

AN
HonestReporting
IN-DEPTH MEDIA ANALYSIS



The Washington Post
Time Period: April - June 2010

Why the Washington Post Matters

There is no denying that the Washington Post is one of the most influential news sources in the world. Regardless of political party, Presidents, Congressman, and millions of others begin their day by reading through the Post. One would expect such a well-established source to always be on the lookout for those who are trying to manipulate the news. Headlines, images, and article content should be based on credible, proven sources and those making unsupportable claims should not be given a platform.

For example, the passengers on board the Turkish vessel Mavi Marmara were not waving white flags as Israeli soldiers came aboard – as expressed by anti-Israel protestors in the above image



Photo of anti-Israel protest that ran on the Washington Post website

that was published on the Washington Post website. As was eventually reported throughout the media – based on photographs and video footage – the soldiers were immediately set upon by an angry mob who used iron bars, knives, and even firearms to battle the soldiers. **That is not an opinion, it is a documented fact.** Yet even after the facts became clear, the Post left the above image and other similar ones on its website. This is just one example of Israel's enemies manipulating the media to propagate a very different message, one of naked Israeli aggression.

The media had a responsibility to sort through the claims and report accurately what transpired. As this study will show, the Washington Post failed this task. **In fact, over the three month period during which we analyzed Post articles, the newspaper failed to separate facts from unsubstantiated claims and propaganda.** Every one of the thirty-three articles published by the Post during this period had problems in regarding balance, missing context, selective omissions, and misleading terminology.

We looked at every aspect of the Post's coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli issue. What we saw was that the reporting frequently failed to pass standards of objectivity in four specific areas:

1) Balance

Frequently, those making claims *against* Israel far overwhelmed sources that tried to explain Israel's positions.

2) Context

Key context was often missing leaving readers without extensive background in the history of the Middle East and wondering if the conflict began in 1967.

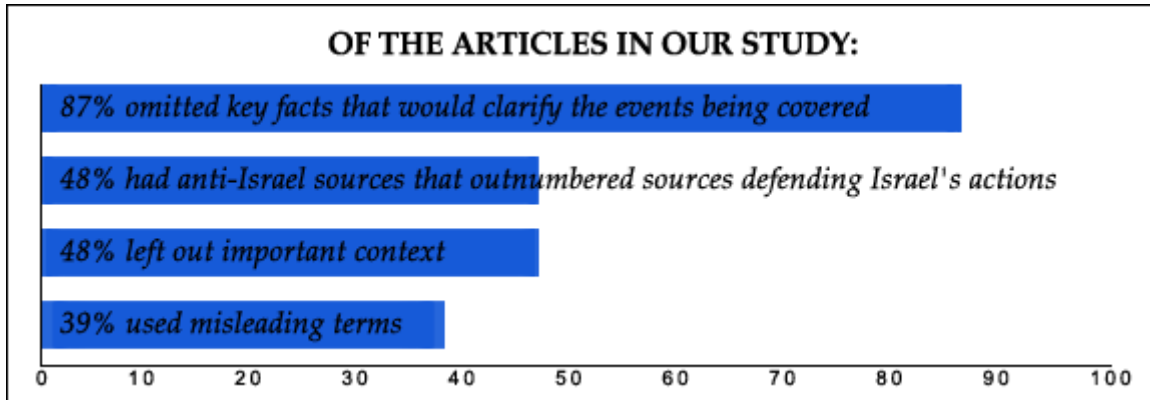
3) Inaccurate Terms

Misleading terms were used and important facts left out.

4) Omission of Key Facts

Key facts about incidents were often left out giving a biased reflection of events.

These elements of bias mean that readers of the Post were more likely to be misled by its coverage than informed.



The Flotilla Story

In our study, we looked at thirty-three articles published by the Washington Post between April 1 and June 31, 2010. This period included the flotilla story – certainly a key test for journalists. The claim that the flotilla organizers wanted the media to report was that Israel attacked unarmed civilians on a strictly humanitarian mission to bring supplies to the Gaza Strip. **This claim was proven to be factually inaccurate when video evidence quickly emerged showing an armed mob beating Israeli soldiers as they landed on the deck of the Marvi Marmara, the largest ship in the flotilla.**

Yet the Post did not immediately dismiss the accusations. In a series of twelve articles concerning the incident, the Post repeatedly refers to the “**aid flotilla**” as if bringing food to a starving population was the objective.

“They had no knives, no axes, only sticks that they used to defend themselves.”

- Passenger's statement from the flotilla published by the Washington Post

While it may seem like eyewitness statements would have been an important part of reporting on this incident when they were clearly not credible. By publishing them, the Post gave a victory to the propagandists.

Inappropriate Use of Images

Images are a critical tool for accurate reporting. Often, a single image can convey far greater detail than many paragraphs of text. Where images show a real scene and that scene is placed in context, the reader can learn a great deal about the true nature of an incident. On the other hand, if images are staged, manipulated, or otherwise set up to mislead, the result can be devastating for those seeking to understand the truth. Additionally, when an important news source such as the Post chooses NOT to publish a freely available image, it can only mean that they do not believe that the image adds to a story.

With that in mind, we have to ask which of the following images reflects more accurately on the passengers of the Mavi Marmara? The dotting father kissing his daughter (*see right, top*) - which the Post did publish? Or this photo of a knife-wielding "peace activist" (*see right, bottom*) that the Israel Defense Forces spokesman made available to the press which the Post decided (unlike many of their colleagues in the media) NOT to publish?



We think we know which the more informative image is. What do you think? (Tell us and then tell the Post.)



