**Creating news when there is none to be had**

*The* New York Times *keeps an “Israel as aggressor” motif front and center in its Middle East coverage.*

By Ricki Hollander/JointMedia News Service

Readers of the *New York Times* may be forgiven if they are misinformed about the Arab-Israeli conflict. They are, after all, held hostage to the newspaper’s determination of what makes news.

One of the underlying themes ofthe newspaper’s coverage of the Middle East is blaming Israel for the Arab-Israeli conflict while removing Palestinian responsibility for the situation. And if there happens to be no particular Palestinian grievance to play up on a given day, the *Time*s will be sure to create one. Meanwhile, stories about Israeli grievances—for instance, Israel’s outrage over Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas’ false, inflammatory accusations at a recent Doha conference—are ignored.

The front page of the March 8 edition of the newspaper provides an exemplar of how the *New Times* manipulates the news of the day. It included a large, above-fold, color picture that had nothing whatsoever to do with any breaking news from the region. In an effort to create news where there was none, the newspaper dredged up a month-old photo of Israeli soldiers with the caption, “Israeli soldiers fired at Palestinian stone throwers in the West Bank town of al Ram, near East Jerusalem, last month.” The newspaper apparently wanted to keep an “Israel as aggressor” motif front and center in its Middle East coverage.

The clashes depicted in al Ram last month, however, were not exactly harmless demonstrations. Masked Palestinians had been hurling both rocks and firebombs. The Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America (CAMERA) discovered another major problem with the photo. The soldiers were firing non-lethal rubber bullets, “in other words, a crowd control tool used by police and security forces around the world.” After the newspaper’s foreign editor was contacted about the misleading photograph, the *Times* issued a correction indicating that, “While the soldiers were indeed firing rifles at stone throwers in the West Bank town of Al Ram last month, the rifles contained rubber bullets.”

But by that time, readers were already misled. Moreover, the accompanying, front-page story, in what could have been construed as a parody, focused on the fact that Palestinian grievances were not dominating the front page anymore. The article, entitled “Mideast Din Drowns Out Palestinians,” proclaimed:

“For decades, as autocrats ruled their neighbors, the Palestinians were at the center of Middle Eastern politics, their struggle with Israeli occupation embodying the Arab longing for post-colonial freedom and dignity... But when Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel visited Washington this week, the conversation was dominated by Iran, not peace talks or occupation.”

Once again, Palestinians were portrayed as victims of Israelis who “contributed to a worsening fiscal crisis for the Palestinian Authority,” who “stepped up their nighttime raids on West Bank cities,” and who “contributed to the [Palestinians’] sense of impotence.” The Palestinian Authority was described as a victim of collapsed peace talks with Israel—“sidelined, confused and worried that its people may return to violence.”

Had the *Times* wanted to deliver a complete picture of the Arab-Israeli conflict, it could have provided an in-depth analysis of how the PA’s increasing defamation of Israel and glorification of terrorists has a corrosive effect on Palestinian society and reduces the chances of a peaceful solution. Such a story might have helped readers fully understand why Palestinians “may return to violence.”

The newspaper, however, apparently prefers to rehash its message of Israeli guilt—creating front-page news even when there is none to be had.

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