

Al-Jazeera English and BBC News Coverage of the Gaza War 2008-9: A Comparative Examination

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my beloved father, Baba Hmoud, God bless his beautiful soul, who was there for me at every step of this journey.

Baba, your passion for knowledge will always inspire and guide us, and your kindness and generosity towards others will forever live in us.

We miss you dearly. Every single day.

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Abstract

This research comparatively examines BBC News and Al-Jazeera English's (AJE) reporting of the 22-day Gaza War of 2008/9 ('Operation Cast Lead') and the production factors shaping their coverage. The research combined a content analysis of AJE and BBC news coverage, including thematic, textual and sourcing aspects, as well as interviews with AJE and BBC journalists. The findings show that Israeli sources, themes and framings dominated the BBC's broadcast and online coverage across all thematic areas, including historical contextualisation, world reactions, protests, the humanitarian impact, legality, and military developments, whereas Israeli and Palestinian sources and perspectives received equivalent levels of coverage on AJE. Key elements of historical, political, and legal contextualisation, notably Israel's blockade of Gaza and the humanitarian crisis, were extensively reported on AJE but were largely absent from BBC coverage. Overall, the BBC adopted 'Operational' and 'War on Terror' framings of the conflict, which centred Israeli aims and objectives, while AJE adopted 'Attack on Gaza' and 'Resistance' framings, broadly echoing the Palestinian narrative. Key production factors revealed by the interviews include Israel's public relations superiority, its media access restrictions, and AJE's extensive presence in Gaza. The findings also highlight significant differences in journalistic self-conceptions. Although AJE and BBC journalists both endorsed journalistic values such as 'objectivity', 'balance' and 'presenting all sides', they disagreed on how these should be interpreted and deployed in practice. While BBC interviewees articulated journalistic roles and ideals through a strictly professional or regulatory lens, AJE journalists explicitly placed them within a broader moral and political outlook. The findings show this translated into markedly different editorial choices: Overall, the BBC's 'decontextualised balance' approach often disadvantaged the Palestinian perspective by under-reporting Palestinian rationales and deprioritising contextualisation, whereas AJE's 'morally informed objectivity' resulted in coverage which centred the humanitarian dimension and was explicitly sceptical of official Israeli narratives.

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CHAPTER ONE: Introduction

1.1 Israel/Palestine: One land, two narratives

For more than a century, the Israeli-Palestinian¹ (I/P) conflict has been one of the world's longest-running and most intractable political disputes. Over this period, it has had a defining impact on the geopolitical, economic and cultural features and contours of the Middle East region and beyond. A key dimension of the conflict has been an ongoing and fraught war of narratives and representations among its various protagonists. Fierce disputes over facts of the historical record and the merits of moral, legal and political claims have been as integral and decisive an element of the conflict as military confrontations. In this context, the media, and particularly news journalism, have played a crucial function in investigating, documenting and communicating the realities of the conflict — in all their multifaceted complexities — to audiences and publics, both within and beyond the region. In doing so, media outlets and individual journalists have exerted a considerable degree of influence in shaping public opinions and discourses, as well as on official policymaking. This has made the news media itself a fiercely contested battlefield. Over the past decades, coverage of the I/P conflict has routinely found itself the subject of regular and intense scrutiny and controversy. Western media coverage, in particular, has been the subject of a significant body of examination, evaluation and critique by scholars, activists and journalists.

In this context, this thesis aims to contribute to the scholarly literature on news reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by conducting a comparative examination of how two of the world's most established media organisations — the British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) and the Al-Jazeera Media Network (AJMN) — covered a significant episode of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, namely the 22-day Gaza War of Dec 2008-Jan 2009, also known as Operation 'Cast Lead' (OCL)². In particular, this examination seeks to map out the key differences in the sourcing, thematic and framing patterns of BBC and AJE reporting of the conflict, and also to explore the major news production factors shaping these differences.

¹ In this thesis, the terms "Israeli-Arab conflict" and "Israeli-Palestinian conflict" will be used interchangeably, although the latter term is preferred when referring to events in the era after the Camp David accords (i.e. 1977—present).

² For reasons of convenience, the terms "the Gaza conflict of 2008/2009", "the Gaza War 2008-9" and "Operation Cast Lead (OCL)" will also be used interchangeably throughout this thesis. This is not to elide the problematic or contested aspects involved in using either term.

1.2 Rationale for the Study

The choice of the 2008/2009 Gaza War, which began on 27 December 2008 and ended on 17 January 2009, as a case study was motivated by a number of factors, notably the unprecedented scale of the human toll caused by the conflict. According to Amnesty International:

The scale and intensity of the [Gaza 2008/2009] attacks were unprecedented, even in the context of the increasingly lethal Israeli military campaigns in Gaza in previous years. More Palestinians were killed, and more properties were destroyed in the 22-day military campaign than in any previous Israeli offensive. (Amnesty International, July 2009:2)

Another key motivation behind the choice of topic was the researcher's own experience of witnessing coverage of the Gaza War of 2008/2009 as a viewer — including Al-Jazeera English's (AJE) live reports and interviews conducted from within the Gaza strip itself. The apparent differences, in terms of scale, scope and tone, between AJE's coverage and that of other major international news outlets (in particular, the BBC and CNN), the relative dearth of on-the-ground reporters, and the apparent prominence of official Israeli spokespeople, in most Western coverage of OCL³, prompted questions about the causes underlying such differences in coverage between AJE and Western-based channels, and the role of logistical, political, institutional, ideological and other factors in shaping editorial decisions and output.

The news outlets selected by the researcher for examination in this thesis are the Al-Jazeera English (AJE) channel, based in Doha, Qatar, and the BBC News Channel, based in London, UK. Several rationales informed this choice. As the world's oldest national broadcasting organisation, the BBC has acquired a unique and unmatched status and reputation, both at home — as the “nation's foremost public service institution” (Ahmad, 2018:39) — and across the globe, as “the model for public broadcasters on every continent” (Born, 2005:5). A century on, the BBC continues to dominate the British media space, with “80% of Britons continuing to access its services daily” (Higgins, *The Guardian* 18 August 2014). The BBC News channel is one the most watched and trusted news channels in the world, often seen as a standard-bearer for high-quality international news journalism.

³ This was principally the result of media restrictions imposed by the Israeli government on international media organisations' access to Gaza during the conflict, as will be discussed in detail in Chapters Nine and Ten.

The selection of AJE was principally motivated by two distinct but related factors: First, the fact that AJE is arguably the world's foremost non-Western English-language news channel, and second, its status as the only English-language news channel that extensively reported on the events of the Gaza 2008/9 conflict from within the Gaza strip itself.

Another key rationale for choosing AJE and BBC News was the scholarly importance of a comparative examination of two broadcasters operating predominantly within different cultural and political spheres — the Middle East and Europe/US, respectively — where the dominant assumptions, framings and narratives around the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, both at the official and public discourse levels, often differed markedly. How differences in political and cultural contexts, and journalistic assumptions and self-conceptions — about what journalism is and does — can influence differences in editorial approaches and choices, is a question of great interest to media scholars, and is a central concern of this thesis. As Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) note:

There is one highly important question on which single-country research, however comprehensive or sophisticated, can shed virtually no illumination: how does the articulation of a country's mass media institutions to its political institutions affect the processing of political communication content and the impact of such content on the orientations to politics of audience members?

Indeed, there is a growing body of scholarly literature on comparative journalistic practices across the globe (as will be discussed in Chapter Four) and the importance of such comparative approaches is increasingly being recognised. As Obijofor and Hanush (2011) argue in their survey of global journalistic forms and practices, "an examination of journalism practices across cultures will enrich rather than dilute public knowledge and understanding of the similarities and differences in journalism" (Obijofor & Hanush, 2011:4).

1.3 Structure of the Dissertation

This thesis consists of eleven chapters, and is structured as follows:

Chapter One: Introduction

This chapter provides a brief overview of the context, scope, and rationale of the research.

Chapter Two: Histories of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

This chapter presents a historical and political overview of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from ancient times up to Israel's unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005, and the 'dual narratives' that have come to dominate representations of the conflict.

Chapter Three: The Gaza War of 2008/9 — Operation 'Cast Lead'

This chapter provides an overview of the immediate historical and political context within which the Gaza War of 2008/2009 took place, as well as the events and immediate aftermath of the conflict itself. The chapter concludes by presenting the main themes of the Israeli and Palestinian narratives that emerged around the 22-day conflict — particularly over Israel's reasons and rationales for launching OCL and its military conduct during the conflict.

Chapter Four: Reporting Conflict: A Theoretical Overview

This chapter presents the theoretical framework underpinning this research and surveys the key relevant scholarly literature and debates around journalism's roles and values in a global context. The survey also touches open the scholarship on conflict reporting and news production.

Chapter Five: News Reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

This chapter provides an overview of the scholarly literature on news reporting of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, including the key thematic and structural patterns, as well as the major news production factors that have historically characterised international coverage of the conflict.

Chapter Six: Al-Jazeera and the BBC

This chapter presents an overview of the historical, political, and organisational backgrounds of the BBC and Al-Jazeera. Some of the key scholarly examinations and critiques of both organisations are presented and discussed, including studies of their OCL coverage.

Chapter Seven: Methodology

This chapter presents the research questions and the methodological framework underpinning the empirical dimension of this research.

Chapter Eight: Content Analysis Findings

This chapter presents the empirical findings of the content analysis of AJE and BBC News reporting of the Gaza War of 2008/9, including the key thematic, sourcing, and framing aspects of their coverage. In addition to the sourcing and thematic analysis, the chapter features extensive close textual analysis of hundreds of textual samples from the coverage.

Chapter Nine: Interview Findings: Production Factors

This chapter presents and examines the findings of the interviews conducted with BBC and AJE journalists and media specialists with direct experience and working knowledge of the networks' coverage of OCL and the wider conflict. The interview responses provide the basis for identifying the principal production factors shaping BBC and AJE coverage of OCL.

Chapter Ten: Discussion

This chapter critically engages with the results of the empirical findings in the context of the research questions and theoretical framework. The discussion explores how the research findings inform and relate to those of earlier studies, as well as the relationship between the content analysis and production factors findings.

Chapter Eleven: Conclusion

This chapter presents an overview of the key findings of the research and offers a set of recommendations for future research avenues.

CHAPTER TWO: Histories of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict

2.1 Introduction

This chapter provides a historical overview of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The aim is not to offer a comprehensive or novel historiography — an impossible task within the scope and remit of this research — but rather to delineate the principal events, actors and points of contention that have come to define official, popular, and scholarly discourses around the conflict. This overview seeks to highlight the ‘dual narratives’ aspect of the histories of the conflict, and thus provides the necessary contextual framework within which to adequately understand, analyse and evaluate BBC and AJE media coverage of Operation Cast Lead.

Understanding the historical origins of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict depends in large measure on reckoning with a twin, overlapping set of conflicting but parallel narratives. There is, on the one hand, what might broadly be termed an ‘Israeli narrative’, based around a two-thousand-year quest by the Jewish people to return to their ancestral homeland in historical Palestine. According to this narrative, this quest culminated in the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948, and was subsequently followed by decades of precarious but determined survival and resilience amidst regional and international hostility. There is also a ‘Palestinian narrative’, one based around an analogous claim by Palestinians to an ancestral homeland in historical Palestine, and within which the year 1948 represents an equally pivotal landmark, albeit for diametrically opposite reasons, being the year of the ‘Nakba’ (‘the catastrophe’) — the traumatic opening act to decades of dispossession and exile. Only by taking into account both competing narratives can we hope to adequately investigate and evaluate media coverage of the conflict.

In this context, it is perhaps unsurprising that histories of Israel/Palestine, and of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, have been the subject of such intense contestation and controversy for decades. In effect, each side⁴ in the conflict is liable to favour, deploy and defend those historical narratives and interpretations which support and confirm its partisan interests and prejudices, and which can be used to provide moral or legal legitimising cover for particular actions and claims. In turn, this desire to establish historical justifications for particular claims, policies and ideologies can have a forceful role in shaping scholarly discourse, often leading to the creation of rigid historical orthodoxies. Describing modern Israeli historical scholarship,

⁴ It must be noted that the term ‘side’ itself can be quite ambiguous, in light of the number of actors involved and the complex set of motives and agendas at play in the context of the I-P conflict.

