

## Headlines as Battlegrounds: Topic Selection and Ideological Framing in The Washington Post and The New York Post Coverage of the 2023–24 Israeli Aggression on Gaza and the Russia–Ukraine War

العناوين الرئيسية كساحة معركة: اختيار المواضيع والتأطير الأيديولوجي في تغطية صحيفتي واشنطن بوست ونيويورك بوست للعدوان الإسرائيلي على غزة في عامي 2023 و2024 والحرب بين روسيا وأوكرانيا

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### الملخص

تبحث هذه الدراسة خيارات التغطية الإخبارية الأمريكية لصحيفة واشنطن بوست ونيويورك بوست للعدوان الإسرائيلي على غزة في أكتوبر 2023 والحرب بين روسيا وأوكرانيا. ويطبق البحث نهج تحليل الخطاب النقدي على مجموعة من عناوين المقالات لمدة عام واحد من هاتين الصحيفتين الرئيسيتين. تم أخذ العينة (المكونة من 5000 عنوان) من المقالات المنشورة في كلتا الصحيفتين بين 7 أكتوبر 2023 و8 أكتوبر 2024. يُظهر التحليل نظرة رسمية متسقة مؤيدة للغرب: تعامل كلتا الصحيفتين إسرائيل وأوكرانيا كضحايا أو أبطال مبررين وتصور الفلسطينيين والروس بشكل سلبي. صحيفة واشنطن بوست استخدمت عمومًا أسلوبًا رسميًا وحذرًا، بينما تستخدم صحيفة نيويورك بوست لغة صريحة. بناءً على النتائج، تختتم الدراسة بتوصيات لمختلف الجماهير: يجب على القادة الفلسطينيين الاعتراض على التمثيلات الخاطئة في وسائل الإعلام الأجنبية؛ يجب على اللغويين والمحللين مواصلة دراسة الخطاب المتحيز وكشفه؛ ينبغي على المعلمين تعليم محو الأمية الإعلامية النقدية؛ وعلى الصحفيين الفلسطينيين تسليط الضوء على وجهات النظر المحلية؛ وعلى المراقبين الدوليين فضح التغطية الإعلامية المشوهة؛ وعلى المجتمع المدني أن يناضل من أجل سرديات متوازنة. الكلمات المفتاحية: تحليل الخطاب النقدي؛ التحيز الإعلامي؛ عناوين الأخبار؛ العدوان الإسرائيلي على غزة؛ الحرب بين روسيا وأوكرانيا؛ صحيفة واشنطن بوست؛ صحيفة نيويورك بوست؛ التأطير المجازي؛ الصحف الأمريكية؛ الأيديولوجية في الأخبار.

### Abstract

The study investigates how The Washington Post and The New York Times, as two major American news outlets, covered two paramount events: The Israeli aggression on Gaza and the Russian Ukrainian war. Using Fairclough's model, particularly topic selection, the paper examined 5,000 headlines published between 07 October 2023 and 08 October 2024 from the two newspapers. The results showed that both outlets adopted an offensive and strict language toward Palestinians and Russians. However, The Washington Post was more neutral and formal. Both put the responsibility on the Palestinian shoulder as if the actions started on 7 October and they do not belong to more complex historical events. Moreover, The Washington Post relied on under covering as a tool for neglecting Palestinian Pain. On

the other hand, the outlets showed Israelis as victims and heroes: the actions of the Israeli army were always justified and reasonable. Ukrainians were also presented as heroes who deserve support. The study recommended that Palestinian leaders should challenge the misrepresentations in foreign media; linguists and analysts should continue to study and expose biased discourse; teachers should teach critical media literacy; Palestinian journalists should highlight local perspectives \*

Keywords: Critical Discourse Analysis; Media Bias; News Headlines; Israeli Aggression on Gaza; Russia–Ukraine War; Washington Post; New York Post; Metaphoric Framing; Lexical Choices; Transitivity; U.S. Newspapers; Media Representation; Ideology in News.

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## 1 Introduction

Human ideologies work as sensors towards the decisions taken and the ways in which people interpret and engage with various social forms. In turn, the media has the power to shape and reinforce these ideologies. So, media plays a crucial role in circulating information, narratives, and perspectives. As such, the relationship between ideology and media is a complex and reciprocal one, with each informing and influencing the other.

Tufekci (2017) argued that the internet, especially social media, has further complicated the relationship between ideology and media, as these platforms have enabled the proliferation of alternative and often driven ideologically sources of information. Sunstein (2018) warned of what he called it as online echo chambers, where persons predominantly consume content that associates with their pre-existing ideologies. Online echo chambers can exacerbate ideological polarization and contribute to the spread of misinformation. Social media platforms employ algorithms which often prioritize engagement and sensationalism furthering and contributing to the reinforcement of ideological divides (Pariser, 2011).

Media's main component is discourse, and the discourse's main component is words, so words constitute the backbones of media. However, words themselves are never neutral (Irigaray, 2002). That is why several approaches went beyond the analysis of media meanings. American theories analysis of media focuses on the communication model, which concentrates on the associations between the individuals entangled. This model considered media as a form of communication between the sender and receiver (Woollacott, 2005).