What We Looked For

In a May 5 article describing the Israeli and Palestinian perspectives on the peace process, the Post uses direct quotations from Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat and another unnamed Palestinian Authority official. There are no quotations from Israeli officials.

Balance: Where there are differences of opinion, articles should contain factual information from all sides. When quotations are used by officials or "experts," the "deck should not be stacked" against one side. This does not mean that those making non-credible accusations (ie: the passengers in the flotilla were unarmed) should be used in the interest of balance. **Are the Post articles about the conflict balanced?** Not at all. In the 36 articles in our study, we found examples of lack of balance in almost half of them. When an article uses multiple Palestinians or anti-Israel advocacy group as sources, it can not be considered "balanced."

The headline of a May 31 article was "Israeli troops raid aid flotilla." Disregarding Israeli offers to let the ships dock in Ashkelon and then transfer the cargo to Gaza after it had been searched for weapons proves that the goal of the flotilla was not simply to give "aid."

Misleading Terminology: The article should use neutral, objective terminology wherever possible. Some common terms are used for political reasons that belie the true nature of what is being named. Examples include calling terrorists "militants" or referring to a "humanitarian aid convoy" where publicity is a greater goal than the delivery of aid.

A June 1 article described the flotilla as: "...a ship carrying medicine, construction materials, school paper and parts for Gaza's defunct water treatment plant...." No mention was made of the weapons or large amounts of cash that were also aboard.

Selective Omission: Salient facts are often left out that change an article's impact. While an article referring to the suspension of peace talks may be factually accurate, without explaining why the talks have been frozen, the article can be misleading.

In an article on July 1, the Post mentions that "Israel annexed East Jerusalem after capturing it from Jordan in the 1967 Arab-Israeli war."

Context: While the above quote is factually correct – Israel did capture and annex this area in 1967 – it is still misleading. The Jewish connection to parts of Jerusalem that include the Western Wall and the City of David began thousands of years before the 1967 war. Without mentioning this connection, Israeli claims to Jerusalem appear tenuous and only based on military conquest.

The Articles and Our Analysis



April 3, 2010

Hostilities intensify between Gaza, Israel

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/02/AR2010040201724.html>

Article Lead: Tensions along the Israeli border with the Gaza Strip have escalated in the past week, threatening a cease-fire with the ruling Hamas movement that has held since Israeli forces waged war in Gaza last year to try to end rocket attacks.

Elements of Bias: Balance, Context, Misleading Terminology

Analysis: The article discusses not only the Israeli strike, but the situation of the Hamas government and life for Palestinians in Gaza. The article contains direct quotations from two Hamas leaders and a Palestinian civilian who has decided to leave his home to avoid the Israeli military operations. There are no quotations from any Israelis – government or otherwise.

An accompanying picture shows a Palestinian woman walking through the rubble at the scene of what we are told were the Israeli strikes. Yet the Israeli strikes were against rocket storage facilities. There is no evidence that the random destruction shown in the photo – taken by Palestinian stringer Hattam Moussa – is of the airstrike in the article. If it is, why would a woman be walking through the remains of a storage facility?



According to the article, Hamas has been “labeled” a terrorist organization by the U.S. Not only is the Post afraid to use the term itself, but saying they have been “labeled” is an extraordinarily weak way of describing the true nature of the organization. It is even weaker than the expression that Hamas has been “designated” as a terrorist organization.

◆ April 26, 2010

Sharing a West Bank highway proves a tall order for Israel, Palestinians

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/25/AR2010042502024.html>

Article Lead: For eight years, Israeli commuters have whizzed between Jerusalem and Tel Aviv on Highway 443, a road whose West Bank portion is lined with barriers, off-limits to Palestinians who live along the way.

Elements of Bias: Balance, Misleading Terminology

Analysis: Several times the article laments the inability of the Israeli and Palestinians to “*share*” the road. This way of describing the situation implies that the problem is one of selfishness that each side would like to keep the road for itself rather than let others use it.

“If the Israelis and Palestinians can't agree over how to share nine miles of pavement, how will they ever resolve the far more complex issues that divide them?”

Yet the debate over the road is not one of sharing limited resources. Those who live in Palestinian villages were banned from the road as a result of attacks being launched on that very road from those same villages. The military is trying to craft a plan that complies with the Supreme Court ruling yet does not facilitate a resumption of the terrorist attacks.

The article begins and ends with direct quotations from those advocating the Palestinian position, including the moving pleas by the Palestinians' attorney:

"We give these people no hope and no ability to be able to safeguard their rights," she said, "so what options do we leave them with?"

Wouldn't a direct quotation from an Israeli who had lost a loved one in an attack have given the article a bit more balance? While the attorney who represented the Palestinians is interviewed, readers do not hear from the attorney who represented the State and argued against opening the road to those living in the Palestinian villages?

◆ May 5, 2010

Israel, Palestinians move closer to indirect peace talks

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/05/AR2010050504246.html>

Article Lead: Israel and the Palestinians on Wednesday crept closer to indirect peace talks as U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell met with Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu to set the rules for Palestinian statehood discussions.

Elements of Bias: Balance, Misleading Terminology, Omission

Analysis: The article discusses the difficulties in negotiations stemming from the fact that the two sides have different agendas that they want to achieve. There are two separate quotations

from Palestinian officials, while only an indirect statement from the Israeli side. No mention is given in the article that Israel has consistently welcomed the talks while the Palestinians have shunned them. The article also says that Israel accuses the Palestinians of being “insincere about peace.” The accusation that Israel has made is the PA has failed to end incitement and glorification of terrorism. That is much more specific than an accusation of being insincere. The Post is not reporting accurately on Israel's position.