Israeli historian Sand (2009) comments that “national exigencies created an iron-jawed vice that prevented any deviation from the dominant narratives” (2009:18).

It is important to note here that historical scholarship on Israel/Palestine cannot be reduced to these twin narratives, Israeli and Palestinian, nor are these narratives embraced by all Israelis and Palestinians, respectively. Rather, they reflect the two principal bodies of official, popular and scholarly discourses around the conflict, and as such they delineate the main sites of contention and disagreement.

2.2 From Biblical Palestine to the Birth of Modern Zionism

Despite significant scholarly progress over the past two centuries, the ancient history of the land of Palestine remains a contested one. Biblical accounts and historical records of the period still elicit multiple and contradictory interpretations. As Kuhrt (1995) writes, “there are no explanations, rationalisations or archaeological discoveries that provide clear answers to all” (Kuhrt, 1995:429). There is little disagreement, however, that over the past three thousand years, Israel/Palestine has witnessed an almost uninterrupted sequence of conquests and annexations, notably by the Babylonians, the Romans, the Byzantine Empire, the early Muslim Empires, various dynasties of the Golden Islamic age, and European invasions during the Crusades (Kuhrt, 1995; Lewis, 1995; Rogan, 2009). By the 15th century Palestine was under the control of the Ottoman Empire (which also extended over Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, and Iraq). The Ottoman presence in Palestine was a largely hands-off affair, often limited to tax collection and monitoring of population movements, notably immigration. Control was chiefly enacted through appointed local governors and, for the most part, involved a modest military presence (Hourani, 1991).

Although the term ‘Zion’ dates back thousands of years — it is one of the biblical names for Jerusalem — the Zionist movement in its modern form only emerged at the tail-end of the 19th century. The first recorded use of the term ‘Zionism’ was in 1885, by Nathan Birnbaum, a Viennese Jewish writer, but the creation of the modern Zionist movement is generally credited to Theodor Herzl, an Austro-Hungarian-born, Paris-based journalist and author (Shlaim, 2000, Lochery, 2004). Herzl initially believed in assimilationist emancipation for European Jewry, but his reporting on the Dreyfus trial in 1894 led him to reconsider his stance on the ‘Jewish Question’, eventually coming to the view that “Jews had to become a ‘normal people’ in a land of their own. Otherwise, the ‘abnormality’ of the Jews as a beleaguered minority everywhere would persist.” (Hertzberg, 2003:1)

According to Gilbert (1999), Herzl wanted to secure “the immediate return of the Jews to Palestine on a massive scale, from every one of the countries of the Diaspora, to land which would be theirs as a Jewish homeland, recognized as such by the great powers of the world” (1999:10). Herzl spent most of the 1890s promoting his project and seeking support and patronage from European governments and leaders of European Jewry. While many of those he approached considered his project to be ill-advised, he succeeded in attracting a growing number of powerful and influential sympathisers. In 1896, Herzl established the World Zionist Organisation (WZO) and published ‘*The Jewish State*’ (Der Judenstaat), in which he laid-out his vision. The basic aim of Zionism, Herzl argued in the book, was two-fold: “to regain Jewish self-respect and dignity in the eyes of non-Jews” and to rebuild a Jewish national home, for Jews to ‘live as free men on their own soil, to die peacefully in their own homes’. (Herzl 2006:599)

In 1897, the WZO convened its first Zionist Congress, in Basle, with its stated aim the creation of a home in Palestine for the Jewish People. In 1901, at the Fifth Zionist Congress, a ‘Jewish National Fund’ was launched, tasked with purchasing land in Palestine using donations from Jews from across the world, and which was to be kept in trust for the Jewish people as a whole (Hourani, 1991: 288). Herzl initially selected two potential sites for the prospective Jewish homeland: Argentina and Palestine (Philo & Berry, 2011). However, when in 1902 Joseph Chamberlain, the British Colonial Secretary, offered Herzl a Jewish Homeland in Uganda, Herzl accepted and, according to Gilbert (1999), “split the Zionist movement”. Although the Sixth Congress of 1903 voted in favour of the idea, it was definitively abandoned a year later after Herzl’s unexpected death in 1904 (Gilbert, 1999:22).

Herzl’s plans initially found a mixed reception within the Jewish community in Europe. A large number of Jewish leaders, including Moritz Gudemann, the Chief Rabbi of Vienna, opposed it on religious as well as secular grounds. As Gilbert (1999) states:

Zionism was never a unanimous or even majority, movement among the Jews of Russia, the Jewish heartland, and made even less of an impact on the Jews of the United States, which was rapidly emerging as the second great centre of Jewish life. (Gilbert, 1999:16)

Some interpretations of Zionism have attempted to foreground the problematic nature of Zionism’s territorial claims. For instance, Halliday (2011) characterised Zionism as “the movement that aimed to create a Jewish state in the territories inhabited for a few centuries by the modern Jews’ remote ancestors” (Halliday, 2011:90). Others have gone further, arguing

that territorial national claims on Palestine represented a rejection, rather than an expression, of Zionist deals. This view is shared by Hobsbawm (1990), who states:

It is entirely illegitimate to identify the Jewish links with the ancestral land of Israel ... with the desire to gather all Jews into a modern territorial state situated on the ancient Holy Land. (Hobsbawm, cited in Sand, 2012:1)

Others have argued that Zionism was a movement motivated less by national self-determination ideals and more as a response to European anti-Semitism and the failures of assimilation. Zionism, according to Achcar (2010), “was first and foremost a reaction to anti-Semitism that envisioned an ethnic-nationalistic segregation and regrouping of Jews on a territory of their own” (Achcar, 2010:17). Laqueur (1972) goes further, writing: “had it not been for this increase in tension and anti-Jewish persecution, Zionism might still have existed as a small literary-philosophical sect of idealistic reformers. It became a political force as the result of outside pressure... In a world without anti-Semitism, Zionism would not have flourished” (Laqueur, 1972:590-593). Whereas ancient Zionism existed as a yearning for a “return to Zion”, Shlaim (2000) argues, its modern variant “had its roots in the failure of Jewish efforts to become assimilated in Western society, in the intensification of anti-Semitism in Europe, and in the parallel and not unrelated upsurge of nationalism” (Shlaim 2000:2). For Abdullah (2004) modern Zionists “crystallized three inter-related elements to implement their project; religion, nation and territory” and, as such, “created and then exploited certain circumstances in Europe and Palestine, especially Western empathy, to build a “national home” for the Jewish people” (Abdullah, 2004:231).

The emergence of modern political Zionism led to rapid and dramatic changes to the demography of Palestine. Although the Jewish presence in the area had been steadily increasing since the 1500s, often spurred on by persecution of the Jewish diaspora in Europe, the scale of Jewish immigration to Palestine remained modest in absolute terms for the next three centuries. Gilbert (1999) writes of “considerable Jewish activity” in the Holy Land by the 1850s, estimating that “about 10,000 Jews lived in Palestine” at the time. He goes on further to argue that Jerusalem had become a majority-Jewish city as early as 1850 (Gilbert 1999:3), a claim contested by Hourani (1991), Finkelstein (2010, 2011) and others.

Although Jewish immigration gathered pace throughout the 19th century, the demographic make-up of the population in Palestine remained predominantly Arab. By the 1880s, the territory comprised “an 85 percent Muslim majority, a Christian minority representing some 9 percent of the population, and an indigenous Jewish community” (Rogan, 2009: 197). Between

1904 and 1914, as many as 40,000 Jews, mostly from Eastern Europe, immigrated to Palestine, a movement referred to as the 'Second Aliyah'. European Jewish immigration to Palestine, Hourani (1991) writes, produced:

... a Jewish community of a new kind: not the long established Oriental Jews but Jews from central and eastern Europe, and not coming to Jerusalem to study, pray and die, but coming in accordance with a new vision of a restored Jewish nation, rooted in the land. (Hourani 1991:288)

By 1914, Gilbert (1999) notes, "there were 90,000 Jews living in Palestine, of whom 75,000 were immigrants" (Gilbert, 1999:30). Hourani offers a similar figure of 85,000, accounting for 12 per cent of the total population of Palestine (Hourani: 1991, 289).

2.3 WWI and the Balfour Declaration

On 2 November 1917, in a letter to Lord Rothschild — a prominent representative of British Jewry — the British Foreign Secretary, Arthur Balfour, declared:

His Majesty's government view with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people, and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object, it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine, or the rights and political status enjoyed by Jews in any other country.

The Balfour Declaration, as it came to be known, "electrified the Jewish world" according to Raviv (1998:2). It was a significant breakthrough for the Zionist Movement and came to represent "the charter on which its subsequent activities were based" (Laqueur, 1972:594). Despite the declaration's provision that "nothing should be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine", the reaction within the Palestinian and Arab population was predictably hostile. Abdul Rahman Azzam, later to become the first Secretary General of the Arab League, called it "a commitment on the part of those who do not own to give what is not theirs", adding that it was "detrimental for the Jews as well as the Arabs" and that its "result can only be eternal hostility" (cited in Achcar, 2010:46). Raviv (1998) argues that the declaration's provision reflected a genuine belief by Balfour that the creation of a Jewish state could be possible without infringing upon the rights of the non-Jewish indigenous population. This is contested by Rogan (2009), who states that "given Palestine's very limited resources, there simply was no way to establish a home for the Jewish

people in Palestine without prejudice to the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine” (Rogan, 2009:197).

The Balfour Declaration elicited a particularly acute sense of betrayal among Arab leaders, who felt that Britain had effectively reneged on its promise to “recognize and support the independence of the Arabs” in exchange for the latter’s support for Britain against the Ottomans during the First World War (Kennedy, 1985:195). Most notably, Sir Henry McMahon, the British High Commissioner in Cairo, in wartime correspondence with Sharif Hussein, Emir of Mecca, offered assurances that were understood by the Sharif to mean Britain would help the Arabs achieve self-rule once the war had ended. McMahon’s remarks were later echoed in further British statements. As Heikal (1996) points out, while McMahon’s assurances were “vaguely worded, and Hussein was not as persistent as he could have been in clearing ambiguities ... on two occasions after the war the British governments made statements reiterating its support for Arab self-determination” (Heikal, 1996:34-35).

Interpretations have varied over the rationales behind Balfour’s declaration. Kennedy (1985), while noting that “influential Zionists had won the sympathies of various figures in the British Government,” nevertheless finds that Balfour’s principal motivation was that of protecting and furthering British imperial interests. As he writes:

... there is every indication that, although unclear about Arab feelings over Palestine, the British *were* clear about the political advantages which would accrue from the establishment of a Jewish bulwark in that area: it would protect the approaches to the Suez Canal, eliminate Turkish control there forever, and also reduce France’s prospects of expanding south from Syria. Finally, it would gain the applause of Zionists everywhere from the United States to Russia. Here were sufficient arguments of expediency and possible advantage to outweigh scruples concerning the Arabs... (Kennedy, 1985:195-196) [*Author’s italics*]

Kennedy’s assessment is echoed by Raviv (1998), for whom the declaration reflected Balfour’s realisation “that a striving Jewish community in Palestine might become an important asset for British imperial strategy in the Middle East and in the defence of the Suez Canal” (Raviv, 1998:1). Others, notably Abdullah (2004), see in the document merely the official confirmation of long-running British support for the Zionist movement’s aim of creating a solely Jewish state in Palestine.

2.4 The British Mandate

At the end of the First World War (1914-1918), the defeated Ottomans ceded control of much of their territories in the Middle East, including in the Holy Land. Britain was granted mandatory powers over Palestine at the Paris Peace conference of 1919, and the tenets of the Balfour declaration were “written into the preamble of the mandatory instrument issued by the League of Nations to formalize Britain’s position in Palestine” (Rogan 2009:197). This official endorsement of the declaration was later reiterated at the San Remo Peace Conference of 1920.

Over the three decades of the mandate (1919-1948), the British government, caught between the competing demands of the Arab and Jewish populations in Palestine, and faced with the increasingly irreconcilable claims and aspirations of the two communities, commissioned a series of reports into the situation. These included the Churchill White Paper (1922), the Shaw Commission report (1929), the Royal Commission Peel report (1936-1937) and a further, highly influential, White Paper published in May 1939. The Churchill White Paper, published in June 1922, asserts that “the Balfour Declaration did not contemplate converting the entire country into a Jewish national home, but that such a home was to be facilitated within Palestine.” Significantly, it also stipulated that the level of Jewish immigration had to remain within “the economic capacity of the country to absorb it” (Lazaron, 1945:102).