To check bias, fanaticism, extremism, ethnic and religious bullying, and political and national subordination, other theories went beyond the word and the sentence level. Words and sentences carry these elements (rather than the lexical meaning) deliberately and unconsciously to exercise what is so called the power of the language.

van Dijk (1988) believes that words gain power through one's personal and social knowledge, beliefs, mental or memory structures, and mental representations of language by individuals as social members. Fairclough (1989) added that words gain their power by reordering, passivation, and attaching them to a specific context to create a new situation that the word's lexical meaning does not have.

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Based on this, one could claim that most conflicts that appear in political battles or wars are another face of media wars. Media and popular mobilization practices change the convictions of people to adopt the leaders' ideology in moving armies toward their goals. This is exactly what Israel does before any attack it launches against the Palestinians, which is to prepare international and local public opinion. It is the same thing that it does during and after its war. It is precisely the same as what Russia did before they invaded Ukraine and what they are doing now in justifying every attack. This behavior is exactly like what the United States and the Western world do to justify any material or military support to Ukraine. They all use language and media to rally public opinion.

Here comes the role of critical discourse analysis where its primary purpose is to investigate what is beyond the word aiming to interpret how discourse is maintained, constructed, and legitimized to attain social discrimination. Most CDA basic rules stand on the notion that language usage has more than the surface meaning. It has something to do with the deep sense. In other words, it is a purposeful process of selecting and ordering terms to build the sentence - no matter whether this process happens consciously or unconsciously (Musa, 2024).

## 2 Statement of the problem

The media consistently asserts its neutrality in covering events, while linguistics repeatedly accuse the media of bias. Almost no one can conclusively prove these positions—until two simultaneous wars unfolded. By coincidence or fate, the developments in both conflicts were remarkably similar: bombing hospitals, targeting civilians, destroying infrastructure, and mobilizing allies. All these parallel actions were carried out by two different sides against two opposing groups. This implies that both the aggressors and the victims in the two wars should, in principle, be treated in the same way. This paper examines whether they were indeed treated equally or not.

### 2.1 Critical Discourse Analysis CDA

As a type of discourse analysis, critical discourse analysis has taken the word critical as a distinguisher term of its unique character showing that language is used as a tool to practice socio-political control. As a result, the main role of CDA is to move beyond a surface – level examination of discourse to show how discourse can produce and hide deep structure relations of power and inequality.

van Dijk (2001) stated that critical discourse analysis mainly studies how language users abuse, predominate and unequally reproduce social power in ways that resisted by texts and talks within the social and political context taking an obvious position aiming to expose, comprehend and eventually oppose social discrimination. Fairclough (1993) clarified that CDA aims at exploring the deep relationship between events, practices and texts on a hand and cultural and social structures, processes and relations in a wider term on the other hand trying to recognize the ways that such events, practices and texts originates from and are ideologically formed by relations of struggles and power. Moreover, it tries to prove that ambiguous or unclear relationship between society and discourse constitutes a factor fortifying power and supremacy.

Power can be exercised in discourse and over discourse, especially in the relations between the media and politics since different individuals and groups have different kinds of influence on discourse. However, one can challenge the dominant discourse, and no one has full control over it. Discourse cannot be seen as the cognizant and manipulative intent of some group or individual. Moreover, some individuals and groups have a greater influence on

discourse than others because of having greater access to the media and major sources of funding. Politicians have more access than less powerful ones while most people have no access whatever (Wodak & Meyer, 2015).

Thanks to various social media such as YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Tik Tok, and others, ordinary socialists can reach many audiences without having to go through traditional media such as television and radio. Everyone now could create a live broadcast through any social media unit and sometimes have a stronger influence than politicians on television, radio and websites. Yet, the words of politicians are taken as trusted sources for different means of media types such as reports, programs, documentary films, and newscasts which give them a larger opportunity to enter every home and every place. Most of the time, ordinary socialists seek for their audiences, on contrary, people themselves seek for politicians' words because they affect their personal life and to be informed by the last updates in political, economic, and social developments.

CDA is an attempt to reform the social disorders which, in most cases, impact the interpretation of discourse that the readers may constitute. This is what makes CDA distinctive; the attempt to ally with the burdened and dominated groups against the governing ones and the open declaration about the emancipatory concerns that provoke it. CDA has a commitment towards social justice aiming at exposing mistreatment and the abuse of authority (Alsemeiri, Elsemeiri, Carroll, & Aljamal, 2024). A number of researchers put U.S. media coverage in comparative context, highlighting how different media systems narrate the Gaza conflict in divergent ways. Mewati, Naeem, and Siraj (2024) performed a CDA on front-page war coverage in *The New York Times* (U.S.) versus *The Express Tribune*. Using Wodak's Discourse-Historical Approach, they found *both* newspapers relied predominantly on "war journalism" discourse – emotive, zero-sum narratives that intensified the sense of conflict – but with notable differences in emphasis. The U.S. paper, consistent with Western outlets generally, focused on Israeli retaliation against "terrorism," whereas the Pakistani paper provided relatively more acknowledgment of Palestinian casualties.

Notably, Liu (2024) conducted a corpus-assisted CDA of three outlets (CNN, *Al Jazeera English*, *China Daily*) and found each outlet's ideological alignment drove its word choices. CNN's U.S. coverage hewed closely to official Western terminology e.g. describing Hamas fighters as "terrorists", *Al Jazeera* adopted more skeptical wording toward Israeli actions, and *China Daily* used the most neutral tone.