◆ May 7, 2010

Israeli construction in East Jerusalem adds to difficulties facing negotiators

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/06/AR2010050604356.html>

Article Lead: When the Obama administration launches indirect peace talks between the Israelis and the Palestinians, as early as this weekend, it faces a much more complicated landscape than the Clinton or Bush administrations did, especially in Jerusalem.

Analysis: There are several problems with this article:

Elements of Bias: Balance, Omission, Context

1) Once again, the failure of the peace process is attributed to Israel. The one issue of Jewish housing in Jerusalem is singled out as the major obstacle to peace. The idea that the whole peace process and the two state solution is placed into jeopardy by Jewish housing in Jerusalem is phony.

2) Salient facts are omitted. Most importantly is that there is a surplus of Arab housing and a severe shortage of Jewish housing in the city.

According to a 2010 report by JCPA:

“The planned inventory of Jewish housing in Jerusalem does not meet expected needs for 2020, while the planned inventory of Arab housing will suffice until at least 2030.”

Were Washington Post readers to be informed that there is a surplus of Arab housing in Jerusalem and a shortage of Jewish housing, their reactions might be very different than from this article, which implies an Israeli takeover of the city.

The first source the Post uses is Daniel Seideman. Seideman is Director of Ir Amin, an Israeli organization that opposes Israeli construction in disputed areas of Jerusalem. The article describes his organization as an “organization that tracks how city planning affects peace prospects.” Describing Ir Amin this way and not disclosing the organization's agenda is in itself an important omission. His quotation – that within a few years a two state solution will not be possible – is echoed by two of the other sources quoted by the article. Only a single sentence is quoted by a Jerusalem city council member to indicate that there is an



alternate view. One wonders why the Post chose not to have a more balanced set of views in its selection of sources for the article.

Finally, the picture accompanying the article is of Israeli border police clashing with a Palestinian from the Arab village of Wallajah – located outside of the city of Jerusalem. It seems strange that to illustrate a story on housing in Jerusalem, this photo was used. The event in the picture did not happen in Jerusalem. Does the image add in any way to the subject matter of the article? Or is it simply usage of file footage to portray Israel in the most negative light?

◆ **May 16, 2010**
Palestinians turn to boycott of Israel in West Bank

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/15/AR2010051501492.html>

Article Lead: In Mishor Adumim, a bougainvillea-lined industrial zone inside this West Bank Jewish settlement, at least 17 businesses have closed since Palestinians began boycotting its products several months ago.

Elements of Bias: Balance, Omission, Context

Analysis: The article explains the boycott movement as a last choice effort since every other attempt to reach peace with Israel has failed. The article points out:

“For more than 40 years, Palestinians have sought to end Israeli occupation and gain statehood. International terrorism, nearly two decades of negotiations and two major waves of mass revolt have not brought measurable progress toward those goals.

Now Palestinians are looking at the success of their boycott as evidence that a campaign focused on peaceful protest, rather than violent struggle, could finally yield results.”

Stating that two decades of negotiations have not brought the Palestinians “any progress” is an overly broad generalization. The historical record shows that the Palestinian leadership's refusal to compromise prevents progress, not the Palestinians' tactical choices. At Camp David, the Palestinians were offered a state on 95 percent of the disputed territories. This fact has been confirmed by President Clinton and aides who were present at the time. Arafat refused to even consider this offer and instead launched a wave of terrorism. In 2005, Israel withdrew all military bases and settlements from the Gaza Strip only to be met with a rocket war. These are just two examples of Israeli steps towards peace that were met with hostility.

These are not examples of the “failure of negotiations” that the article cites as a basis for the boycott. References such as this one support the false impression that Israeli intransigence is the root cause of the peace process's failure. Is it fair to remove the failure of Palestinian leadership as a root cause?

The quotation from Palestinian Prime Minister Salam Fayyad is given greater prominence in length and placement than the Israeli response from Israeli Deputy Prime Minister Dan Meridor.



May 31, 2010

Israeli troops raid aid flotilla headed for Gaza, killing nine

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/31/AR2010053101209.html>

Article Lead: A nighttime Israeli naval operation to seize control of an aid flotilla headed for the Gaza Strip ended in a fatal melee on Monday as passengers battled with helicopter-borne Israeli commandos aboard a ship sailing on international waters. At least nine pro-Palestinian activists were killed.

Elements of Bias: Misleading Terminology, Omission

Analysis: In covering one of the most important events during the time period we have reviewed, the Post makes some poor choices. For example, the lead paragraph has a huge impact on how Israel's actions are perceived. Yet there are serious problems with the Post's reporting:

- 1) Describing the ships as an "aid flotilla" is not supported by the facts. If the goal of the flotilla was to deliver aid to Gaza, the ships would have accepted the Israeli offer to deliver by land all the aid after it had been checked for weapons.
- 2) The fighting was a result of the mob's attack on Israeli soldiers. The soldiers did not arrive on the ship and initiate the fighting.
- 3) "Pro-Palestinian activists" is hardly descriptive of a group that was armed and openly discussing its desire to be martyred by violently confronting Israelis.



June 1, 2010

Photo Gallery of Flotilla Incident and ensuing Protests

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/gallery/2010/05/31/GA2010053101653.html>

Elements of Bias: Balance, Omission, Context

Synopsis: Appearing with every article covering the flotilla incident, the Post ran a photo gallery that combined pictures of the raid, the participants, and world reaction. There were five times as many pictures of anti-Israel protestors as those supporting the raid. Yet the real problem is that many of the photos were simply shots of handmade anti-Israel signs. They are just expressions of anti-Israel propaganda. Running an image of a mass protest is one thing, but a sign that carries an untruthful statement is really not news. These images do not help readers understand what happened aboard the flotilla. All the Post is doing is giving a platform to anti-Israel extremists. Following are a few examples. The images beg the question: Is the opinion of a member of the "International Migrants Alliance" that Israel is a terrorist state really news?



