**Bombing the media**

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Targeting the media represents an attempt to camouflage the truth. It is a sign of a political will that is not interested in finding a just and long-term solution to violence.

The latest round of Israeli aggression in the Gaza Strip proves evidence of this. Tel Aviv has killed close to 200 Palestinians, 58 of whom were children. It also destroyed the offices of international media outlets. In essence, Israel is now waging battle on a free media that is the rightful watchdog of the unjustness of war.

Let’s be clear here. The ongoing atrocities are indiscriminate, killing both young and old alike. Failure to resolve the crisis leaves Palestinian children feeling powerless, while young people find themselves paying an enormous price for a historical legacy inherited long before they were born. All are victims of hate in a world where tolerance and empathy do not exist. Victims of a world where ethnic cleansing and apartheid are still in place. In 2021.

But the truth, the ability to report from the ground, the journalists, freedom of speech — these, too, are casualties in this war without end. And it suggests that the world is being hoodwinked about the immense power imbalance that fuels this conflict.

Central to enduring Israeli-Palestinian peace is the free exchange of information, free speech and a press that is free to do its job. The deliberate bombing of media outlets underscores that one side is not yet ready for peace

This is what happened on May 15, when the Israeli Air Force decided to destroy a high-rise tower in Gaza that housed both The Associated Press and Al Jazeera bureaus. The one-hour advance warning of the strike allowed occupants to flee the building but did not leave enough time to save media archives; thereby making the job of foreign correspondents working in the field much harder.

Why this is important? It is a question of choking independent voices while preventing the fourth estate from doing its mandated job. That is, arming the world with facts to help all of us to develop critical thinking and to demand that the instigators of violence be held accountable. Of course, social media plays a big role in keeping us informed. But during times of conflict — nothing can replace the role of professional journalism. For with this comes the ability to tap first-hand sources, contextualise important socio-historical reasons that have led us to the present, the necessary experience to interview key players to give space to as many competing voices as possible. In short, ethical journalism is about facts and not one-sided rhetoric, fake news or clickbait potential.

Shadi Hamid, author and senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, explains it well in an article penned for The Atlantic, titled ‘Don’t Take the Narrow View of What’s Happening in Gaza’. He says : “As always in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, two narratives are vying for primacy. In one, Israel is simply defending itself against a fresh attack. In the other, Israel’s bombardment of Gaza is the latest example of a desire to punish and humiliate Palestinians. These two narratives are not reconcilable, which makes reasoned discussion an exercise in futility. But any sophisticated argument must contend with the long, winding lead-up to the current crisis.” So, the first thing is to understand both historical and contemporary contexts.

Hamid goes on to point out that mainstream media outlets only gave minimum coverage to the heavy-handed police raid during the final days of Ramzan at Al-Aqsa mosque in the Old City of occupied East Jerusalem. This is Islam’s third-holiest site and it sits atop Temple Mount, which holds enormous religious significance in Judaism. Hamid instead turned to social media platforms that were documenting the raid and its aftermath in real time, although many were censored due to ‘sensitive content’. He notes that the “tragedy, upon other tragedies, is that the world seems to pay attention to Palestinians only when they use violence. Nonviolent activism goes largely ignored”. Hamid continues to stress how tensions had been building for months, with the threatened eviction of Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood of occupied East Jerusalem. “But even these details don’t capture the broader context. What is so important about Sheikh Jarrah, and why are Palestinian families being faced with eviction in the first place?” The short answer is that the expansion of Israeli settlements in Sheikh Jarrah, taking over land that helps form the final link in a settle circle surrounding occupied East Jerusalem, has been built on land that Palestinians hope will form the capital of a future Palestinian state, as reported by NBC news.

Now where lies the truth? Who really sparked the latest conflict? Who has never complained about the passing UN resolutions? How it is possible to create a peaceful state when there are illegal settlements and a civil society that remembers very clearly the apartheid regime which existed in South Africa until 1991?

While the Israel-Palestinian conflict is complex, this doesn’t mean that there is no possible long-term solution. But central to this is the free exchange of information, free speech and a press that is free to do its job. The deliberate bombing of media outlets underscores that one side is not yet ready for peace.

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