These comparative studies reinforce that American media's Gaza-war discourse was *not inevitable*, by contrasting it with alternative portrayals. Overall, the literature indicates U.S. news coverage of the 2023 Gaza war was characterized by homogeneous pro-Israel framing, marginalization of Palestinian perspectives, and a rhetoric of justification – patterns critically unpacked through discourse-analytic approaches in the months since the war.

## 2.2 Research Questions

To achieve the research purposes, the researcher seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What topics do The Washington Post and The New York Post emphasize in their headlines about the 2023–24 Israeli aggression on Gaza?
2. What topics do The Washington Post and The New York Post emphasize in their headlines about the Russia–Ukraine war 2024?
3. How do these topic choices reflect asymmetrical representation of the conflict actors?
4. What perspectives or events in are omitted or downplayed in each newspaper's headline coverage?
5. How do such omissions reveal selective victimhood or bias in the framing of victims and aggressors?

## 2.3 Fairclough's Method of Analysis

To Fairclough (1993), discourse has three overlapping dimensions; social practice which represents social identity, disruptive practice which signifies the construction of social associations between individuals, and the text which embodies the construction of knowledge and belief systems. To do CDA depending on Fairclough Moodle one needs to join the analysis of context, processes of text production and interpretation, and text. Texts not only exhibit knowledge, ideology, social interactions but also present the change occurs in the cultural, social, political, economic and scientific situation; and show power, dominance and control.

As a part of CDA, textual analysis is achieved depending partly on several issues such as multifunctional theories of language like systematic- functional linguistics which analyses grammar and other properties of language form in a functional manner. Additionally, recognizing the relationship between the text forms and their social context needs to be taken into consideration not only what is mentioned but also what is not. some absent or neglected information is a main method of revealing the misuse of power. Moreover, the way texts are organized adds too much to the overall meaning and vice versa, various meanings require different organizational patterns. In addition, the same article consists of more than one genre. The analyst should pay attention to these genres and the different meanings expressed by each (Fairclough, 1989).

Biased on Fairclough and Wodak (2008), CDA can be done in one of two ways; either linguistically or intertextually. As for Fairclough method, the analyses processes concentrate on linguistics version under four central headings: separate words (vocabulary), combined words creating clauses and/or sentences (grammar), the ways different clauses and sentences are joined together (cohesion), and the text organization (the structure of the text).

## 3 Analysis & Discussion

### 3.1 New Youk Post main topics: Israeli Aggression on Gaza

#### 3.1.1 Horrors of Hamas' Terror Reign

The New York Post presents 7th October events as the start point of the Israeli aggression on Gaza, neglecting the reasons behind such occurrences. The New York Post's extensive list of news items demonstrates a strong focus on the upshot and ongoing consequences of the Hamas-led attack on "Israel". The publication highlights various "heinous" acts and "harrowing" personal stories from the Israeli narrative. For example, accounts of Israeli hostages, murders, and atrocities "committed by Hamas". However, all the Israeli actions were portrayed as reactions. Moreover, the newspaper portrayed Hamas as a formidable military force comparable to the forces of armies, which may explain to the reader that the war is between two armies.

The paper portrayed Hamas as nothing more than an organization that bombs the homes of believers, making "Israel" cry. An example says *"'We are being slaughtered': Israelis cry for help as Hamas militants break into homes."* In contrast, most news items portrayed "Israel" as oppressed, heroic, and compassionate. Examples: *"Israeli student pleads for her life as Hamas terrorists kidnap her from rave: horrifying video"*, *"Family pleads for return of grandma, 85, taken hostage in Gaza"*, *"Leaked audio captures Israeli hostages pleading for their lives before IDF soldiers mistakenly killed them"*.

However, there is limited acknowledgment of Palestinian casualties or humanitarian crises resulting from Israeli military actions, such as the Gaza hospital bombing or displacement of civilians. Complications of the broader geopolitical and historical context, such as the occupation, the blockade on Gaza, or reasons behind Hamas' action are remarkably



absent. Equating Hamas with groups like ISIS or Nazis serves to delegitimize their actions and creates two systems in the world: the first system is the “legitimate system” represented by the United States, “Israel” and their allies, while the second system represents terrorism such as “ISIS”, “Taliban” and Nazism. This brings us back to the war waged by the international coalition against the Islamic State organization in Syria and Iraq. Thus, the newspaper is implicitly calling for the re-formation of an international coalition against Hamas.

### 3.1.2 Shared Resolve: US and Israel's United Front

The New York Post newspaper painted a picture suggesting that the pain caused by the Palestinian resistance to “Israel” is a pain shared by “Israel” and the entire Western world, especially America. The newspaper published many news items linking the events of September 11 in the United States to the events of October 7 in “Israel”. The headlines read: *“Israeli ambassador to UN calls Hamas attack on Israel 'our 9/11', brands terrorists as 'animals'”*, *“Retired US general says Hamas' attack on Israel was 'far worse than 9/11'”*, *“Biden tells Israel not to let 'rage' fuel Hamas response, cites post-9/11 'mistakes'”*, *“Two daughters who lost their dads to terrorists on 9/11 and Oct. 7 meet in NYC”*, *“I lost my dad on 9/11. Now I'm fighting terrorism as an IDF soldier in Israel”* are obvious ones.