The rest of the collection consists mainly of Palestinians receiving humanitarian aid and pro-Palestinian casualties from the ships. It seems odd that some images that were run by many other mainstream media were not included in this gallery. Where are the photographs of the mob with the knives and metal bars on the ship? Where are the bloody pictures of the wounded Israeli soldiers? The IDF Spokesperson's Unit gave pictures from the flotilla to all the media, yet the Washington Post decided not to use those shots.



Taken together, the photo gallery supports the Palestinian charge that the flotilla was a civilian mission bringing aid to a starving people that was attacked by Israeli commandos.

◆ **June 1, 2010**
U.N. calls for impartial probe of Israeli raid

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/01/AR2010060100341.html>

Article Lead: The U.N. Security Council early Tuesday condemned "those acts which resulted in" the deaths of at least nine civilians aboard an aid flotilla bound for the Gaza Strip, and called for a "prompt, impartial, credible and transparent" investigation into why and how the Israeli military acted to stop the ships from reaching their destination.

Elements of Bias: Omission

Analysis: The article is mostly made up of direct quotations from the United Nations and representatives of the United States, Turkey, and Israel. Only one paragraph describes the incident:

"At least nine pro-Palestinian activists were killed and dozens were injured early Monday when Israeli naval commandos took control of the boats about 70 miles offshore in international waters. Turkey had dispatched the main Mavi Marmara ship, which carried 600 activists and thousands of tons of aid."

The Post omits very important facts from this description:

- 1) Why does the Post only refer to the "pro-Palestinian activists" as being injured when Israeli soldiers were also wounded, some quite severely?
- 2) Why doesn't the Post mention that it was the passengers who attacked the soldiers?
- 3) Why doesn't the Post refer to the Israeli offer for the ships to dock in an Israeli port for a security inspection at which point aid could be sent to Gaza?

If the Post had mentioned these facts, the reader might get a different impression of the debate

in the United Nations.

◆ **June 1, 2010**

Analysis: Condemnation of Israeli assault complicates relations with U.S.

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/31/AR2010053102500.html>

Article Lead: The worldwide condemnation of the deadly Israeli assault on the Gaza aid flotilla will complicate the Obama administration's efforts to improve its tense relations with Jerusalem and will probably distract from the push to sanction Iran over its nuclear program.

Elements of Bias: Balance, Omission

Analysis: This article discusses Israel's diplomatic standing after the flotilla raid. The only Israeli interviewed for the article was Daniel Levy, a former peace negotiator. He was critical of the Israeli operation – as were the Turkish and European diplomats whose quotations were used alongside an American analyst. No attempt was made to interview anyone explaining, much less supporting Israel's moves.

The description of the incident gives equal weight to the claims of both sides:

Whether the flotilla was an act of civil disobedience remains up for debate. Its organizers said it was, but Israeli officials said members of the Israel Defense Forces were met with violence when they boarded the ships.

Yet the video evidence makes clear that Israeli soldiers were indeed met with violence when they boarded the ships. Why does the Post consider the matter still “up for debate?”

◆ **June 1, 2010**

Turkish foreign minister: Israeli raid on Gaza aid flotilla 'like 9/11' for his country

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/01/AR2010060101506.html>

Article Lead: With anger and sarcasm, Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu lashed out Tuesday at Israel's attack on a Gaza aid flotilla and by extension the Obama administration's reluctance to immediately condemn the assault that left at least nine civilians dead.

Elements of Bias: Omission

Analysis: A selection of the Turkish Foreign Minister's inflammatory comments are published. The main charge is that the Israeli operation was illegal and that Israel should be held accountable. To help readers understand these accusations, it would have been helpful for the Post to talk to someone shedding light on the legality of the Naval interception.

◆ **June 1, 2010**

Israel says Free Gaza Movement poses threat to Jewish state

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/31/AR2010053103445.html>

Article Lead: Once viewed only as a political nuisance by Israel's government, the group behind the Gaza aid flotilla has grown since its inception four years ago into a broad international movement that now includes Islamist organizations that Israeli intelligence agencies say pose a security threat to the Jewish state.

Elements of Bias: Balance, Omission, Context

Analysis: The article describes the incident as:

... Monday morning's raid on a ship carrying medicine, construction materials, school paper and parts for Gaza's defunct water treatment plant.

Absent in the above description is the fact that passengers came aboard with knives and metal rods and had announced in advance their desire to provoke a fight with Israel. While the article does discuss Israeli charges that the organizers of the flotilla were really a front for a radical Islamic organization, it is dominated by quotations from the president of the group who scoffs at the charges. Is it a surprise that the leader of an organization accused of being a front for terrorists denies the charge? Not at all, which is why his remarks are not credible and should not have been at the center of the story.



June 1, 2010

Israel's flotilla raid revives questions of international law

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/01/AR2010060102934.html>

Article Lead: In the two days following its commando raid on an aid flotilla to the Gaza Strip, Israel has been accused by Turkey and several other governments of behaving like an outlaw state, and engaging in acts of piracy and banditry on the high seas.