While the statements that emerged out of the Paris and San Remy Peace conferences presented the British mandate as the prelude to self-determination for both the Jewish and Arab communities in Palestine, Abdullah (2004) argues that the mandate in fact merely “facilitated and helped to achieve the vision of the Zionist movement.” As he notes:

In effect, the Zionist project sought the displacement of the native people, by using the support of the central rule which was concentrated in the British Mandate that governed Palestine. During this period the latter exercised control and limited Palestinian development by allowing the creation of Jewish colonies. (Abdullah, 2004:231)

While the Arab population in Palestine stood at 560,000 at the end of World War I, the Jewish population had shrunk to a mere 55,000, as “many of them had left during the war because of the hardships it caused” (Raviv, 1998:2). Nevertheless, the Zionist movement, now led by Chaim Weizmann and Nachum Sokolov, had grown into a significant force, and the Jewish National Fund persevered in its efforts to increase both the Jewish population in Palestine and its share of land ownership. British mandatory policies, Hourani (1991) argues, were significantly propitious in this regard:

The acquisition of land for European Jewish immigrants, which had begun during the late nineteenth century, continued within the new system of administration established by Britain as mandatory government. Jewish immigration was encouraged, within limits determined partly by the administration's estimate of the number of immigrants the country could absorb at any moment, and partly by the amount of pressure which Zionists and Arabs could bring to bear upon the government in London. (Hourani, 1991:323)

In 1919, Weizmann signed an agreement with Emir Faisal, a prominent Arab leader (and a future King of Syria and, later, Iraq), "to encourage and stimulate immigration of Jews into Palestine on a large scale and as quickly as possible" (Lazaron, 1945:102). Although the Faisal–Weizmann Agreement included the condition that Arabs would achieve independence, the reaction among the Arab population to the deal and its implications was largely hostile. Some of Weizmann's statements, such as "we shall make Palestine as Jewish as England is English" enthused Jewish nationalists but "hardly pacified the disillusioned Arabs" (Lazaron, 1945:102).

The rate of Jewish immigration to Palestine soon surged again, from 8,000 a year at the start of the 1920s to a peak of 35,000 in 1925 — partly driven by the global economic depression, US immigration restrictions and anti-Jewish measures in Poland (Achcar, 2010). By 1931, Jews represented a sixth of the total population of Palestine, which comprised 175,000 Jews and 880,000 Arabs. Over a period of seven years, from 1932 to 1938, Jewish immigration into Palestine reached almost 200,000 (compared to 187,000 for the whole of 1882-1931). A further influx of 138,000 Jewish immigrants followed between 1938 and 1948 (Achcar, 2010; Hourani, 1991).

The Nazis' ascent to power in 1933, Achcar (2010) argues, was a "decisive" factor behind the increase in Jewish immigration to Palestine in the 1930s and 1940s, as it lent credence to the Zionist movement's case for the necessity of a safe haven for the world's Jews. "It is obvious," Achcar writes, "that National Socialism, by substantially boosting Jewish emigration to Palestine, allowed the movement to attain the critical mass that enabled it to triumph politically and militarily in 1948". In total, "nearly 313,000 immigrants settled in the area between Hitler's assumption of power in 1933, and the end of the British mandate in 1948 ... One hundred and fifteen thousand of them came illegally" (Achcar, 2010:18-20).

The imposition of the British mandate, and the perception that Britain was aiding Zionist efforts to increase Jewish immigration, caused concern and anger within Palestine's Arab community.

According to Morris (1987), the Arab population perceived “the rise of the Jewish political and military power, and especially the enormous influx of Jewish immigrants fleeing persecution in Europe in the mid–1930s” as proof of a Zionist plan to take over the land (Morris, 1987:23). Rising anger and resentment stoked intra-communal tensions, which sometimes turned to violence. The first wave of anti-Jewish Arab riots broke out shortly after the establishment of the mandate, initially starting in Jerusalem in 1920 before spreading to Jaffa a year later. Violence continued sporadically throughout the decade, reaching a peak in 1929 (Achcar, 2000, 133). Between 1929 and 1936, Mandatory Palestine saw a period of precarious calm, but anger at British policies remained. The aforementioned acceleration of Jewish immigration between 1933 and 1936 (known as the ‘fifth Aliya’) in the wake of Hitler’s election saw 160,000 Jewish immigrants admitted into Palestine, and soon resulted in Arab anger reaching a tipping point. In 1936, a shipment of arms intended for the Haganah, a Zionist paramilitary organisation, was discovered in Jaffa, and proved to be a catalyst for the re-eruption of Arab anger at both Zionist plans and Britain’s perceived complicity in them (Heikal, 1996).

The Arab revolt of 1936-1939, also known as the ‘Great Arab Revolt’, initially involved mass strikes, which lasted seven months, as well as other forms of protest. This prompted British authorities to send a Royal commission, headed by Lord Peel, to investigate the reasons for Arab discontent. The Peel report, published in July 1937, recommended the partition of Palestine into two states — a proposal accepted by Zionist leaders Weizmann and Ben-Gurion, but rejected by the Arab Higher Committee, which represented the Arab population in Palestine (Heikal, 1996). In the face of perceived British hostility to Arab aspirations, Arab protests turned into a violent uprising, mostly involving attacks on British targets, both civilian and military. This led to Britain sending a force of 25,000 soldiers to Palestine, “the largest deployment of British forces abroad since the end of the First World War” (Rogan, 2009:205-206). The British response was crushing; by 1939, “over 10 percent of the [Arab] adult male population was killed, wounded, imprisoned, or exiled” (Rogan, 2009:206). The cooperation between the Jewish Agency and British forces during the revolt played a great part in intensifying the ensuing cycle of attack and retaliation between Arabs and Jews in Palestine, which continued throughout the two decades leading up to the creation of the state of Israel in 1948.

Between 1938 and 1939, as the prospect of war with Hitler’s Germany intensified, British authorities undertook a number of initiatives to try to shore up Britain’s position in the Middle East. A 1938 report was produced that seemed to contradict the Peel Commission’s findings, while a London conference in 1939 ended in failure (Heikal, 1996). Later that same year,

another White Paper was produced which set a limit of 75,000 for Jewish immigration into Palestine over the following five-year period, and also stipulated that Arab consent was needed for the approval of any further immigration. Land purchases by Jews were also to be restricted in some areas and prohibited in others. However, as Lazaron (1945) points out, “the Mandates Commission of the League never approved the White Paper of 1939, still less so Jewish nationalists” (Lazaron, 1945:102).

For Achcar (2010), the Second World War played a pivotal role in the history of the Zionist movement. The strategic alliance between Hadj Amin Al Husseini, the Mufti of Jerusalem, and Adolf Hitler resulted in Britain turning firmly against the former. In the aftermath of the war, as the full scale of the atrocities committed in the Holocaust became apparent, Jewish claims to nationhood gained compelling resonance on the world stage. At the end of WWII, Britain “had neither the resources nor the resolve to remain in Palestine” (Rogan, 2009:250), and the prospects of a peaceful settlement between Palestine’s Arab and Jewish communities grew increasingly remote. Between 1945 and 1948, Zionist paramilitary groups — primarily the Irgun and the Haganah — launched an armed campaign against both Arab and British targets, most notoriously bombing the King David Hotel in 1947, where a large number of British officials were based, an event which hastened British withdrawal from Palestine (Heikal, 1996). According to Morris (1987), Haganah commanders wished to “move more quickly” after the war so as to exploit “the weakness and disorganisation of the Arabs ... then frighten or force them into leaving” (Morris, 1987:24). In the spring of 1947, Britain declared its intention to hand control over Palestine to the United Nations, and full-scale hostilities between Arab and Jewish communities, which had subsided in the war years, soon re-erupted (Lewis, 1995). In August 1947, the UN voted on a partition plan that granted the Jewish minority (which represented 30% of the population at the time) over 60% of the land of Mandatory Palestine. The Zionist leadership accepted the plan, but the Arab leaders did not, arguing that it was unfair and violated the principles of self-determination.

The period from 1947 to May 1948 saw what was, in effect, an undeclared war between Arabs and Jews in Palestine. Attacks and counterattacks became a daily occurrence, and prospects for a peaceful resolution diminished daily (Heikal, 1996; Pappé, 2007). Between April and May 1948, an estimated two hundred Palestinian villages were occupied by Zionist paramilitary forces, and their inhabitants attacked or expelled (Pappé, 2007:10). One of the most infamous of these attacks was on the village of Deir Yassin, on April 9, 1948, in which an estimated 100 to 120 villagers were killed by Irgun and Lehi militiamen (Rogan, 2009: 259).

2.5 The first Arab-Israeli War: 1947-1949

British control over Palestine officially ended on the 14th May, 1948. The same day, Zionist leaders declared the creation of the state of Israel. On May 15th, armies from five neighbouring Arab countries launched a joint offensive into Palestine, during which they “moved into the mainly Arab parts of the country” (Hourani, 1991:359). The ensuing fighting between Zionist and Arab forces continued, on and off, for months — over the course of four main campaigns punctuated by UN-brokered ceasefires. Jewish military units, numbering 35,000 in May 1948, increased to 96,000 men by December of the same year. For their part, the Arab armies — from Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, Syria, and Egypt — numbered fewer than 25,000 in total.

From February to July 1949, a series of bilateral armistice agreements were concluded between the Israeli leadership and each of the Arab countries involved in the fighting. By the end of hostilities, the Zionist forces had managed to lay claim to almost 80 per cent of the territory of mandatory Palestine. Arab control was reduced to the West Bank and East Jerusalem, which remained under Jordanian control, and the Gaza strip, which was under Egyptian control. By 1949, an estimated total of 750,000 Arabs had been driven out of their homes. Although the UN General Assembly passed a resolution, in December 1948, enshrining their right to return, most were forced into refugee camps in southern Lebanon, Jordan, the West Bank and Gaza.

Scholarly disputes continue over the causes of the 1947/1948 war, and the parties most responsible for its genesis and outcome (Gilbert, 1999; Pappé, 2007; Segev, 2000). For Hertzberg (2003), attempts to reach a peaceful post-Mandate settlement failed partly because “Jews now knew beyond any shadow of a doubt that the Arabs remained entrenched in opposition to the results of the Balfour Declaration” and thus “would be kept in check only by superior power (Hertzberg, 2003:49). Other accounts suggest that military confrontation between Zionists and Arabs was an inevitable and integral consequence of the Zionist project. “Every indigenous people will resist alien settlers...” wrote Ze’ev Jabotinsky, a leader of Revisionist Zionism (cited in Shlaim, 2000:13) in 1923. Accordingly, he later concluded, “Zionist colonization must either be terminated or carried out in defiance of the will of the native population” (cited in Masalha, 2001:28). While Jabotinsky was often portrayed as a marginal voice by the official Zionist leadership, his stance nevertheless found echoes in numerous statements by other Zionist leaders. As Morris (1987) notes, David Ben-Gurion’s approach to the ‘Arab Problem’ (as the latter termed it) mirrored Jabotinsky’s:

Ben-Gurion understood that few, if any, of the Arabs would uproot themselves voluntarily; the compulsory provision would have to be put into effect. “We must expel Arabs and take their places... and if we have to use force- not to dispossess the Arabs of the Negev and Transjordan, but to guarantee our own right to settle in those places... then we have force at our disposal”. (Morris, 1987:25)

For Segev (2000), “the tragedy of the Arab refugees from Palestine was a product of the Zionist principle of separation and the dream of population transfer. The tragedy was inevitable, just as the war itself was inevitable” (Segev, 2000:508).

2.6 The refugee crisis and the war of narratives

A key consequence of the first Arab-Israeli conflict, Hertzberg notes, was that “two narratives of this war arose almost immediately” (Hertzberg, 2003:45). For the Palestinians, the events of 1947-1949 have come to be referred to as the ‘Nakba’ (Arabic for ‘Catastrophe’), with the date of May 14th specifically referred to as ‘The Day of the Nakba’. Although an estimated 90,000 Palestinians remained in Israel after the war, and later became Israeli citizens (Shlaim, 2000), three quarters of Palestine’s 1947 Arab population — more than 750,000 people — had, in the space of a few months, become refugees scattered primarily in camps in neighbouring countries (primarily Jordan, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria) and were never to return home.