To deepen the ties, the newspaper published news about the killing of Americans in the events of October 7, claiming that these Americans suffered what the “Israelis” experienced. Hence, it is normal to find American fighters within the first lines of the “IDF”. The paper said that some Americans left their homes immediately to join the Israeli army. In addition to military support, the newspaper also emphasized humanitarian gestures by Americans. It published news indicating that many volunteered to surrender themselves to the Palestinian resistance in exchange for prisoners held by Hamas, such as the news titled *“'I am ready': Cardinal representing Pope Francis offers Hamas to swap him for child hostages”*.

### 3.1.3 Polarized Global Perspectives on Israel

It is surprising that the New York Post investigated and explored all the news of the stars from athletes, actors, politicians, economists, writers, researchers, scientists, and even Social Media Influencers wanting to know who supported Hamas, who supported Israel, and who remained silent. What is even more surprising is that the newspaper considered those who supported Hamas and those who remained silent in the same category, as both are “terrorists” or encourage terrorism, and both are anti-Semitic.

It did not stop there. The newspaper attacked those who supported “Israel” with absolute support but after the killing of thousands of Palestinian civilians — called for a ceasefire. For example: Although Joe Biden has provided extensive support to “Israel”, the newspaper continued to attack him, claiming that he did not provide enough. According to the newspaper, Elon Musk provided support in the form of aircraft, technology, and money to Israel, and yet the newspaper attacked him because he stopped publishing what supports “Israel”. Despite this, the newspaper has assigned itself the position of the protector god of “Israel” and the absolute supporter.

### 3.1.4 Israel's Struggles towards Global Antisemitism

The New York Post’s recent coverage of the Israel–Hamas conflict constructs an image of Israel as a nation besieged by hostility on multiple fronts. Through a series of headlines, the newspaper emphasizes that threats and anti-Israeli sentiment are not confined to the immediate warzone but are manifesting globally — from far-flung international arenas to the Western world, and even the virtual world of social media.

The Post reports that in Pakistan, *“Thousands rally in Pakistan against Israel's bombing in Gaza, chanting anti-American slogans”*, demonstrating a vivid public picture that portrays

Israel as a target for Muslims' outrage. Likewise, China witnessed an incident that highlights the perilous Israeli position abroad. *"Israeli embassy staffer attacked, hospitalized in Beijing after Hamas calls for 'Day of Jihad': report"* suggests that Israeli diplomatic personnel share a fragile safety status from the fierce aftereffects of the conflict, even in countries far from the Middle East. Even Western cities no longer serve as an immune shield either; the Post underscores one rally at New York City describing the way in which *"Palestinian supporter flashes swastika as protesters clash at 'abhorrent' NYC rally in wake of Hamas attack"*, revealing open displays of anti-Semitism even there.

Furthermore, a headline highlighted that *"Hundreds waving Palestinian flags swarm US embassy in Beirut ahead of Biden's Israel visit,"* representing the Middle East's unrest beyond Israel's borders. This covers a regional atmosphere of hostility and threatening pressure over Israel's allies. Away from the physical world, the Post further encompasses the virtual aspects of hostility against Israel. One conspicuous incident is *"We learn hate for Israel on TikTok and Instagram, say young protesters"*; the headline proposes that social media platforms serve as a field for strengthening and spreading hatred for Israel, especially among new generations. Indeed, banning TikTok has been suggested by a major audience of the Post's coverage. They argue that this platform supports Hamas by manipulating the public image. This interpretation draws a vivid similarity between both digital networks and the physical one, as they have turned into an incubator for conflict ideologies that elevate Israel's logic of being besieged. Together, the headlines presented above for both the virtual and real worlds present that the New York Post's narrative portrays Israel as a victim. In essence, it implies that Israel is surrounded by hostility and hatred worldwide.

### 3.1.5 Israel's Resilience Amidst Ongoing Threats

According to the New York Post's Coverage of the conflict between Israel and Hamas, Israel is morally justified and strategically effective in conducting such military actions. Indeed, Israel's cause is highlighted through the Israeli heroism that underpins the moral uprightness aspect. For example, a story narrates that a "25-year-old Israeli woman, addressed a hero for killing terrorists, leading a team that saved a kibbutz from Hamas," her heroism is depicted as a symbolic code of Israel's righteous resistance. It also emphasized the proficiency and efficiency of Israel's forces. Moreover, the rapid reestablishment of security is stressed: Israel "regains full control of Gaza border fence, signifying tactical capability and resolution after the initial shock attack.

Similarly, hostile military actions are considered legitimate. The paper mentions that an essential procedure to deactivate the danger is by *"'complete' and JUSTIFIED siege vs. Hamas and Gaza"*, suggesting that even the most vicious tactics are justified to be both necessary and effective. Further, stories of resilience expand this framing. Unusual accounts embody the Israeli spirit under fire. For example, a story of *"95-year-old reservist joins Israel's fight against Hamas terrorists"* underlines a sense of patriotism and determination.

The worldwide voice for criticism and calls for restraint is toned down by the New York Post, for instance, which discharges the global requests for a ceasefire. American officials' point of view on pausing is met with disdain. *"Any actual adults in charge?"* one headline heckled at a U.S. call for a truce. Politicians who lean progressive are also criticized. *"'Squad' reps blasted for calling for ceasefire following Hamas attack on Israel"*, reads the headline. This strategy supports the idea that Israel's effort is both morally right and practically required by portraying outside criticism as misplaced or foolish. In conclusion, the New York Post creates a viewpoint in which Israel's activities seem just successful despite criticism from around the world by selectively reporting on Israeli bravery, military prowess, and social resiliency.