Elements of Bias: Balance

Analysis: While this is an important article in that it attempts to shed light on the legality of Israel's actions, the Post uses an international law expert, a non-governmental organization (NGO) - Human Rights Watch - that has a history of anti-Israel bias, and a "Palestinian advocate" to make the case that Israel operated illegally. It interviewed only one legal expert who supported Israel's case. (This is in addition to official representatives from both Turkey and Israel.) Phyllis Beemis, the "Palestinian activist" who was interviewed has compared the flotilla incident to the killing of civil rights activists in Mississippi and also wrote:

The recent flotilla crisis, with much less immediate direct impact on Palestinians, may turn out to be one of those moments in which public understanding and perception, this time at an international level, is transformed. The crisis showed that civil society is the key global actor in the international struggle against Israeli occupation and apartheid.

The Post again stacks the deck with sources that outnumber and drown out any other view.

◆ June 2, 2010

◆ **Accounts, videos of flotilla assault continue to conflict**

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/01/AR2010060104000.html>

Article Lead: Under a moonlit sky, Huwaida Arraf, a graduate of American University's law school, watched from a small ship early Monday as Israeli commando boats pulled up to the Mavi Marmara, a vessel filled with about 600 activists hoping to breach an Israeli blockade of Gaza.

Elements of Bias: Balance, Omission, Context

Analysis: The Post attempts to give equal weight to accounts of passengers of the ships in the flotilla and video evidence showing Israeli soldiers being attacked. Does the following actually give a reader any important information?

Norman Paech, a former member of Germany's Left Party who was aboard the Turkish vessel, said he saw only three activists resisting. **"They had no knives, no axes, only sticks that they used to defend themselves,"** Paech said at a news conference in Berlin. **He added, however, that he could "not rule out" that others used weapons somewhere else on the boat.**

If he did not know whether there were passengers using weapons against Israeli soldiers, why print the quotation? No one has ever made the claim that all 600 passengers were armed. So the fact that Paech saw three passengers without knives is inconsequential. Printing the quotation, however, may lead readers to believe that contrary to the video evidence, no passengers were armed.

◆ June 2, 2010

◆ **Nations decry Israel's blockade of Gaza**

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/01/AR2010060100548.html>

Article Lead: Israel's botched and deadly commando raid on an aid flotilla has set off widespread international criticism of the Gaza blockade, with popular opinion in many countries swinging heavily against Israel and even the United States urging its ally to find new ways to allow aid shipments to reach the Palestinians.

Elements of Bias: Balance, Omission

Analysis: As a news organization, the Post should identify for readers what the facts show about the raid. Instead, it simply reports each side's claims, including the patently false charge that the passengers were all unarmed civilians.

Israeli officials say the demonstrators attacked the commandos with axes and metal rods, while flotilla organizers say the troops used excessive force on unarmed civilians.

The pictures and videos circulating throughout the internet demonstrate that many of the passengers were in fact armed. The Post should not be reporting falsehoods in an attempt to be balanced.

◆ **June 3, 2010**
In Gaza, a complex, dysfunctional way of life

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/02/AR2010060204687.html>

Article Lead: The ill-fated aid flotilla bound for Gaza this week bore food, medicine and toys. What it didn't have on board were the things that Gazans say they need most: jobs, reliable electricity and a ticket out.

Elements of Bias: Omission, Context

Analysis: To start an article in the above way already sets the tone. The ships also bore knives, metal rods, and people wielding them. The Post has again repeated the anti-Israel propaganda about the flotilla. The majority of the article, while noting that there are no food shortages, depicts suffering of the residents of the Gaza Strip due to the Israeli blockade. Yet very little attention is paid to the context that gave rise to the blockade - namely the attacks facilitated by Gaza's Hamas rulers.

◆ **June 3, 2010**
U.S. urged Israel to use caution and restraint with aid boats heading to Gaza

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/02/AR2010060200858.html>

Article Lead: The Obama administration said Wednesday that it had warned Israel's government repeatedly to use "caution and restraint" with half a dozen aid boats bound for the Gaza Strip before Israeli commandos raided the flotilla this week in an operation that killed nine people.

Elements of Bias: Misleading Terms, Omission

Analysis: Again, the Post misrepresents the flotilla when it reports that:

...the flotilla, which was carrying construction materials, medicine, school paper and other aid to Gaza when Israeli commandos set upon it in international waters.

The flotilla was carrying a lot more than that when it was captured. According to other reports (including a different article by the Post) the ships had 100 metal rods, 200 knives, 50 wooden clubs and 150 military vests. So why give an incomplete and misleading description of what the ships were carrying?

June 4, 2010



American teenager among those killed in Israeli raid of aid flotilla

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/03/AR2010060301931.html>

Article Lead: One of the nine activists killed by Israeli commandos aboard a Gaza-bound aid flotilla was a teenager who held U.S. citizenship, Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton said Thursday.

Elements of Bias: Misleading Terminology, Omission

Analysis: Furkan Dorgan was indeed an American citizen, but describing him as an “American Teenager” is misleading. Dorgan moved to Turkey at age two. His father is quoted as being happy that he died as a martyr.

June 4, 2010



Israel's Netanyahu maintains defiance amid criticism over Gaza blockade

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/03/AR2010060304836.html>

Article Lead: When Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu delivered his angry response to a cascade of international condemnation of Israel on Wednesday, he spoke first in Hebrew to a domestic Israeli audience. Choosing to address his home constituency, rather than the broader world, was a sign of his continued willingness to accept international ire as the price of upholding policies that are broadly supported at home.

Elements of Bias: Context

Analysis: Why does the Post find it unusual for the leader of a nation to speak in his country's language before switching to English? Would they have thought a televised speech by the President of France that was given in French worthy of similar analysis?