A parallel official Israeli narrative also emerged. According to this narrative, the events of 1947-1949 represented a ‘war of independence’ and the culmination of a 2000-year quest for Jewish self-determination. According to this narrative, the Zionist victory in 1947-9 “was a supreme military test in which Israel prevailed thanks to great courage, high motivation and the readiness of sacrifice of its defenders” (Raviv, 1998:21). On the question of refugees, this narrative broadly asserted that most, if not all, of those Palestinian Arabs who had left their villages by 1949 did so either willingly or under pressure from Arab leaders who had promised them a swift return to their homes once Jewish forces were defeated. As Raviv (1998) puts it:

[...] The Arab High Command called upon Palestinian Arabs to leave Palestine in order to return shortly with the triumphant Arab armies. Thousands of Palestinian Arabs heeded this call and thousands more were driven out in the heat of the fierce fighting [...] The total number of Palestinian Arabs who left before and during the War of Independence is estimated at about half a million (Raviv, 1998, p. 20).

The claim that Palestinians left under instructions by their leaders is also endorsed by Lochery (2004):

In truth, the evidence suggests a complex set of reasons for the exodus, ranging from fear to decisions taken by the Palestinian leadership to evacuate parts of the population with the aim of returning when the war against the Zionists was won. (Lochery, 2004:38)

However, this interpretation has been challenged, notably by a number of Israeli 'New Historians' who emerged over the past three decades, and who have been at the forefront of challenging the official Israeli narrative around the exodus and expulsion of Palestinians in 1948. As Sand (2012) states:

For years, Zionist rhetoric attempted to convince the world in general, and the supporters of Zionism in particular, that the Arabs of Palestine had fled in response to their leaders' propaganda. Since the publication of studies by Simha Flapan, Benny Morris, Ilan Pappé, and others, however, we know this was not the case [...] Many Palestinians fled out of fear, the Jewish forces used a variety of methods to encourage them to do so. (Sand, 2012:231)

This is echoed by Morris (2007):

The refugee problem was caused by attacks by Jewish forces on Arab villages and towns and by the inhabitants' fear of such attacks, compounded by expulsions, atrocities, and rumours of atrocities – and by the crucial Israeli Cabinet decision in June 1948 to bar a refugee return. (Morris, 2007:38)

For White (2009), the "mass of available evidence from eyewitnesses, survivors, perpetrators and historians," directly undermines the official Israeli narrative about why the Palestinians left their homes during the fighting. Moreover, "an estimated half of the eventual total of dispossessed Palestinians had been 'cleansed' *before* the 'Arab-Israeli' war ever began" (White, 2009:29-31) [author's italics]. For his part, Segev (2000) argues that Palestinian refugees fled for multiple reasons, and that "some planned their departure, some fled, and about half were expelled" (Segev, 2000:508). Shlaim (2000), while agreeing with Segev that there were "many reasons" for the exodus, nevertheless argues that "the most important reason was Jewish military pressure" (Shlaim, 2000:30). The term 'expulsion' has itself become a source of scholarly and political dispute, as many have claimed it can only be applied to acts of physical expulsion, rather than voluntary departures. However, Pappé argues that "not allowing people to return to their homes after a short stay abroad is as much expulsion as any other act directed against the local people with the aim of deportation" (Pappé, 2007:54). Soon after its establishment, Israel "began to enact a number of laws, to secure itself as a Jewish

ethnic state. These laws incorporated the demographic instruments that were to be used in the Judaization of Palestine and transformation of its landscape” (Abdullah, 2004:229). The post-1948 period also saw a surge in Jewish migration to Israel, from Europe but also from Arab and Muslim countries, leading to the near-total decimation of ancient Jewish communities across the Middle East and North Africa. As a result of this influx, Israel’s Jewish population, which stood at 750,000 at the end of the 1947-49 war, reached 1.9 million by 1960 (Hourani, 1991:374).

2.7 The 1967 War: Pre-emptive defence or a war of expansion?

In the 1950s, Egyptian leader Gamal Abdel Nasser emerged as a figurehead of Arab nationalism, particularly in the wake of the ‘Suez Crisis’ of 1956, when his attempt to retake control of the Suez Canal prompted Britain, France and Israel to launch a joint attack on Egypt that ended in failure after the intervention of the United States. Nasser’s style of fiery public rhetoric galvanised Arab masses throughout the sixties. His promise to defeat Israel and reclaim the lands lost in 1948 resonated with millions. However, he suffered a significant setback in early June 1967, when the Israeli air force conducted a series of lightning strikes over a period of half a dozen hours, which led to the total destruction of the Egyptian and Syrian military air fleets, and the quadrupling of the size of area under Israeli control — which now included the West bank, East Jerusalem, the Gaza Strip, the Sinai Peninsula, and the Golan Heights (Shlaim, 2000:250-251). According to Forsythe (1983), the war also “changed some of the factual and humanitarian dimensions of the refugee situation,” as it resulted in a further 200,000 Palestinians being made refugees, many for the second time (Forsythe, 1983:94).

The political, military and sociocultural impact of the 1967 Israeli-Arab war was almost as seismic as that of the 1948 conflict. Not only did it substantially increase the geographical area under Israel’s control, it vastly enhanced its regional dominance. It also brought under Israeli rule, for the first time, the entirety of Mandatory Palestine territories. This meant that Israel was now, in the eyes of the United Nations and international law, an occupying power in the West Bank, the Gaza Strip, the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula. Furthermore, Israel’s military victory in 1967, Hourani argues, “made Israel more desirable as an ally in American eyes,” and marked a turning point in its relationship with the United States, which became one of utmost strategic and military importance for both countries (Hourani, 1991:414). This is echoed by Rogan (2009), for whom “the 1967 war would utterly transform America’s position in the Middle East. It was then that the special relationship between the United States and Israel began, commensurate with Arab antagonism toward the United States” (Rogan, 2009:341).

The causes of the 1967 war have been the subject of political and scholarly disputes for decades. While some see the conflict as a war of expansion by Israel, the official Israeli narrative has portrayed it as a “defensive war” against enemies who had been planning the young nation’s destruction. Supporters of this view often invoke the record of official Arab rhetoric in the lead-up to the attacks — by Nasser, notably, but also other leaders — which were largely interpreted in the Arab world as promises of devastating reprisals against Israel, to atone for the humiliation and defeat of 1948 (Gilbert, 1999:381-382). Other accounts contest this interpretation. For instance, Egyptian journalist – and Nasser confidante – Mohamed Heikal has argued that “Egypt’s moves were meant to be interpreted as a strong warning, not as a declaration of war” (Heikal, 1996:126). For Rogan (2009), “war with Israel must have been the last thing Nasser wanted in 1967, but he was hostage to his own success” (Rogan, 2009:336). In contrast, Shlaim (2000) believes Israel “hoped for a war” but argues that “the one thing [the Israeli Government] did not have was a master plan for territorial aggrandizement” (Shlaim, 2000: 249-250).

2.8 1973: The October War

In the course of the two decades between the first (1948) and second (1967) Arab-Israeli wars, the situation on the ground changed drastically. Palestine’s Arabs lost their homeland, and more than half of them now lived as refugees beyond Mandatory Palestine’s borders. Israel’s 1967 victory had created a unique sense of triumphalism in Israeli society and cast a shadow of defeatism and despair across the Arab world. Nasser’s death in 1970 led to the ascension of Anwar Sadat to the Egyptian presidency and growing uncertainty about how he would address the Arab-Israeli issue.

On the 6th of October 1973, the Egyptian army, aided by a number of other Arab forces, launched a surprise attack on Israeli military positions in the Sinai, forcing the latter to cede territory and, in the process, denting the aura of regional military supremacy that Israel had enjoyed after its 1948 and 1967 victories (Heikal, 1996:181-183). Ten days later, Arab countries announced oil price rises, and threatened full embargoes against nations supportive of Israel. However, after its early setbacks, Israel — with the aid of emergency US military support — made significant advances that began tipping the balance of the conflict back in its favour. On Oct 22, after two weeks of conflict, a UN-brokered ceasefire was announced, as well as a Security Council Resolution (S/RES/338) that reiterated earlier UN resolutions calling for “land for peace” (Rogan, 2009:369-371).

Several years of secret negotiations ensued between Egypt and Israel, culminating in the 1978 Camp David accords – brokered by the Carter administration – which saw Egypt and Israel sign a peace treaty in exchange for the Sinai returning to Egyptian sovereignty. The accords were seen by some as a great success for diplomacy and a breakthrough in Arab-Israeli relations (Raviv, 1998:200). However, many in the Arab world, especially the Palestinians and their representatives, viewed the accords as a historic strategic and military setback in light of Egypt's weight on the Arab political stage, and a mortal blow to the notion of 'Arab Unity' which many Arab leaders had continued to invoke. With an Egyptian president who no longer spoke of Israel as a regional occupier but as a peace partner, the Arab world's confrontation with Israel looked set to continue without its most populous and powerful nation (Said, 1992:191).

2.9 The rise of the PLO and the first Lebanon war

This period also saw the rise to prominence of the Palestinian national liberation movement. In 1964, the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) came into existence and — with the support of Nasser's Egypt and other Arab states — soon became a vehicle for the Palestinians' national struggle and aspirations. In 1969, Yasser Arafat, a rising Palestinian militant based in Cairo, took over the PLO leadership and by 1974 the organisation was widely seen as the sole legitimate representative of the Palestinian people (Wallach & Wallach, 1997:507). By 1970, Palestinian militant groups, notably the Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) were increasingly using Jordan as a base for their operations, which included highly publicised airplane hijackings. The PFLP "made no attempt to hide its intention to overthrow the [Jordanian] monarchy," and, as a result, King Hussein reached the conclusion that "the Palestinian factions had overstayed their welcome" (Rogan, 2009:352). From September 1970 to 1971, an internal war (known as the 'Black September' conflict) broke out between the Jordanian army and the PLO fighters who had been based in the country. The conflict resulted in tens of thousands of (mostly Palestinian) deaths; saw King Hussein re-assert his control over the Kingdom, and culminated in the displacement of the entire PLO operation to Lebanon.

During the 1970s, the PLO's presence in Lebanon continued to grow until many felt it was a serious impediment to the proper functioning of the Lebanese state. In 1978, the Israeli Army launched its first major attack on Lebanon (code-named Operation Litani), which resulted in an estimated one to two thousand Lebanese and Palestinians deaths and the internal displacement of 250,000 people within Lebanon. The attack also forced PLO forces to retreat north of the Litani river and led to the creation of an international peacekeeping force operating along Lebanon's southern border. Five years later, in June 1982, Israel launched a full-scale

military assault into Lebanon, with the stated aim of completely destroying the PLO (Shlaim 2000:395). According to Shlaim, the real “driving force”, behind the Lebanon invasion was Israeli Defence minister Ariel Sharon, whose “big plan” was to establish “political hegemony in the Middle East” using Israeli military supremacy. (Shlaim, 2000: 396-397)

Lebanese factions were divided between those supporting the Israeli action and those against it. After fierce fighting which devastated Lebanese urban areas, the PLO leadership and most of its fighters left Lebanon for Tunisia. On the 16th September 1982, following the PLO’s withdrawal, Lebanese Phalangist militiamen attacked the Sabra and Shatila camps, which were home to thousands of Palestinian refugees, and proceeded to massacre up to 2,000 unarmed civilians over a period of 36 hours. The attack was conducted with the full knowledge of Israeli soldiers and elicited worldwide outrage and condemnation, including in Israel itself (Rogan, 2009:417).

2.10 1987: The First Intifada and the Rise of Hamas

On 8 December 1987, a vast movement of civil resistance was launched across the occupied territories. This movement, called ‘Intifada’ (Arabic for ‘uprising’), was largely led by Palestinian civilians, including youth and children, engaging in acts of civil disobedience and challenging Israeli occupation forces using rudimentary means such as stones and catapults (Lewis, 1995; Pratt, 2006). According to Shlaim (2000), the main aim of the Intifada was securing “self-determination and the establishment of an independent Palestinian state” (Shlaim 2000:451). For Barak, (2017) “the Palestinian Intifada also indicated that coercion alone could not compel the Palestinians in the Territories to acquiesce to Israel’s rule” (Barak, 2017:128).