### 3.1.6 UNRWA-Hamas Links and Israel Criticism

Israel claimed that the UNRWA staff members participated in the events of October 7, which prompted most or all donor countries to stop supporting UNRWA. The New York Post confirmed the Israeli narrative, as did the American press. However, when the United Nations published the results of its investigations, the New York Post did not publish or mention them. Moreover, when most UNRWA donor countries restored their support, the New York Post launched a scathing attack on these countries, accusing them of anti-Semitism. The New York Post accused UNRWA of supplying Hamas with RPGs, providing them with hideouts in its schools, and circulated news that 10% of UNRWA employees are terrorists. *“UN agency that employs Hamas terrorists still being funded by Biden admin”*, and *“UN school in Gaza found to have rocket launchers and RPGs, Israeli military says”* are two clear headlines that reinforce this narrative.

Such news not only supports the Israeli view that UNRWA should be eliminated, but also implicitly provides justification — from the Israeli perspective — for targeting shelters operated by UNRWA.

### 3.1.7 Palestinian Actions Compared to Nazism

From the New York Post's perspective, Israel has the right to protect itself from the Holocaust and Nazism. To this newspaper, Palestinians are just Nazis. The newspaper has been tracking anyone who raises the Nazi sign or waves the swastika. The New York Post has published news such as *“Bloody decapitated baby doll found underneath 'Free Palestine' flag in Ohio yard”*, *“Arabic copy of Adolf Hitler's 'Mein Kampf' found inside child's room in Gaza”*. Some of what the newspaper reported may be true, but it represents individuals and not parties or resistance movements in Palestine. When the newspaper published such news, it did not give the other side (the Palestinians) the right to defend itself. The American press views Israeli crimes as individual acts and views the acts committed by individuals who may be Palestinians as collective, institutional acts.

## 3.2 Washington Post main topics: Israeli Aggression on Gaza

### 3.2.1 Non-Publishing as a Tool for Misleading

Throughout the year, The Washington Post failed to cover many days of Israeli aggression on Gaza, despite urgent events. For example, on January 6, 2024, 122 Palestinians were killed in 12 massacres, including the destruction of Al Jazeera's office. Euro-Med Monitor announced that 4% of Gaza's population had been killed, injured, or missing. Relief Web, Wafa, Al Jazeera, The Guardian, and AP reported the massacres, Israeli blockade, and children's deaths. The Washington Post ignored the events, promoting Israel's narrative.

On July 4, 250,000 Palestinians were displaced and 45 killed. Anadolu covered U.S. and German military aid. Reuters and BBC focused on Rafah closure. The Washington Post published nothing. New York Post reported only Netanyahu's call with Biden. On July 6, Alhurra, Al Jazeera, BBC, and AL Monitor reported that Israeli bombed UNRWA school caused a massacre. However, The Washington Post remained silent. On July 7, The Guardian, France 24, PBS, AP, and Al Jazeera reported an Israeli massacre caused of the killing of 90 Palestinian civilians. Nevertheless, The Washington Post ignored the event. However, New York Post published two articles denying Deif's death and accusing Hamas of hiding in UNRWA schools.

On August 11, The Guardian, AP, Reuters, BBC, and Lemonde covered Israeli massacres, evacuation orders, and humanitarian crisis. Washington Post was silent. New York Post justified the massacre as self-defense. On August 25, 28 Palestinians were martyred and



Deir al-Balah was ordered evacuated. Al Jazeera and Reuters reported. Washington Post said nothing. New York Post focused on ceasefire talks. On August 26, Anadolu reported U.S. sent 500 tons of weapons to Israel. Al Jazeera reported a new massacre. Business Standard, AP, Reuters, BBC covered electricity outages and humanitarian suspension. Washington Post published nothing. New York Post mentioned only a former prisoner.

On September 6, Al Jazeera, Guardian, AP, POLITICO, BBC, and Lemonde covered more massacres, the killing of an American woman, starvation, and school disruption. Washington Post remained silent. New York Post published only one article showing a Hamas video of an Israeli soldier killed by Israeli fire. On September 7, one year after the war, Voice of America, Guardian, Al Jazeera, Reuters reflected on the war. 61 Palestinians were killed. Washington Post ignored this. New York Post focused on stories of personal grief and Israeli friendship, and blamed Israel for one death.

On September 8, 61 Palestinians were killed. India Today, The Times of India, Al Jazeera, Guardian reported the atrocities and the death of a senior aid official. New York Post mentioned three Israeli soldiers killed by a Jordanian gunman and criticized BBC. On September 13, AP, First Post, Anadolu, MEM, Middle East Eye, Borgen Magazine, Al Jazeera, BBC covered atrocities, legal actions by Chile, ICC cases, and Israel's foreign support. New York Post mentioned a Hamas commander thanking Hezbollah.