June 4, 2010



Israel gives its account of raid on aid ship headed for Gaza

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/03/AR2010060304836.html>

Article Lead: This is the Israeli version of the deadly raid on an aid ship bound for Gaza: Operation "Sea Breeze," the Israeli code name for the military action that resulted in the melee, began at midnight Sunday when the Mavi Marmara was about 90 miles off the coast of Haifa.

Elements of Bias: Omission

Analysis: It is refreshing to see the Post actually report Israel's side of the story. Yet there was proof that back's up Israel's claims. The Post should have noted this proof instead of simply describing that Israel was making a “claim” no better or worse than the claims of supporters of the flotilla.

◆ June 5, 2010

◆ **U.S. should include Hamas in peace efforts**<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/04/AR2010060404015.html>

Article Lead: The Israeli attack on the Gaza-bound "Freedom Flotilla" has put the United States in a difficult position. But it has also given Washington an opening for a game-changing action.

Elements of Bias: Omission

Analysis: While opinion pieces are by definition subjective, that does not mean that clear falsehoods should not be challenged. Daoud Kattab writes:

...basic facts such as the location of the attack, the perpetrators of the killings and the absence of violent intent or goods on board the ships are so obvious.

In fact, violent intent among the mob that sailed on the Mavi Marmara has been made quite clear. While Mr. Kattab certainly has the right to his opinion (this is an opinion piece), opinion should not be allowed to contradict fact as the Post has allowed him to do.

◆ June 5, 2010

◆ **Israel says it will block aid ship from Ireland**<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/04/AR2010060402131.html>

Article Lead: Israel pledged Friday to stop an Irish humanitarian aid ship from reaching the Gaza Strip after activists on board refused requests to unload its cargo at an Israeli port. The Rachel Corrie was due to arrive off Israel's coast on Saturday.

Elements of Bias: Misleading Terminology

Analysis: The headline is misleading. Israel said the ship must dock in an Israeli port first and then the supplies could be sent to Gaza. Israel has said many times it is not interested in blocking true humanitarian aid.

◆ June 6, 2010

◆ **Israeli navy boards aid ship bound for Gaza, this time peacefully**<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/05/AR2010060500803.html>

Article Lead: Israeli naval commandos boarded an Irish humanitarian aid ship bound for the blockaded Gaza Strip without incident Saturday and diverted it to an Israeli port, after a similar attempt earlier in the week to intercept a ship from Turkey ended in a deadly melee at sea.

Elements of Bias: Omission, Context

Analysis: The headline of the article implies that the last time Israel boarded a ship it was not done so peacefully. But the fact is that the *boarding* of those ships was peaceful. Only after the passengers attacked the commandos did they use violence to gain control of the ship. While the

headline writer may have wanted to show that this incident was peaceful while the previous one was not, the implications of the headline are somewhat different.



June 7, 2010

Israel's restrictions haven't weakened Hamas's grip over Gaza, analysts say

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/06/AR2010060604006.html>

Article Lead: Three years after Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip in a bloody battle with its secular rival, Israel's efforts to undercut the Islamist movement's rule through a policy of isolation have largely failed, according to analysts and residents here.

Elements of Bias: Balance

Analysis: Whether the Israeli blockade has strengthened or weakened Gaza's Hamas rulers is an important question. So the Post went to "analysts" to find the answers. Here are the "analysts" they chose:

- Mukhaimer Abu Saada, a political science professor at Gaza's al-Azhar University
- Bruce Riedel, a former Middle East analyst for the CIA
- Mahmoud Zahar, a Hamas founder
- Khalil al-Haya, a top Hamas figure
- Issam Younis, head of the Gaza-based al-Mezan Center for Human Rights

With the exception of Riedel (who did not comment on whether the Israeli blockade was helping or hurting Hamas), this group of "analysts" can hardly be called objective. Asking Hamas leaders if the Israeli blockade is hurting Hamas is a pointless endeavor. What did the Post expect Hamas to say about itself?



June 8, 2010

Death toll rises to 6 after Israeli navy shoots Palestinian divers off Gaza

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/08/AR2010060801245.html>

Article Lead: The bodies of two more Palestinians, whom the Israeli navy shot dead at sea, washed up on the Gaza Strip's shore Tuesday, bringing the death toll from the incident to six.

Elements of Bias: Misleading Terminology, Omission, Context

Analysis: All the men were members of the Al-Aqsa Brigades, a terrorist group. Whether they were on their way to an attack as Israel claims or training for one as the group says is beside the point. The fact is that they were members of one of the most violent terrorist groups in the region. Why didn't the Post use more specific language in the headline or the lead? Instead, the Post refers to them as "divers" as if they were tourists exploring a coral reef.

June 10, 2010



Islamic charity at center of flotilla clash known for relief work and confrontation

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/09/AR2010060905930.html>

Article Lead: Across from a car-repair shop in this working-class city sits the home of IHH, an Islamic charity. One side of the building is painted with wistful-looking orphans; the other is surrounded by banners celebrating the group's recent effort to challenge the blockade of Gaza. One reads: "Israel, murderers, hands off our boats!"

Elements of Bias: Balance

Analysis: The Post interviewed two people directly to shed light on the IHH, the Vice President of the organization and a board member.

An IHH board member, Murat Yilmaz, denied in an interview that the group was involved with terrorism. As for the phone calls (between IHH headquarters and an al-Qaeda cell), he said, "Our organization had people from all over the world coming in and out" at the time.

"We are for humanitarianism. Nothing else," Huseyin Oruc, the group's vice president, said in an interview.

