

# Letter by media & communications scholars on British news media coverage of the war in Gaza

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As scholars of journalism, media and communications, we write to express our shock and dismay at what we can only describe as a dangerous suspension of journalistic values, standards, and norms in much of the British news media coverage of the war in Gaza.

Israeli government and army officials are using genocidal language in reference to Palestinians, including terms such as "human animals", "barbarians", and "savages". Several British news media outlets not only fail to report this and warn against it but at times seem to be inciting violence against Palestinians through insinuations that hospitals are legitimate military targets. This implicates media institutions and personnel in accusations of war crimes and violations of international law.

We note that much of the coverage omits key facts and context necessary for understanding this war including that Gaza is an occupied territory under international law that has been under 16 years of illegal siege.

We observe widespread selective use of evidence in reporting. While unsubstantiated Israeli claims are reported in full and treated as trustworthy, Palestinian claims are shrouded in doubt and suspicion.

We note double standards in the coverage of the tragic suffering of civilians in Gaza and in Israel and a biased deployment of emotion in the news. While Israeli civilian victims are rightly mourned, Palestinian victims are reported as nameless numbers.

Furthermore, discrimination seeps into the use of language. We observe the widespread deployment of the passive voice when it comes to the killing of Palestinians, so as not to implicate Israel.

As media scholars, we have studied the dangers of hate and disinformation on social media. We are disturbed to see established news organisations that pride themselves on their impartiality become sources of dangerous misinformation.

We remember the coverage of the ongoing Ukraine war and how British media rose to the task of condemning occupation and voicing support for the victims of military aggression.

Palestinians are no less human than Israelis or Ukrainians and should not be treated as such by British media. The British public deserves balanced and truthful information on this escalating war.

Considering the above, we believe it is vital that news organisations take the following steps:

1. Critically question and provide evidence on Israeli claims in the name of accuracy, fairness and truth.
2. Challenge Israeli officials with difficult questions and not just simply give them uninterrupted airtime.
3. Include the colonial context of Israel's more than 50 years long military occupation of Palestinian territories and 16 years of siege on Gaza – repeatedly condemned by the UN and human rights organizations.
4. Include Palestinian voices in your coverage, not to trap them into denouncing the acts of Hamas as a precondition of any discussion, as if they are guilty by virtue of their identity, but to offer a human perspective and context.
5. Demand that journalists gain access to Gaza and condemn the killing and targeting of journalists doing their jobs in the region.
6. Immediately rescind actions against Palestinian and Arab journalists reporting on the conflict.

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