On September 14, 26 Palestinians were killed. Al Jazeera and CTV reported Israeli attacks on civilians and protests in Tel Aviv. Washington Post stayed silent. New York Post published two articles: one about 100 militants killed in Rafah, the other about a Turkish American funeral. Civilian suffering was not addressed. On September 20, Al Jazeera, Reuters, Anadolu, India Today, BBC reported the failure of ceasefire talks, new massacres, and Kamala Harris backlash.

### 3.2.2 Equating the aggressor with the victim

The Washington Post often presents Israeli actions and Palestinian reactions symmetrically. This would blur the distinctions combining Palestinian and Israeli casualties. For example, *"Gaza reels from Israeli airstrikes and braces for all-out war"* and *"Israel formally declares war against Hamas as more than 1,000 killed on both sides"*. This suggests equal killing tools, equal battle, and equal death tolls. The news omits that at least 70% of the thousand killed were Palestinian civilians, equating the killer with the killed.

In *"Israel declares Gaza siege as Hamas fires rockets and toll mounts"*, the siege appears as a reaction to Hamas's attack, ignoring that Gaza was under siege for 15 years. It frames Hamas as a strong military power, while omitting that its rockets are simple and locally made. The item equates oppressor and oppressed. Headlines like *"Israelis, still at war, pause to remember the attacks of one year ago"*, *"American Jews cope with the fallout a year after the Oct. 7 attacks"*, *"The land is full of blood": An Israeli kibbutz where Oct. 7 never ends"*, *"Four Americans are still held hostage by Hamas a year after Oct. 7 attack"*, and *"As war widens and costs mount, Israel's economy is in 'serious danger'"* focus only on Israeli suffering.

These reports suggest that the war affected Israel alone and was imposed on it. They ignore Palestinian displacement, home demolitions, civilian deaths, siege, and starvation. Reports imply that emotional loss is exclusive to Israelis, marginalizing 50,000 Palestinian victims. The newspapers present Israeli blood as more valuable. The use of terms like *"war"* instead of *"occupation"* or *"siege"* instead of *"blockade"* contributes to this framing.

### 3.3 New York Post main topics: Russian Ukrainian War

#### 3.3.1 Russian criminality

The New York Post aimed to distort Russia's image by depicting it as an outlaw state. The paper focused on Russia's conduct of war and its civilian treatment. The post presented the Russian government negatively as a criminal regime. Many headlines repeatedly emphasized the Russian authorities' use of repressive measures against reporters. For example, one Wall Street Journal reporter's detention was arbitrarily extended. His trial was held behind closed doors, demonstrating a lack of transparency and the use of "espionage" charges to silence journalists. The New York Post also shed light on Russian journalists' stories calming that they have also been targeted. For instance, the paper claimed that the editor-in-chief of a Russian newspaper was arrested on a fabricated charge of "discrediting" the military. These recurring themes depict Moscow as a repressive regime that treats journalism as a criminal. This reinforces the implicit message that Russia is violating democratic norms and basic human rights.

Another set of headlines addresses Russia's crimes against civilians. These set portray Russia as a source of violence and suffering inflicted on people. Many headlines highlight the targeting of Ukrainian civilians and critical infrastructure. For example, a report of a Russian drone strike that left 11 people dead, underscores the human cost. Others emphasize that civilians continue to get killed in Russian strikes. The New York Post links these actions to an urgent international need to rescue Ukraine and holds Russia morally responsible for widespread human suffering.

Many headlines also focus on internal repression within Russia. The headlines widen the concept of "criminality" to include violations of basic human rights. A headline warns of "catastrophic" repercussions after Russian police target LGBTQ individuals following a court declaration of the LGBTQ movement as extremist. Some headlines highlight the experiences of Ukrainian civilians under Russian occupation. A refugee's testimony that Russian "took everything for themselves" documents the looting of civilians' property. Other reports describe civilians forced to flee once-liberated regions due to renewed invasion.

#### 3.3.2 Ukrainian Heroism

In contrast to the reported Russian crime, the newspaper presented Ukrainian as heroes. It showcased heroism at various levels individual heroes, leaders, the army, and military equipment. This collection of stories aimed to emphasize that Russian brutality is met with Ukrainian valor. That means that Ukrainian deserve Western and American support. For example, "Ukrainian sniper uses 'Horizon's Lord' rifle to take out Russian soldier from 2.5 miles away". "Ukrainian officer weeps as she's freed from Russian captivity after 2 years" highlight both remarkable combat skills and personal losses in the face of the enemy". These themes extend to national leaders as heroes .

One headline gives Ukrainian president an image of resilience. It describes his transformation from comedian to "Man of Steel". These individual stories personalize heroism and add a human element. Moreover, many headlines depict collective bravery. They show the Ukrainian state and society as a united force. The army, the people, and the leaders are portrayed with a firm determination to endure challenges as an unyielding nation .

Numerous reports spotlight Ukraine's achievements on the front lines and military successes. A headline details how Ukrainian forces ambushed and destroyed a Russian column tank. Some headlines celebrate Ukraine's political will and even mock the enemy. "Ukraine mocks Russia's addition of Zelensky to its criminal 'wanted' list as an act of 'desperation'". This type of statement reflects high morale and solidarity behind Ukraine's leadership .

The newspaper added headlines that praise modern weaponry and innovative tactics in Ukrainian hands. Drones, warships, and submarines are dubbed heroes alongside the Ukrainian people. "Ukraine says it destroyed \$330M Russian spy plane and airborne command post". The piece of news highlights a significant technological win against one of Russia's most advanced intelligence assets.