Where are the quotations from those claiming the IHH is linked to terror? If the Post is trying to accurately investigate whether the IHH is a terrorist organization, simply asking the organization's top officials for their views is a bit misleading. Did the Post expect them to say any different? The fact that the organization is described as a "charity" in the headline already demonstrates the Post's views.

June 10, 2010



Obama calls for new approach on Gaza blockade

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/09/AR2010060906011.html>

Article Lead: President Obama called Wednesday for a "new conceptual framework" to replace Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, saying he thinks the effort should be narrowed to focus only on arms shipments..

Elements of Bias: Misleading Terminology, Omission

Analysis: The push for more civilian goods is a direct result of the flotilla incident. While the article only references the incident as background, it boils the whole event down to:

The comments, made Wednesday after a White House meeting with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas, reflect the administration's willingness to pressure Israel since commandos stormed an aid flotilla headed for Gaza on May 31, killing nine people. The commandos had come under attack by passengers wielding pipes.

The words “aid flotilla” are a poor description of the group of ships that had less to do with aid than with propaganda. Furthermore, the Israeli commandos were faced with firearms, combat knives, sling-shots, chains, and other weapons. Many were savagely beaten by the mob. To simply reduce the event the way the Post has is to create a false impression that undermines Israel’s contention that the soldiers were acting to defend their lives.



June 10, 2010

U.S. student pays devastating physical price to protest Israel's actions

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/09/AR2010060906126.html>

Article Lead: Emily Henochowicz wasn't thinking about protests or Palestinians or tear gas canisters when she went to Israel in February for a one-semester college exchange program..

Elements of Bias: Balance, Omission, Context

Bias Analysis: Using a number of direct quotations, the student comes across as an activist who believed in non-violence, loves Israel, and simply wanted to protest Israeli settlement policy. As she says:

... activists were attracted by "a kind of Martin Luther King, South Africa thing to end discrimination."

Yet she is a member of the International Solidarity Movement (ISM) a group that allies itself with terror groups and whose protests are anything but non-violent. Dozens of Israeli security officers have been wounded in ISM protests. In the interests of telling the whole story, why didn't McCartney inform readers of the ISM's history? Why were no Israelis interviewed to explain how often violence is part of the ISM's tactics? Instead, the column leaves readers with the impression that this peaceful student was wounded on purpose when she tried to stand up for “justice.”

The column is accompanied by a political cartoon drawn by the student in which a layer of angry Israeli soldiers are set between peaceful protestors and the media.



June 18, 2010

Israel eases restrictions on goods bound for Gaza Strip

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/17/AR2010061700952.html>

Article Lead: Israel eased restrictions on goods entering the Gaza Strip on Thursday but left in place a sea blockade of the Palestinian enclave, raising the prospect of further clashes with aid flotillas following last month's deadly confrontation with a Turkish ship.

Elements of Bias: Balance, Misleading Terminology, Omission, Context

Analysis: The Israeli blockade against Gaza is extremely controversial. Israel points out that it is at war with the Hamas rulers of the Strip and has the right to blockade shipments that could aid

its enemy. Palestinians and their supporters claim that the blockade is illegal and collective punishment. While the article uses the word “aid ships” several times to describe efforts to break the blockade, it does not mention that Israel has repeatedly said that after inspection, any real “aid” could be sent into Gaza. But the bigger problem with this article is the use of sources to describe the situation.

1) Saeb Erekat, known for lying to the media: **“in reality, the siege of the Gaza Strip, illegally imposed on Palestinians, continues unabated.”**

2) Amnesty International, known for having an anti-Israel bias: The siege is **“collective punishment.”**

3) Professor Augustus Richard Norton, a Boston University Professor who simply labeled the blockade **“arrogant in-your-face to the U.S. and other concerned members of the international community.”**

Where are the Israeli voices? Are there no organizations of academics who can speak positively of the Israeli steps? At the very end of the article is a quote from a member of the opposition Kadima party. Yet this is also critical of the easing of the blockade.

At the end of the article, we are told that “Special correspondent Samuel Sockol in Jerusalem and staff writers Scott Wilson and Glenn Kessler in Washington contributed to this report.” With four reporters working on the article, how could it be that no one could find an Israeli official or non-official source who supported the move? Did they even look?

◆ **June 21, 2010**
Palestinian politicians reject Israeli deportation order

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/21/AR2010062102794.html>

Article Lead: Four Palestinian politicians affiliated with the Islamist Hamas party on Monday rejected an Israeli order that they relocate to the West Bank.

Elements of Bias: Balance, Misleading Terminology, Omission, Context

Analysis: The headline of the article describes these individuals as **“politicians.”** The article then mentions that they are “affiliated with the **Islamist Hamas party.**” A quotation from one of the four is included:

“We as sons of the city of Jerusalem never left it before. We were born here before it was occupied and we emphasize that we will remain here and never leave it.”

Another quote from Saeb Erekat calls the order a “form of collective punishment.”

This background certainly makes Israel look unjust and vindictive. What country deports “politicians” from the land they were born in? It is only much further down in the article that it is mentioned that the four belong to an organization committed to the destruction of Israel.

The article then equates the deportation order with the Silwan park plan. It says:

Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat wants to turn the East Jerusalem neighborhood of Silwan into a multi-use area that includes a tourist park. Fakhri Abu Diab, chairman of the residents' committee of the area, called the decision "a declaration of war."

Actually, the plan is to turn a very small section of the area into a park by the demolition of 22 illegally built homes and legalizing about three times as many. Why isn't there a quotation from one of the Jewish residents of the area to counter the "declaration of war" comment?