Over the 1987-1993 period, Israel’s attempts to suppress the uprising resulted in the deaths of over a thousand Palestinians, a fifth of whom were children (White 2009:82). The events received “intense media coverage” including “disturbing pictures of Israeli troops firing on stone-throwing demonstrators, or beating with kludges those they caught, among them women and children” (Shlaim 2000:454). Shlaim believes the Intifada “refocused” the Arab world’s attention on the Palestinian cause, which had been virtually side-lined at the Arab league summit of November 1987. A June 1988 extraordinary summit of the Arab League was convened in Algiers to discuss the Palestinian issue and the summit ended with strong pledges – financial and political – to the Palestinians and to the PLO as their representative (Shlaim 2000:457).

After the start of the Intifada, the Muslim Brotherhood in Gaza immediately proceeded to discuss ways of channelling popular anger and give it organisational coherence. Within days,

' Hamas', an Islamist-based political and religious movement was launched. Hamas placed itself as a direct rival of the PLO, and as such brought about "a state of imbalance" to the pre-existing status-quo that had dominated the Palestinian national struggle for decades (Abu-Amr, 1993:5-6). As Shlaim notes, "ironically, the Israeli authorities at first encouraged Hamas in the hope of weakening the Secular nationalism of the PLO," but the Intifada had a "radicalizing effect" on Hamas and its members (Shlaim 2000:459).

Since its establishment, Hamas has presented itself as "an extension of an old tradition that goes back to the early 20th century struggle against British and Zionist colonialism in Palestine" (Hamas Memorandum, 1990, cited in Tamimi 2007:247). Some accounts, however, have argued that Hamas represented little more than a local incarnation of the Muslim Brotherhood⁵. Although routinely portrayed in the West as being primarily or exclusively a military group, Hamas's structures encompass political, cultural and social grassroots organisations. Furthermore, its official statutes decree its military wing has its "own leadership and recruiting mechanisms" (Tamimi, 2007:247-249). The Hamas Charter, issued on 18 August 1988, has come to represent one of the most controversial documents of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in recent years. Its Article 11 stated that:

The land of Palestine is an Islamic trust ('waqf') upon all Muslim generations until the Day of Resurrection. It is not right to give it up or any part of it. (cited in Abu-Amr, 1993:13)

While the charter referred to the PLO as a "father, brother, relative, or friend" of the Islamic movement, with a "common plight and common destiny," and facing "the same enemy" (Article 27), it criticised the PLO's secular tendencies as well as its support for a two-state solution to the conflict (Abu-Amr, 1993:13).

2.11 1993-2002: The Oslo Era

In 1991, in the aftermath of the first Gulf War, the Madrid peace talks, featuring Syria and the PLO in public negotiations with Israel for the first time in history, ended in deadlock. However,

⁵The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in 1928 in Egypt by Hasan al- Banna, with the aim of establishing an Islamic state sought a presence in Palestine as early as 1935. It established its first branch in Jerusalem in 1945, and twenty five further branches, representing up to 20,000 members, by 1947. Al-Hajj Amin al-Husseini, the preeminent Palestinian nationalist leader of the Mandate era, was named a local leader of the Brotherhood, which helped spread the movement's influence in Palestine. After the creation of the state of Israel, the Brotherhood continued to operate in Palestine, although mostly focused on the provision of social and educational services. With the emergence of the PLO in the mid-60s, the Islamic movement began to lose ground, as it wasn't seen as an active participant in the national struggle. (Abu-Amr, 1993:6)

secret negotiations between Palestinian and Israeli emissaries continued in Oslo and, within months, produced an unexpected breakthrough. On September 13, 1993, PLO chairman Yasser Arafat and Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin signed a peace agreement at the White House. The Oslo Accord, as it came to be known, stipulated an end to hostilities between Israel and the PLO and the establishment of “a provisional Palestinian authority over the Gaza Strip and an enclave surrounding the West Bank town of Jericho” (Rogan, 2009:472). However, the accord was criticised by many within the Palestinian movement for offering too many concessions and ignoring the issue of Palestinian Statehood (Said, 2004). “The impact of the Oslo accord,” writes Shlaim, “was nothing less than sensational” (Shlaim, 2000:600). The agreement was “hailed with enthusiasm” as it promised a final settlement would be negotiated within three to five years, with the aim of producing “two states between the Mediterranean and the Jordan River living in peace and substantial economic symbiosis with each other” (Hertzberg, 2003:91). A year later, in 1994, Rabin signed a peace treaty with Jordan.

However, the initial optimism soon made way for mutual suspicion and distrust⁶. In November 1995, Yigal Amir, a right-wing religious extremist, fatally shot Rabin at a peace rally in Tel Aviv. Seven months later, the Likud party, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, won power at the 1996 elections⁷. Netanyahu was an early and vehement critic of the Oslo accord, and his policies in office reflected this. As Shlaim (200) notes:

From his first day in office Netanyahu worked, surreptitiously but systemically, to undermine the Oslo accords... By building new Jewish settlements on the West Bank and more Jewish housing on Arab land in Jerusalem, he violated the spirit of these accords. (Shlaim, 2000:601)

The years following the Oslo accord witnessed a growing frustration, notably within Palestinian society, over the slow progress of its implementation on several fronts, such as the dismantling of illegal settlements. This was matched by mounting tension in Israel, particularly regarding the security situation, as Hamas and other Palestinian groups increased attacks inside Israel. By the end of the 1990s, the promise and optimism of Oslo were largely in tatters, following six years of violence and broken pledges. During that period, the number of Israeli illegal

⁶ As Hertzberg puts it, “powerful forces representing the settlers on the West Bank and their sympathizers opposed the creation of a Palestinian state... they did not trust a Palestinian state to police the factions within its own borders that would continue to be intent on destroying Israel.” (2003:91)

⁷ After Rabin’s assassination, Shimon Peres served as acting Prime Minister for seven months, until the May 1996 elections.

settlements in the West bank, including in East Jerusalem, had expanded significantly, while attacks by Palestinian militants also increased. Meanwhile, the Israeli occupation of the West Bank showed no signs of being scaled down (Said, 2004).

In July 2000, the US president, Bill Clinton, in his last months in office, brought the Palestinian leader Arafat and the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, together for the Camp David II summit. The talks ended in failure, though interpretations have varied markedly as to the reasons for this. There was a further attempt to bring the sides together a few months later at the Taba summit of January 2001, but this also ended in failure. Israeli officials, including Barak himself, have repeatedly insisted that the Camp David II and Taba negotiations failed mostly because of Palestinian intransigence and a lack of serious commitment by Arafat. This account is disputed by many on the Palestinian side, who point out that the offers being presented to Arafat, in light of the relentless settlement expansion during the half-decade after Oslo, had put him in an untenable position with his own people⁸ (Said, 2005: 89). “The Palestinians did not reject the Clinton Plan,” Agha and Malley (2002) note, “to the contrary, they were ready to continue the deliberations on the basis of its parameters, as actually happened at Taba” (Agha & Malley, 2002, cited in Kacowicz, 2005:352).

2.12 The Second Intifada

In September 2000, Ariel Sharon, then opposition Likud leader, paid a visit to the Temple Mount site, “one of the most sensitive areas in the Middle East,” where the Haram al-Sharif and Dome of the Rock, Islam’s third holiest shrine, are also located. Many saw the visit as a provocation, and it sparked outrage among Palestinians and alarmed the wider international community (Reinhart, 2002:93-94). The visit prompted a wide wave of demonstrations and clashes between Palestinian protesters and Israeli soldiers, and was widely seen as a principal catalyst for the launch of the Second (also known as the ‘al-Aqsa’) Intifada. Hertzberg contests this, asserting that “the Second Intifada was prepared⁹ and even begun before Sharon’s theatrical appearance at the Temple Mount” (Hertzberg, 2003:91). For Usher (2003), the al-Aqsa Intifada was caused by a “collision between two national wills,” pitting an “Israeli-determined peace process,” experienced by Palestinians as a “new form of colonial dispossession,” against a

⁸ According to Kacowicz, the Taba talks failed because Israel would never permit Palestinian refugees to return to pre-1948 territories, Barak would not sign anything granting a transfer of sovereignty over the Temple Mount, and Israel insisted that “in any settlement, 80% of the Jewish residents of Judea, Samaria and Gaza will be in settlement blocs under Israeli sovereignty.” Faced with these conditions, Arafat said he had no choice but to withdraw (Kacowicz, 2005:351).

⁹ Hertzberg also argues that the Second Intifada was markedly different to the first, stating that “guns and bullets replaced stones and rocks as Arab weapons.” (2003:91)

“collective understanding” by a new generation of Fatah leaders that “unless a challenge was mounted soon to Israel’s deepening occupation, their own future claims to leadership would be dashed” (Usher 2003:22). Israel’s actions during the Second Intifada exacted an especially heavy toll on the Palestinian population in the occupied territories. As Rogan (2009) notes, “from the outbreak of the Second Intifada in September 2000 until the end of 2001, some 750 Palestinians were killed; in 2002 the number of Palestinians killed exceeded 1,000” (Rogan, 2009:486).

As the Al-Aqsa Intifada entered its second year, Ariel Sharon, now Israeli Prime Minister, ordered the reoccupation of the West Bank in June 2002 — a move many interpreted as an attempt to isolate Arafat. This was accompanied by a campaign of targeted assassinations against Palestinian leaders, principally within Hamas, which often resulted in significant civilian casualties¹⁰ (Rogan, 2009:486). Israel also arrested, imprisoned or expelled thousands of Palestinians, and demolished more than six hundred homes of families linked to people it accused of ‘involvement in terrorism’. In addition to ongoing illegal settlement building, Israel started construction of a 450-mile ‘separation barrier’, which Palestinians viewed as an attempt to illegally annex more Palestinian lands (Rogan, 2009:487).

The Sharon government’s repression of the Second Intifada was deeply problematic for the Bush administration, especially in the context of U.S. attempts to enlist the support of the Arab public for its “War on Terror” and military intervention in Iraq. In June 2002, George W. Bush delivered an address in which he presented his vision of a Palestinian State “living side by side in peace and security” with Israel. Bush also called on Israel to withdraw from the West Bank, and to end settlement expansion, while also criticising Arafat and the Palestinian leadership. A year later, Bush outlined a ‘Road Map’ for peace that was to be pursued by the Palestinians and Israelis under the auspices of a ‘Quartet’ of international brokers¹¹. The Bush Road Map was criticised by many as too unrealistic in its timescale, while Israel expressed deep reservations about its provisions (Rogan, 2009:492). Overall, the Bush administration largely failed in its attempts to move the peace process past the Camp David II/Taba impasse.

2.13 Conclusion

This chapter provided an overview of the principal historical events, actors and debates that have shaped the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, from the rise of modern political Zionism up to the

¹⁰ e.g. in a July 2002 targeted assassination attempt against Salah Shahada, a Hamas leader, Israel levelled an entire apartment building, killing eighteen residents. (Rogan, 2009:486)

¹¹ The quartet was comprised of the US, the UN, the EU and Russia. Former British Prime Minister Tony Blair was appointed as its ‘special envoy’.

second Intifada and its aftermath. One of the principal conclusions highlighted by this overview is the centrality of history to any understanding of the conflict, and the long-standing and deep-rooted nature of many of the political disputes that still dominate the conflict a century on. What the survey also makes clear is the contested nature of much of this history. As the historiography shows, almost every historical episode of the conflict is – to some extent – a matter of dispute and contention.

These conclusions highlight the intrinsic challenge facing media representations and news reporting of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. This challenge is not simply a matter of adhering to historical accuracy, but also that of understanding the significance of this history and the ways it underpins and shapes the politics, ideology, and culture of the region. Even when facts are relatively uncontested, interpretations of their significance rarely are. The next chapter presents an overview of the immediate historical and political context leading up to the Gaza War of 2008-9/Operation Cast Lead, as well as the events of the conflict itself.