### 3.3.3 International Support

The coverage suggests that, considering Russian brutality and Ukrainian heroism, support for Ukraine has become a right owed by all nations that uphold shared values and principles. Headlines emphasize the urgency of Ukraine's pleas for international assistance. For example, President Zelenskyy was described as "desperate" when warning that "Ukraine will lose the war" if Congress fails to send more aid, and another headline linked a Russian attack on civilians "53 injured as Russian ballistic missiles target Kyiv" with Zelenskyy's plea for help in Washington. By pairing Ukraine's suffering with its appeal for aid, the media imply that Russian brutality drives Ukraine's desperate calls for support, reinforcing a heroic victim versus brutal aggressor narrative that morally justifies assisting Ukraine. Another headline, "Outnumbered 6-1 with artillery, Ukraine's counteroffensive is over without US aid," underscores Ukraine's underdog status and explicitly states that without American support the offensive will stall. Together, these themes portray Ukraine as a heroic, beleaguered nation facing overwhelming aggression beyond its control, making its calls for international support entirely legitimate and urgent.

### 3.3.4 Personalizing the War around Putin

The coverage consistently frames the war in Ukraine as Putin's personal project, repeatedly naming him as the primary actor responsible for the conflict. One headline even quotes President Zelenskyy saying, "Putin's tried to assassinate me so many times that I've lost track," casting the war as a personal clash between the two leaders. Other stories show Putin taking extreme measures, such as pardoning criminals – including a cannibalistic serial killer – to join the fighting, implying he will do anything to achieve his aims.

By focusing so heavily on Putin, the narrative suggests that the entire war is his doing and that he alone is responsible for igniting and continuing the conflict. Many headlines also portray Putin as increasingly isolated from his own people amid growing domestic dissent. For example, one headline declares "Russians sick of Putin join Ukrainian army to fight against their own country," starkly illustrating an internal rift that leaves Putin seemingly alone in his war. Similarly, a Russian general who criticized Putin's military performance turned up dead (along with his wife), and the Kremlin has been paying protesting soldiers' wives to keep quiet – evidence that the regime relies on repression and bribery to quash discontent and sustain Putin's campaign. He is even blamed for unrest beyond Ukraine: some reports suggest Putin orchestrated protests in the US or warn his allies that chaos could spread abroad, painting him as the hidden instigator of turmoil worldwide. Taken together, these examples reinforce the sense that Russians are not fully behind Putin's war – it appears to be the obsessive venture of an isolated dictator rather than a unified national effort.

In contrast to Putin's isolation, the discourse emphasizes Ukrainian unity in the face of his aggression. One headline notes that "Putin makes no mention of Ukraine war in New Year's Eve speech as Zelensky rallies nation," highlighting how Putin avoids acknowledging the war to his own people while Zelensky openly rallies Ukrainians in solidarity. Another story describes Ukrainians being "forced to vote for Putin at gunpoint," implying that any show of support for Putin on Ukrainian soil is purely coerced and that Ukrainians overwhelmingly reject him. Through such stark dualities, the narrative suggests that Ukraine's side enjoys cohesion

and high morale under Zelenskyy's leadership, whereas Putin's side is fractured and demoralized.

### 3.3.5 The World is Two Axes

Discourse divides the world into two opposing camps or "axes." On one side is the Western axis (the US, NATO, Israel, and allies), portrayed as the side of good and the defender of order. On the other side is the Eastern axis (Russia, China, North Korea, and their partners), cast as an "axis of evil" driven by aggression. This stark dichotomy leaves no room for neutrality. In this framing, the war in Ukraine and the conflict in Israel are treated as a single two-front struggle for the Western axis. For example, one headline urges Congress to swiftly aid "Israel AND Ukraine," and another describes aid to the two countries as "intertwined," emphasizing a united Western front. A U.S. official likewise warned that "Ukraine and Israel won't win if US support stops," explicitly linking the two fights as one.

This twinning of Ukraine and Israel is a recurring theme intended to highlight the moral and fateful unity of the Western camp. Even U.S. leadership is criticized in terms of its effect on both fronts; as one headline put it, "Joe Biden's fecklessness may bring defeat for Israel AND Ukraine." Conversely, Russia and its allies are depicted as a unified opposing axis arrayed against the West. Many stories stress the growing partnership among America's adversaries. Putin's visit to Xi Jinping was touted as a "no-limits partnership," and China's expanding military ties with Russia (along with North Korea sending arms to Moscow) paint a picture of a cohesive Eastern axis. Together these developments portray a bloc stretching from Moscow to Beijing and Pyongyang, united by hostility toward the West.

## 3.4 The Washington Post main topics: Russian Ukrainian War

### 3.4.1 Military Operations

An overarching aspect is the meticulous archival of battles and military activities. Many headlines highlight active fighting and strategy changes, depicting the dynamic changing conflict. For instance, headlines describe Russian offensives and Ukrainian counteroffensives. A headline such as "*Russia mounts major attack on key city in eastern Ukraine*" captures Russian violence, while another "*In eastern Ukraine, small assault teams quietly advance against Russia*" shows detail in military actions. Together, they reflect focus on fierce battles from infantry movements to major city assaults.

