that Israel will face skepticism about its narratives every time it attempts to present itself positively or compares the Palestinian side to extremist entities. For the current image of Israeli behavior in GS has become a reference in the recipient’s mind.



- ▶ 2. Several reports from Western media and international organizations seem to contradict the Israeli narrative regarding the “military presence of resistance” in hospitals or schools.²³ This will likely strengthen doubts in Israeli narratives in the future.
- ▶ 3. Israeli policies have reinforced, from the Western perspective, the view that Israel has become more of a burden than assistance, despite its limited assistance so far.²⁴
- ▶ 4. It is certain that any Israeli official returning to talk about the Holocaust or anti-Semitism will be reminded of what his government did in GS. This will make Israel less inclined to repeat discussions about the Holocaust, because it has engaged in the same practices. In other words, this idea (the Holocaust) is no longer as meaningful as it used to be, and Western media has begun to point this out.²⁵

- ▶ 5. Indicators in the US and EU countries suggest that the younger generations (future leaders) are more sympathetic to the Palestinian position. This became particularly evident in the period after Operation Al-Aqsa Flood, meaning that the possibilities of gradual changes in attitudes not aligned with Israeli policies will increase.
- ▶ 6. While our study is concerned with public opinion, voting in UN, statements by the UN Secretary-General and its specialized agencies, and the number of countries that withdrew their ambassadors or protested against Israeli policy towards GS all reinforce, to a certain extent, the shifts in public opinion in these countries.



Endnotes

- ¹ An expert in futures studies, a former professor in the Department of Political Science at Yarmouk University in Jordan and a holder of Ph.D. in Political Science from Cairo University. He is also a former member of the Board of Trustees of Al-Zaytoonah University of Jordan, Irbid National University, the National Center for Human Rights, the Board of Grievances and the Supreme Council of Media. He has authored 37 books, most of which are focused on future studies in both theoretical and practical terms, and published 120 research papers in peer-reviewed academic journals.
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