CHAPTER THREE: The Gaza War 2008/9 — Operation Cast Lead

3.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the principal elements of immediate context — military, political, humanitarian — surrounding the Gaza conflict of 2008/2009. The chapter begins with the 2005 Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and its consequences, and will trace the history of other key events leading to the launch of Operation Cast Lead (OCL)¹² in Dec 2008. These include the January 2006 Palestinian elections, the 2007 Hamas takeover of Gaza, and the Egyptian-brokered June 2008 ceasefire between Israel and Hamas. Important features of the political and humanitarian context of this period will be presented, notably the imposition by Israel of a blockade on the Gaza Strip, and the ensuing humanitarian impact on the civilian population. They also include Hamas's firing of rockets into Israel, and the rise of the tunnel economy. The chapter will then offer an overview of the events of the military conflict itself, including international reactions and peace initiatives. The chapter concludes by presenting some of the key narratives and themes (Israeli, Palestinian and international) around the causes of the conflict, as well as those relating to critiques and defences of Israeli (and, to a lesser extent, Hamas) military conduct during the war. The extent to which these Israeli and Palestinian narratives are adopted, challenged or omitted in BBC and AJE coverage of OCL is a significant component of the empirical and analytical examination undertaken in this thesis.

3.2 Israel's 2005 withdrawal from Gaza and Hamas's election victory

In the wake of Yasser Arafat's death in 2004, Mahmoud Abbas was voted in to succeed him as Chairman of the Palestinian Authority. While US President George Bush welcomed the result of the election, the Israeli Prime Minister, Ariel Sharon, refused to deal with Abbas. In 2005, Sharon announced what he described as Israel's "unilateral disengagement" from its settlements in the Gaza Strip, while maintaining military control over Gaza's borders. Although Israeli officials have portrayed the withdrawal as the end of Israel's occupation of the Strip, this has been regularly contested by human rights organisations and International Law experts. For instance, a 2010 report by Human Rights Watch states:

The Fourth Geneva Convention on occupation applies in Gaza because although Israel withdrew its military forces and settlers from the Gaza Strip in 2005, it still exercises

¹² The term 'Operation Cast Lead' is the code-name given by Israel to its military operation in Gaza during Dec 2008-Jan 2009. This is term generally adopted throughout the dissertation (rather than "the conflict in Gaza" or 'the Gaza War') partly because it better represents the fact that the launching, escalation and ending of major military hostilities during this episode were all unilateral Israeli decisions.

control over Gaza's airspace, sea space and land borders, as well as its electricity, water, sewage and telecommunications networks and population registry. (Human Rights Watch, 2010)

Sharon's 'Disengagement Plan' proved popular both with the Israeli public and its military, and as such "allowed Sharon greater freedom to ignore the Road Map" (Rogan, 2009:492). For their part, many Palestinians no longer believed the PLO (and the Palestinian Authority) had any "credible national strategy capable of leading to a just solution of the conflict with Israel" (Milton-Edwards & Crooke, 2004:40). Sharon's unilateral withdrawal thus left a "dangerous power vacuum" (Rogan, 2009:492) and allowed Hamas to claim credit for "having chased away the occupying power" (Kaposi, 2014:4).

In January 2006, parliamentary elections to the Palestinian Legislative Council resulted in a landslide victory for Hamas in Gaza, giving it an overall majority across all of the occupied territories. While Hamas took power in Gaza, the rival Fatah leadership retained control of the West Bank. The 2006 election result took many by surprise, leading then-US Secretary of State, Condoleezza Rice, to comment "It does say something about us not having a good enough finger on the pulse" (Chehab, 2007:1). Israel's reaction was swift, with acting¹³ Prime Minister Ehud Olmert declaring that:

There will be no recognition of a Palestinian government with the participation or under the control of Hamas unless three conditions are met: the Hamas charter is changed to recognize the state of Israel's right to exist as a Jewish state, total dismantling of all weapons and a total cessation of all terrorist activity; and acceptance of all agreements signed between the PA and the state of Israel. (Usher, 2006:7)

Israel's position was soon endorsed by three members of the 'Quartet': the US, the EU and the UN. Russia, however, invited a Hamas delegation to Moscow for talks (Usher, 2006:7). Both Israel and the United States (which had placed Hamas on its list of terrorist organisations) imposed an economic blockade on Gaza, which involved severe restrictions on basic goods and materials entering the territory. Hamas, meanwhile, announced an extension to its unilateral truce with Israel, and declared that if the US "truly wished to see peace prevail in the region they should put pressure on Israel to end its occupation, rather than on the Palestinians, who are the victims not the oppressors" (Tamimi, 2007: 225-226). In June 2006, an IDF soldier,

¹³ Olmert became Israeli Acting Prime Minister on 4 January 2006 after Sharon suffered a stroke and entered into a coma. Olmert became Israeli Prime Minister in his own right four months later, in May 2006.

Gilad Shalit, was captured by Palestinian militants in a cross-border attack and taken back to the Gaza Strip. After the incident, Israel closed the Karni terminal, considered “Gaza’s primary crossing for goods” (Pelham, 2012:8).

The imposition of the Israeli blockade on Gaza was heavily criticised by human rights organisations and other observers. The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) described the blockade as “a denial of basic human rights in contravention of international law and amounts to collective punishment” (OCHA, 2012). Israeli journalist Gideon Levy (2010) argued that the blockade amounted to “collectively punishing the population of the occupied territories” for voting for Hamas (Levy, 2010:147). In 2012, several UN agencies — including the World Health Organisation (WHO), UNICEF and UNESCO — joined fifty international organisations in issuing an open letter calling on the Israeli government to “end the blockade.” The letter particularly emphasised the impact of the siege on the Gazan health system, including:

“[The] restrictions on importation of medical supplies, equipment and spare parts; limitations on movement of patients and health staff; interruptions of power supply and impurities of water supply; insecurity; and the permit regime limiting access of Palestinians to health services, as well as of the professional development of staff.”
(WHO, June 2012)

One of the principal consequences of the blockade has been the emergence of a shadow economy based on a vast network of makeshift, underground tunnels, most of which built under Gaza’s southern border with Egypt (OCHA, 14 June 2012). In the years after the imposition of the blockade, Israeli officials have routinely portrayed the tunnels as a major security risk (Whewell, 11 December 2012), describing them as “an offensive tunnel network” intended primarily for smuggling weapons and launching attacks on Israel (Calev, *Bloomberg*, 21 July 2014). However, the tunnels have also been described as a “vital lifeline” for the Gazan population (al-Mughrabi, 2013). As Bajec (2012) notes, “smuggling tunnels were opened to circumvent Israel’s blockade of the Gaza strip. Many families rely on tunnels for their income” (Bajec, 2012). A 2013 report in the *Economist* found that tunnels “have kept the besieged enclave fed and fuelled, and provided Hamas with most of its revenues” (*Economist*, 3 August 2013). For Pelham (2012), “from enterprises primarily geared to weapons smuggling, the tunnels rapidly turned into what one trader described as ‘the lungs through which Gaza breathes’” (Pelham, 2012:9-10).

3.3 The Second Lebanon War

On July 12th, 2006, Israel launched a large-scale military attack on Lebanese territory, after “Hezbollah fighters ambushed and killed three Israeli reserve soldiers and kidnapped two others” (Matthews, 2009:6). The ‘Second Lebanon War’, as it came to be known, lasted 34 days, ending on August 14th with a UN-brokered ceasefire. In its 2007 report on the conflict, Human Rights Watch (HRW) estimated that the Israeli military conducted more than 7,000 airstrikes during the war, as well as numerous naval bombardments and artillery attacks, a campaign which “destroyed or damaged tens of thousands of homes” (Human Rights Watch, September 2007). The report expressed “concerns about the conduct of that conflict by both sides,” and stated:

The conflict resulted in at least 1,109 Lebanese deaths, the vast majority of whom were civilians, 4,399 injured, and an estimated 1 million displaced. Hezbollah's indiscriminate rocket attacks on Israel ... resulted in the deaths of 43 Israeli civilians and 12 [Israeli] soldiers, as well as the wounding of hundreds of Israeli civilians. (Human Rights Watch, September 2007)

The Israeli military's intensive use of cluster bombs came in for especially heavy criticism, notably by the UN's humanitarian chief, Jan Egeland, who called it “completely immoral” (BBC News, 30 August 2006). Israel was also widely criticised for the disproportionate nature and scale of its military actions. Marusek (2018) describes Israel's response as “immediate, asymmetric and catastrophic,” and reports comments by an Israeli Defence Force (IDF) commander who stated that the use of “disproportional force was intentional” (Marusek, 2018:73). Marusek further notes that “the same strategy was employed” two years later in Operation Cast Lead, an assessment echoed by an October 2008 interview in which Gadi Eisenkot, head of the Israeli army's northern division, told Reuters that Israel had pursued a ‘Dahiyeh Strategy’ in its 2006 Lebanon war. The strategy, Eisenkot explained, sought “to deliberately target civilian infrastructure and wreak collective punishment” on civilians, adding that Israel was intent on using the strategy again in future (Marusek, 2018:73-74). “This is not a recommendation,” Eisenkot declared in the interview, “This is a plan. And it has been approved” (Reuters, 3 Oct 2008).

3.4 2007: Hamas Takes Control of Gaza

In June 2007, after months of tensions between the two groups, Fatah militants launched an unsuccessful attempt to wrest power from Hamas in Gaza, which led to violent clashes between the two factions. Israel responded by designating Gaza “a hostile entity” and, after rocket

attacks on its border areas in November 2007, slashed food supplies into Gaza by half. In January 2008, after rockets were fired from Gaza at the bordering Israeli town of Sderot, "Israel announced a total blockade on fuel, banning all but seven categories of humanitarian supplies" (Pelham, 2012:8).

Throughout 2007 and 2008, the Israeli military regularly bombarded Gaza using heavy artillery and missiles, while Palestinian groups continued to launch rockets into Israel. The hostilities produced casualties on both sides, though on a significantly bigger scale among Palestinians. Meanwhile, the impact of Israel's blockade on Gaza's civilians was getting ever more severe. In June 2008, a six-month Egyptian-brokered ceasefire was agreed by Israel and Hamas. No formal text of the agreement was published, but according to the International Crisis Group, its key provisions included the requirement that "Hamas halt all rocket launches," that Israel "halt all military attacks on and withdraw all troops from Gaza"; for "real efforts to end arms smuggling into Gaza"; for the "dispatch of a multinational monitoring presence to verify adherence to the ceasefire"; and, crucially, for the "opening of Gaza's crossings with Israel and Egypt" (International Crisis Group, 2009:2). The months following the June 2008 ceasefire saw "a very significant reduction of violence on both sides" (Kaposi, 2014:5). According to statistics published by the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center (2009), rockets and mortar attacks launched from the Gaza Strip into Israel fell by 98.4% between July and the end of October 2008, "from an average of 414 attacks a month in the first six months of 2008 to an average of just over seven a month" (Philo & Berry, 2011:136).

However, on Nov 4th, 2008, six members of Hamas's military wing were killed by the Israeli army inside the Gaza Strip. Israel stated that the group were digging a tunnel intended for staging attacks on Israeli soil, a claim contested by the International Crisis Group (Philo & Berry, 2011:137). Following the killings, Hamas responded by "firing a wave of rockets into southern Israel, although no one was injured," an action which the Israeli Intelligence and Terrorism Information Centre called a "predictable sequel to Israel's attack" (cited in Finkelstein, 2011:52). In the weeks following the November 2008 attack, Palestinian groups resumed sporadic firing of rockets into southern Israel, "35 of them into Israel immediately after the incursion and around 200 between November and mid-December" (Kaposi, 2014:7). Meanwhile, the IDF closed all border crossings into Gaza and resumed artillery attacks on the territory.

The question of who broke the June 2008 ceasefire soon became a key subject of contestation. While the *Guardian* reported that Israel's Nov 4th attack had put the ceasefire "in jeopardy" (McCarthy, *Guardian*, 5 November 2008), Alan Dershowitz (2009), writing in the *Daily*

Telegraph, argued that “ Hamas deliberately broke the ceasefire by firing rockets into southern Israel” (Dershowitz, 2009). However, a 2009 report by Amnesty International found that the ceasefire had been maintained for “four and a half months” until the Israeli attack on Nov 4th (Amnesty International Annual Report, 2009). Gideon Levy (2010) agrees with Amnesty’s assessment, writing that “the ceasefire was violated first by Israel, with its unnecessary operation of blowing up a tunnel” (2010:76). Finkelstein (2011) contests¹⁴ Israel’s “spurious pretext of preempting a Hamas raid,” arguing that empirical research had shown Israel was responsible for resuming hostilities “in an overwhelming majority of cases in the past” (Finkelstein, 2011:51).