Other headlines focus on intensity and the number of strikes. Words like "*devastating strike*" and "*massive missile barrage*" are frequent. For example: "*Village of Hroza mourns after devastating strike*" – a missile strike that killed 52 people. "*Russia shatters Ukraine holiday season with massive missile barrage*" and "*Russia unleashes missile barrage at Ukraine as holiday airstrikes persist*" underscore the destructive toll of Russian missile and drone attacks.

Ukrainian military actions are also prominent. For example, "*Ukraine fires long-range ATACMS to strike Russian depot and aircraft*", "*Ukraine attacks Russian landing ship in Crimean port*", and "*Ukraine unleashes attacks on Russian airfields amid Kursk offensive*" show Ukraine's offensive capacity and strategic strikes. The city of Avdiivka appears in multiple headlines, showing its strategic importance and fierce battles. Examples include: "*Russia and Ukraine intensify fight over Avdiivka, another ruined city*", "*Ukraine on verge of losing Avdiivka, strategic city long targeted by Russia*", and "*Russia claims 'complete' control of Avdiivka after Ukraine withdraws*". These reflect how one frontline battle became a microcosm of the wider war.

### 3.4.2 International Support

Most of the headlines talked extensively about the necessity of supporting Ukraine. They always claimed that this is not the Ukraine war rather it is the free world war. Headlines chronicle aid discussions and decisions in Washington and Europe. For instance, “Biden’s aid plan for Israel, Ukraine splits Republicans in Congress”, “Zelensky to pitch Congress on Ukraine aid as border talks stall” and “Zelensky unable to win over Congress as Biden’s Ukraine package stalls”. The aforementioned headlines highlighted Ukraine’s urgent demand in the face of ongoing European and American debates. The newspaper attempted to convey that this support is not a favor but a duty. It emphasized that any delay in supporting due to discussions would result in failure and defeat for the Ukrainian army.

The newspaper tried to place the burden of financing the war on three parties: America, Europe, and NATO. It portrayed this support as justified by Ukraine’s right to defend itself, to protect Western interests, and to undermine Russia’s growing power. “E.U. throws Ukraine \$54 billion lifeline after Hungary drops opposition”, showed a major financial commitment after internal vetoes. “NATO seeks air defenses for Ukraine as Congress finally nears vote on aid” and “U.S. unveils \$1 billion Ukraine weapons package”, focused on efforts to enhance Ukraine’s defenses.

“As Ukraine war drags on, Russia’s Putin and China’s Xi to meet in Beijing” and “Russia’s Putin and China’s Xi celebrate opposition to U.S. led world order” suggested deepening cooperation through shared opposition to Western influence. Meanwhile, “Biden kicks off NATO summit pledging support for Ukraine” and “NATO leaders move to ‘Trump-proof’ the alliance in Washington” demonstrated Western coordination and concerns about future leadership.

### 3.4.3 Leadership in Wartime

Headlines point to maneuvers ensuring his continued rule and control. For instance, “*Putin, eyeing reelection, signs law to allow voting in occupied Ukraine*” shows the Kremlin adapting election rules to bolster Putin’s legitimacy. Relatedly, “*Modest’ Putin makes low-key announcement of 2024 presidential run*” highlights how Putin choreographs even his self-presentation. “*Russia bars antiwar candidate from challenging Putin in March election*”, “*Russia poised to bar only antiwar candidate from presidential race*”, and “*Kremlin cultivates image of Putin as Russia’s leader for life*” collectively signal an entrenched regime silencing dissent. “*Russia’s farce election sums up a grim moment in global democracy*” uses the phrase “farce election” to critique the democratic decline.

Within war bureaucracy and military command, headlines reflect leadership reshuffles: “*Putin reassigns Sergei Shoigu, longtime Russian defense minister*” and “*Putin taps economist Andrei Belousov to lead defense ministry in wartime*” indicate changes meant to streamline the war effort. In Ukraine, politics influence decisions too. “*Zelensky replaces military chief, naming Syrsky top commander*”, “*Zelensky’s shake-up of military command, meant as a refresh, risks backlash*”, and “*Zelensky move to fire general leaves Ukraine guessing who will command war*” show the internal tensions around military leadership change. These highlight the burden of navigating war leadership while maintaining morale and political stability.

## 4 Conclusion

Although Ukraine and Palestine share the same destiny, both newspapers portrayed Israel and Ukraine as victims or heroic protagonists while they depict Palestinians and Russians negatively. However, The Washington Post adopted a cautious language whereas The New York Post uses more overtly emotive one. In both papers, the coverage concentrated on Hamas attacks of October 7, 2023, remembering readers of the “suffering” of Israeli civilians. They



neglected or minimized attention to Palestinian casualties or context. Israeli forces army were always described in symmetrical terms that disorganize the scale of Palestinian sorrow. The operations of Israeli military were outlined as defensive paybacks while the Palestinian reactions were presented as terrorist actions. Hardeners of headlines showed the “pain” and “resilience” of the Israeli side showing them as the only party who born the war’s burden. The headlines marginalize the tens of thousands of Palestinian victims. Nevertheless, both newspapers’ headlines highlighted on what they called Russian war crimes. They always talked about Russian attacks on civilians, and repression. The headlines depicted Russia as a criminal aggressor disparaging international norms. Conversely, both newspapers portrayed Ukraine as courageous resistance on the battlefield to steadfast civilian morale and leadership.

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