June 22, 2010

Israel's feeling of isolation is becoming more pronounced

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/21/AR2010062104706.html>

Article Lead: An Elton John concert ordinarily isn't front-page news. But in Israel, where many feel more shunned than they have in decades, the legendary pop icon's decision to perform in Tel Aviv last Thursday was cause for celebration.

Elements of Bias: Misleading Terminology, Omission, Context

Analysis: First, the concept that a multitude of artists are boycotting Israel is an exaggeration. While Elvis Costello and the Pixies said they would not play in Israel for political reasons, dozens of major recording stars have played concerts in the country. Besides John, Paul McCartney, the Rolling Stones, Madonna, Rod Stewart, Ozzy Osbourne, Metallica and a host of others have either played at concerts in the last year or announced their plans to do so. **Zacharia's phrasing on "dreary reports about artists caving to calls to boycott Israel" gives undue weight to a select few announcements by minor pop stars.**

Even more misleading is her reporting on the flotilla incident as "pro-Palestinian groups eager to jump on the nation's missteps." This is a complete inversion of the fact that pro-Palestinian groups organized and precipitated the incident rather than simply reacted to it. **Why did Zacharia not even review the Post's own coverage of the incident before writing that the Palestinian groups were simply "jumping on the nation's misstep"?**

Accompanying the article is a picture of a girl holding a candle in one hand and a Lebanese flag in the other. The picture was taken by Mohammed Abed, a photographer with a long history of staging photographs sympathetic to the Palestinian cause. If the article is about Israel's diplomatic position, why did the Post choose to run this picture? **Are Israel's "missteps" being contrasted with the innocent Palestinian "victims"?**



◆ June 23, 2010

Adviser to Israel's Netanyahu questions Mideast peace effort, new Iran sanctions:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/22/AR2010062204690.html>

Article Lead: Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu's national security adviser said Tuesday that the push for Palestinian statehood has weakened Israel's standing in the world, and he suggested that the outlook is bleak for U.S.-mediated negotiations in the region.

Elements of Bias: Context

Analysis: Zacharia writes:

Arad's remarks came just days after Obama's Middle East envoy, George J. Mitchell, met with Israeli and Palestinian officials to test the two sides' readiness to engage in face-to-face talks on core issues such as borders, the future of Jerusalem, security arrangements and the fate of Palestinian refugees. So far, those contacts have not produced substantive results.

The truth of the matter is that Israel has stated repeatedly that not only is Israel ready for face to face talks, but would **prefer them to the proximity talks**. The way the article is written makes it sound that neither side is interested in face-to-face talks. This is incorrect reporting of the Israeli position.

The article now goes on to state:

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas agreed this spring to enter into the indirect talks. Arad's comments coincided with accusations by Palestinian officials, including negotiator Saeb Erekat, that Israel is trying to "destroy" the talks by moving ahead with projects such as the creation of a park in an East Jerusalem neighborhood that would require the demolition of 22 Palestinian homes.

The Post neglects to mention that the plan Erekat refers to:

- 1) Involves the demolition of 22 homes built without any legal permits and the legalization of 66 other Palestinian homes so that a Jerusalem park can be created; and
- 2) The plan has only received municipal approval and is many years from being implemented.

Once these facts are known, the accusation that this plan is somehow equal in importance to the very real delegitimization campaign carried out by Palestinian officials against Israel seems far fetched. **Why does the Post allow Erekat - who has a history of lying to the media - to make his charges without providing the proper context?**

◆ June 28, 2010

Israeli Ambassador Oren denies statement of 'rift' with U.S., despite reports

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/27/AR2010062703427.html>

Article Lead: Israeli Ambassador Michael Oren denied Sunday that he had told Israeli diplomats a "tectonic rift" was emerging between the United States and Israel -- incendiary words first reported in the Israeli press and then repeated in media outlets around the globe.

Elements of Bias: Omission, Context

Analysis: Once again the Post fails to give the details or context of Israel's blockade of Gaza, saying simply:

This month, Washington pressured Israel to change its policy toward the Gaza Strip, which has been kept in recent years under a strict blockade.

◆ June 20, 2010

U.S. envoy welcomes Israeli steps to relax Gaza blockade

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/30/AR2010063004397.html>

Article Lead: Israel's first steps toward easing its blockade of the Gaza Strip were welcomed Wednesday by the U.S. special envoy to the Middle East as he visited this crossing where goods are transferred to the Palestinian territory.

Elements of Bias: Misleading Terminology

Analysis: The phrase "deadly raid on an aid flotilla" is misleading.

What Can Be Done?

The Washington Post's coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is unacceptable. When Post readers in Washington, D.C. and around the world see a staged image or read a quotation that conflicts with reality, the damage to Israel can be immeasurable.

We make no accusation that the anti-Israel bias in the Post is done on purpose. That is not our role. All we can do is marshal the evidence that shows there is vast room for improvement in how the Post reports on the conflict.

With that in mind, we suggest the Post takes a number of concrete actions in the interests of objective, credible reporting.

- An attempt should be made to use as many credible sources that explain Israel's position as there are that criticize Israel.
- Sources who have proven to be biased or not credible should never be used.
- The most descriptive terms should be used in place of "politically correct" misleading terminology. For example, the New York Times refers to ships trying to break the blockade as the "Gaza Bound Flotilla." That is a more accurate than the Post's "aid flotilla."
- Where relevant context helps readers understand current events, it should be always be used.
- Editors should double check articles to make sure that important facts are not omitted.

All those who are concerned with the state of the Post's current reporting should write to the Washington Post to express their feelings. You can write to the Post at ombudsman@washpost.com

It is our hope that if enough people write to the Post, its coverage will improve. We will continue to keep an eye on the Post to monitor any changes in coverage that we see.