Several accounts suggest that Hamas was in favour of maintaining the ceasefire even after the Nov 4th attack. Chris McGreal remarks that in the period before the attack, “Israel killed 22 people in Gaza, including 2 children and a woman” yet Hamas was still in favour of maintaining the truce” (McGreal, 2009). This is echoed by Israeli internal security chief Yuval Diskin, who stated that even after Israel had broken the ceasefire, Hamas was still seeking to maintain the agreement (Finkelstein, 2010:47). However, in early December 2008, the Israeli Foreign Minister, Tzipi Livni, rejected the prospect of maintaining or renewing the ceasefire, stating that although Israel wanted to create a temporary period of calm with Hamas, an extended truce “harms the Israeli strategic goal, empowers Hamas, and gives the impression that Israel recognizes the movement” (Finkelstein, 2011:51). A report published in mid-December 2008, days before the start of Operation Cast Lead, by the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) warned that:

The 18-month long blockade has created a profound human dignity crisis, leading to a widespread erosion of livelihoods and a significant deterioration in infrastructure and essential services. The consequences for the Palestinian population are profound, pervasive and difficult to reverse. (OCHA, 15 December 2008)

On December 18, the ceasefire lapsed without being renewed. A few days later, Hamas indicated it “would consider renewing the expired Gaza truce if Israel respected its initial conditions.” (BBC News, 23 December 2008)

3.5 Operation Cast Lead

After the June 2008 ceasefire came formally to an end on December 18, both Israel and Hamas maintained a level of ambiguity with regards to their next course of action. On 26 December,

¹⁴ Finkelstein and others have also suggested the timing of Israel’s attack might have been deliberately chosen to coincide with the US presidential elections. (Finkelstein, 2011; Bar’el, 2008; Avnery, 2009)

Israel agreed for essential supplies to be allowed into Gaza, “in an apparent effort to mislead Hamas about the impending [ground] assault” (International Crisis Group, 2009:4). On 27th December, Israel launched a surprise large-scale attack on the Gaza strip, code-naming the military action ‘Operation Cast Lead’ and citing Hamas rocket fire as the *casus belli*. The Israeli military struck more than 50 targets in less than four minutes, claiming a 99% accuracy rate (Kaposi, 2014:6). Among the targets hit were the headquarters of Hamas, the Palestinian Legislative Council building and two dozen police stations. The attack resulted in almost 300 casualties (International Crisis Group, 2009:4), the highest single-day toll of the entire history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Operation Cast Lead was broadly conducted over two phases: an aerial bombardment campaign, followed by a combined aerial-ground assault phase. In the first days of OCL, Israel conducted a campaign of aerial bombardment targeting “a large number of Gaza’s military and civil locations.” According to the International Crisis Group, Israeli strikes hit Hamas bases, training camps, rocket manufacturing facilities and storage warehouses, but also targeted civilian targets which included “all civil police stations” and “Gaza’s port facilities” (Crisis Group, 2009:4). The operation was later widened to include tunnels under the Egyptian border, as well as “homes of Hamas fighters and parliament members, together with the full spectrum of Hamas and government institutions” (Crisis Group, 2009:4-5). On Jan 3, 2009, after a week of aerial bombardment, Israel launched a ground invasion of Gaza. Israel’s official objective was to secure the areas used by Hamas to launch rockets, and to destroy the tunnels. On Jan 7, in the wake of international pressure, Israel agreed to open a ‘humanitarian corridor’ for essential goods to reach the civilian population and to observe a three-hour daily ceasefire. On 15 January, the IDF began its withdrawal of troops. Three days later, Israel declared a unilateral end to Operation Cast Lead. According to Norton (2009), the timing was influenced by several external political factors:

Israel was constrained not only by international expressions of outrage over the horrors being inflicted on civilians, and a growing chorus of Arab governments calling for an end to the fighting, but President-elect Obama’s inauguration on 20 January. It was obvious from the start that Israel did not wish to mar the new President’s swearing-in with a backdrop of bombing. (Norton, 2009:6)

3.6 The international reaction

In response to the launch of Operation Cast Lead, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice ‘blamed Hamas for breaking a ceasefire with Israel,’ stating that:

The United States strongly condemns the repeated rocket and mortar attacks against Israel and holds Hamas responsible for breaking the ceasefire and for the renewal of violence in Gaza. (Tabassum, *Reuters*, 27 December 2008)

The response from Palestinian and Arab leaders was initially largely critical of Hamas. A day after the start of OCL, the Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, placed the blame for the conflict at Hamas's door, stating "we talked to them (Hamas) and we told them 'please, we ask you, do not end the truce. Let the truce continue and not stop' so that we could have avoided what happened." Abbas's position was echoed by the Egyptian Foreign minister (*Reuters*, 28 December 2008). After a few days of disagreement and confusion, the Arab League issued a resolution calling for an immediate stop to Israeli military operations and an end to the blockade on Gaza. For its part, the EU called for an "immediate and permanent ceasefire", which would involve an "unconditional halt to rocket attacks by Hamas on Israel and an end to Israeli military action¹⁵". The United States, while joining calls for a ceasefire, insisted on conditions which, according to the International Crisis Group, "negated any purported sense of urgency, insisting that Hamas take the first step in halting rocket fire" (International Crisis Group, 2009:23).

Despite mounting international and diplomatic pressure, Israel rejected calls for a ceasefire for much of the 2008/2009 conflict. Israeli officials informed foreign diplomats that "Israel opposed any immediate truce," because this "would give the Islamist movement time to regroup ahead of a future showdown," and that Israel objected "to any outcome that could in any way legitimise Hamas" (International Crisis Group, 2009:24). The US President, George W. Bush, seemed to echo the Israeli stance, claiming that "another one-way ceasefire that leads to rocket attacks on Israel is not acceptable" (Mozgovaya, *Haaretz*, 2 January 2009).

On 8 January 2009, the UN passed Security Council resolution 1860, which called for an "immediate, durable, fully respected" ceasefire. The US abstained at the vote, and Israeli Premier Ehud Olmert claimed that a call he made to President Bush had influenced that decision.¹⁶ The incident, Norton (2009) argues, "illustrated how deeply embedded Israel had become in the policy process in the Bush White House" (Norton, 2009:6).

¹⁵ However, a French initiative for a 48-hour 'humanitarian truce', was rejected by Israel on "the dubious ground that no humanitarian crisis exists." (International Crisis Group, 2009:25)

¹⁶ The claim was denied by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, but as Norton notes, "the resolution was crafted by Rice and her associates and it would be strange for the Secretary to enlist support for a resolution and then abstain when it came to a vote." (Norton, 2009:6)

3.7 The humanitarian impact of OCL

Operation Cast Lead lasted 22 days, from December 27, 2008, to January 18, 2009. According to Amnesty International, “more Palestinians were killed, and more properties were destroyed in the 22-day military campaign than in any previous Israeli offensive” (Amnesty International, 2009:1). In total, the operation resulted in more than 1,400 deaths amongst Palestinians, including an estimated 300 children. On the Israeli side, a total of 13 Israelis died in the conflict, of which nine were killed by Palestinian rockets — three civilians and six members of the security forces — while four soldiers were killed by ‘friendly fire’ (B’Tselem, 2009:2).

In addition to the human toll, Operation Cast Lead resulted in widespread destruction of Gaza’s infrastructure. According to Human Rights Watch:

Overall, some 3,540 homes, 268 factories and warehouses, as well as schools, vehicles, water wells, public infrastructure, greenhouses and large swathes of agricultural land, were destroyed, and 2,870 houses were severely damaged. (Human Rights Watch, 13 May 2010)

Furthermore, an estimated 80 percent of agricultural crops, and nearly one-fifth of Gaza’s cultivated land, was also destroyed by the operation. In total, the damage caused by OCL to the civilian infrastructure in Gaza was estimated at between 660 to 900 million dollars, while the incurred losses from the destruction and disruption were estimated at 3 to 3.5 billion dollars. The total cost of damage inflicted by Hamas rockets during OCL was estimated at 15 million dollars (Finkelstein, 2010:60-61).

3.8 OCL: The war of narratives

Some of the most contentious aspects of the 2008-2009 Gaza War concerned Israel’s motivations and objectives in launching Operation Cast Lead, as well as its military conduct during the conflict. There has been a wide spectrum of views and interpretations, ranging from those presenting OCL purely as an exercise in surgical counter-terrorism, intended to root out an “infrastructure of terror”, to framings that invoke wider strategic, diplomatic or political contexts, including accusations that OCL constituted a deliberate and systemic act of collective punishment, of war crimes against civilians, and of state terrorism. In this section, some of the key rationales and defences presented by official, academic and media sources, are presented and discussed.

3.8.1 Rationales and motivations of OCL

Stopping Hamas Rockets

The official rationale provided by Israeli political and military leaders for launching OCL was Israel's need to defend itself and its population by targeting and destroying what they termed Hamas's "infrastructure of terror." According to the official rationale, Operation Cast Lead was:

"... aimed not only at ending rocket fire but also at destroying or at least seriously impairing Hamas's long-range rocket capabilities, security apparatus and longer-term threat potential, halting or seriously reducing weapons smuggling and barring any Hamas activity within a perimeter of several hundred metres from Israeli borders."
(International Crisis Group, 2009:19)

Toppling Hamas

While "Israel was coy about its objectives," Norton notes, "neither Israeli nor US officials hid their hope that Hamas would be toppled" as a result of the military operation (Norton, 2009:6). Ephraim Sneh, a former Israeli deputy defence minister, stated that the "true objective" of Operation Cast Lead "should be the end of Hamas rule in Gaza" (International Crisis Group, 2009:19). This view was shared by Israeli politicians across the spectrum. According to a BBC report on 23 December 2008, both leading candidates to become Israel's next prime minister, Tzipi Livni¹⁷ and Binyamin Netanyahu, had "vowed, if elected, to topple Hamas in Gaza" (BBC, 23 December 2008). Toppling Hamas was also considered a desirable outcome by the United States. Speaking at the UN on 6 January 2009, ten days after the start of OCL, Condoleezza Rice welcomed the prospect of a return to power in Gaza of what she called the "legitimate" Palestinian Authority. The view that Israel's aim in launching Operation Cast Lead was to isolate, weaken or topple Hamas was also shared by many inside Gaza itself. According to the International Crisis Group, "Gazans of all political stripes believe that Israel is targeting civilians to turn them against the Islamic movement" (International Crisis Group, 2009:10).

Sending a message: Restoring Deterrence

Many have highlighted the restoration of Israeli's regional deterrence as a key rationale underpinning Israel's decision to wage the 2008/2009 Gaza War, especially in the context of its perceived military and political failure in the 2006 Lebanon War campaign. For instance, the Independent's Middle East correspondent Robert Fisk saw OCL as an attempt by Israeli leaders to "take revenge for their 2006 defeat in Lebanon by attacking Hamas in Gaza" (Fisk,

¹⁷Tzipi Livni further argued the war was a "struggle between moderates and extremists, a chance to strike a blow against Islamist radicals in the Arab world", and suggested Israel was "finding a common purpose with 'moderate' Arab regimes." (Norton, 2009:6)

2008). In the first week of OCL, an adviser to Ehud Barak, then Israel's defence minister, told the International Crisis Group that:

A key lesson Barak drew from the 2006 Lebanon War is the crucial importance of who is seen as victor and who as loser. He believes Israel's power of deterrence decreased in the Second Lebanon War. He will, therefore, not allow this campaign not to reach its objectives or to end with the appearance of an Israeli defeat (International Crisis Group, 2009:19).

For Norton (2009), "by scoring a victory over Hamas, Israeli military and civilian officials anticipated restoring the deterrent edge of the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF)," which would send "an unmistakable message to its more formidable foes" (Norton, 2009:1-2). Cordesman (2009) agrees, stating that the aim of OCL was to "restore Israeli deterrence, and show the Hezbollah, Iran, and Syria that it was too dangerous to challenge Israel [...] by demonstrating the amount of sheer destruction it was prepared to inflict. Israel had to make its enemies feel it was 'crazy'" (Cordesman, 2009:11). This view is lent credence by several statements by Israeli officials. For instance, a former Israeli defence official told the international Crisis Group that "with an armada of fighter planes attacking Gaza, Israel decided to play the role of a mad dog for the sake of future deterrence" (International Crisis Group, 2009:19).

Territorial Consolidation and Expansion

Some commentators have suggested Israel's decision to launch OCL should be seen in the context of its wider, long term political and geostrategic aims, notably its ambitions of territorial expansion and consolidation. Finkelstein (2010) believes Israel had resolved to attack Hamas "as far back as March 2007," and was only waiting for a "pretext" (Finkelstein, 2011:20). Livni's opposition to renewing or maintaining the truce with Hamas, Finkelstein argues, suggests Israeli concerns that the June 2008 ceasefire was bolstering international perceptions of Hamas as a pragmatic actor. "Beyond restoring its deterrence capacity", Finkelstein argues, "Israel's principal goal in the Gaza invasion was to fend off the latest threat posed by Palestinian pragmatism," because, Finkelstein contends, such pragmatism "increased international pressure on Israel to negotiate a diplomatic settlement" and, consequently, undermined "Israel's strategic goal of retaining the valuable parts of the West Bank" (Finkelstein, 2011:26).

Thwarting Diplomacy and Palestinian Unity

For Chomsky (2009), OCL was about "far more than revenge, electoral success and restoring military credibility". Israel's breaking of the ceasefire, Chomsky argues, happened "at a

significant time”, coming shortly before a key meeting in Cairo” between Hamas and Fatah that aimed at "reconciling their differences and creating a single, unified government" (Edwards & Cromwell 2009:154). This meeting, Chomsky observes, "would have been a significant step towards advancing diplomatic efforts" (Chomsky, 2009).

Israeli Electoral Calculations

Some have invoked the then-upcoming Israeli elections, scheduled for 10 February 2009, as an important factor in the launch and timing of OCL. For instance, Israeli journalist Gideon Levy (2010) argues electoral calculations could not be ignored as important motivations for figures in the Olmert government, notably Tzipi Livni, seeking to bolster their national security and defence credentials by securing a victory against Hamas (Levy, 2010:101-102). For the International Crisis Group, the Israeli elections “played a real but only secondary role, influencing the scope, intensity and precise timing of the offensive” (International Crisis Group, 2009:18).

3.8.2 Criticism and Defence of Israeli and Palestinian actions during OCL

Over the course of Operation Cast Lead, and in the subsequent weeks, months and years, Israel received strong criticism over its conduct during the campaign from international bodies (such as the UN) as well as human rights organisations (notably Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch). A key tenet of the official Israeli narrative has been that Israel’s use of force during OCL was proportionate, and that Israel acted legally and morally throughout the campaign (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 16 Aug 2009). The following are some of the key points of contentions relating to Israel’s actions during OCL:

Deliberate Targeting of Civilians

According to figures by human rights organisations, an estimated 80 per cent of Palestinian fatalities during OCL were civilians, with children representing at least 40 per cent of Palestinian casualties (Edwards & Cromwell, 2009:152). In this context, one of the most disputed aspects of OCL was whether Israel had taken special care to avoid civilian casualties — as its official representatives repeatedly maintained — or whether its use of force was more indiscriminate. According to a 2009 official Israeli Government briefing document, “the IDF carefully checked and cross-checked targets to make sure they were being used for combat or terrorist activities,” and, as such, IDF attacks were “intentional and precise” (Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2009).

Several international bodies and humanitarian organisations have contested official Israeli claims with regards to the targeting of civilians. For instance, on January 14, 2009, a coalition of Israeli human rights groups issued a report detailing a series of “serious human rights violations” committed by the IDF in Gaza during OCL. The report notably listed cases where “the army shot at medical teams,” “attacked medical facilities”, or conducted “direct attacks” on hospitals. In one case, known as the ‘Samouni family’ or ‘Zeitoun’ incident, “a family of 21, six of whom were injured, waited seven days until the army allowed Red Cross representatives to evacuate them” (Jeffay, 2009).

Moreover, statements by Israeli officials themselves have also been invoked as evidence of a deliberate policy to punish civilians. For example, Sengupta and Macintyre have drawn attention to Tzipi Livni’s statement on the day after the January 2009 ceasefire was announced, in which she declared that “Israel demonstrated real hooliganism during the course of the recent operation, which I demanded” (Sengupta & Macintyre, 2009). Israeli officials have sought to emphasise the “steps [Israel] takes to warn civilians when a Hamas target is about to be bombed”, such as “dropping leaflets or by telephoning householders” (Jeffay, 2009). However, as the International Crisis Group notes, “while Israeli leaflets asked people to evacuate certain neighbourhoods, residents of Gaza City, operating in pitch darkness, had few safe places to which to retreat” (International Crisis Group, 2009:9).

‘Human Shields’

One of Israel’s key official defences for the high level of civilian casualties its actions inflicted during OCL was that Hamas was deliberately pursuing a policy of using Palestinian civilians as ‘human shields’. However, a 2009 report by Amnesty International not only found no evidence for such use of human shields by Hamas¹⁸, but actually uncovered documented cases of the IDF itself using Palestinian civilians as human shields¹⁹.

White Phosphorus

¹⁸ “Contrary to repeated allegations by Israeli officials of the use of “human shields”, Amnesty International found no evidence that Hamas or other Palestinian fighters directed the movement of civilians to shield military objectives from attacks. It found no evidence that Hamas or other armed groups forced residents to stay in or around buildings used by fighters, nor that fighters prevented residents from leaving buildings or areas which had been commandeered by militants.” (Amnesty International, 2009:4)

¹⁹ “In several cases Israeli soldiers also used civilians, including children, as “human shields”, endangering their lives by forcing them to remain in or near houses which they took over and used as military positions.” (Amnesty International, 2009:3)

One of Israel's most criticised, though initially denied,²⁰ military practices during OCL was that of using shells containing 'White Phosphorus', a highly incendiary substance. In its 2009 report into the Gaza War, Amnesty International found White Phosphorus shells were "repeatedly fired indiscriminately over densely populated residential areas, killing and wounding civilians and destroying civilian property." Such attacks, it stated, "were indiscriminate and as such unlawful under international law" (Amnesty International, 2009:2).

The Humanitarian Crisis

During OCL, Israeli officials frequently sought to highlight the IDF's efforts to alleviate the humanitarian suffering of the Gazan population. These included "facilitat[ing] the movement of 800 trucks – totalling more than 25,000 tons – of humanitarian aid into Gaza", the introduction of a 3-hour daily ceasefire (extended to 4 hours daily after Jan 15th) and "mak[ing] access to Israeli hospitals possible for the injured" (Jeffay, 2009). Nevertheless, Israeli human rights organisations have contested this claim, accusing Israel of exacerbating the humanitarian crisis in the territory, notably through the IDF's attacks on Gaza's civilian infrastructure – including its electrical, water and sewage networks. When it comes to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, they argued, the "responsibility of the State of Israel in this matter is clear and beyond doubt" (Jeffay, 2009).

Breaking the Silence: IDF soldier testimonies

Criticism of Israel's approach to civilian casualties has also been levelled by several former Israeli soldiers, notably members of 'Breaking the Silence', an organisation of IDF veterans speaking out about their experiences of military service. Whereas the official Israeli brief during OCL stated that "the protection of IDF troops did not override all other factors," accounts by a number of IDF soldiers seem to contradict this line. Arik Diamant and David Zonsheine, two IDF combat soldiers who took part in OCL, stated that the operation:

...consisted essentially of bombing one of the most crowded places on earth, striking civilian targets such as homes, schools and mosques, and ultimately leaving a trail of more than 1,300 casualties, mostly civilians, over 300 of whom were children. (Guardian, 15 February 2010)

²⁰ Amnesty's report found that "the repeated denials of the use of white phosphorus by Israeli officials during the conflict delayed or prevented appropriate treatment for people suffering agonizing burns. Some who died might otherwise have been saved". (Amnesty International, 2009:2)

For his part, a squad commander also asserted that the IDF “used a huge amount of fire power and killed a huge number of people along the way, so that we wouldn’t get hurt and they wouldn’t fire on us.” Another soldier stated that “as for rules of engagement, the army’s working assumption was that the whole area would be devoid of civilians ... Anyone there, as far as the army was concerned, was to be killed” (Guardian, 15 February 2010). Speaking to Haaretz, a senior IDF officer declared, “when we suspect that a Palestinian fighter is hiding in a house, we shoot it with a missile and then with two tank shells, and then a bulldozer hits the wall,” explaining that this “causes damage but it prevents the loss of life among soldiers” (Harel, Haaretz, 7 January 2009).

As another 2009 report in Haaretz, put it, “Israelis would have trouble accepting heavy Israel Defence Forces losses,” and, as such, “the lives of our soldiers take precedence, the commanders were told in briefings” (Finkelstein, 2010:59-60). These testimonies seem to be corroborated by the findings of the Winograd Commission, appointed by the Israeli government to investigate the 2008-2009 conflict, which “accused the IDF’s high command of giving exaggerated weight to the fear of Israeli casualties in its decision making process” (Winograd, 2008:252, cited in Levy, 2010:398).

3.9 The Goldstone Report

On 3 April 2009, the UN’s Human Rights Council established The United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, led by South African jurist and retired judge Richard Goldstone, entrusting it with the mandate “to investigate all violations of international human rights law and international humanitarian law that might have been committed” during the conflict. On 25 Sep 2009, the mission published a report of its findings²¹. According to Finkelstein (2011b) the report “found that much of the death and destruction Israel inflicted on the civilian population and infrastructure of Gaza was premeditated” (Finkelstein, 2011b:10). Israeli official statements, the report found, indicated a military approach that “viewed disproportionate destruction and creating maximum disruption in the lives of many people as a legitimate means to achieve not only military but also political goals” (UN Human Rights Council, 2009:24).

²¹The publication of the Goldstone report elicited strong criticism and condemnation from the Israeli government, which dismissed its findings. In a Washington Post article published on 1 April 2011, Richard Goldstone revised some of his report’s findings and conclusions. Israel called on the UN to retract the report but with no success. For more on the Goldstone report controversy, see Finkelstein’s Goldstone Recants (2011b) and Philo and Berry (2011:153-157).

Furthermore, the report found that statements by Israeli political and military leaders before and during OCL “leave little doubt that disproportionate destruction and violence against civilians were part of a deliberate policy”. The report also found that Israel had engaged in “the systematic destruction of the economic capacity of the Gaza Strip,” as well as in acts intended to cause the “humiliation and dehumanization of the Palestinian population” (UN Human Rights Council, 2009:258). Israel’s operations, the report also found, “were in furtherance of an overall policy aimed at punishing the Gaza population for its resilience and for its apparent support for Hamas, and possibly with the intent of forcing a change in such support” (UN Human Rights Council, 2009:406). In its conclusion, the report states:

... what occurred in just over three weeks at the end of 2008 and the beginning of 2009 was a deliberately disproportionate attack designed to punish, humiliate and terrorize a civilian population, radically diminish its local economic capacity both to work and to provide for itself, and to force upon it an ever increasing sense of dependency and vulnerability. (UN Human Rights Council, 2009:408)

The report enumerated an extensive list of war crimes it says were committed by Israel during OCL, including “wilful killing, torture or inhuman treatment,” “wilfully causing great suffering or serious injury to body or health,” “extensive destruction of property, not justified by military necessity and carried out unlawfully and wantonly,” and the “use of human shields.” The report also stated that Hamas’s “indiscriminate” and “deliberate” rocket attacks on Israeli civilians constituted “war crimes and may amount to crimes against humanity,” but also that it had “no doubt that responsibility lies in the first place with those who designed, planned, ordered and oversaw the operations” (UN Human Rights Council, 2009:408).

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has presented an overview of the key elements of historical and political context within which Operation Cast Lead/the Gaza War of 2008-2009 took place, and the competing narratives that emerged around it before, during and after the conflict. A decade on, the debate continues over Israel’s rationales for launching the attack, as well as over its conduct, and that of Hamas, during the military campaign. The survey offered in this chapter is not meant to be a comprehensive historical account, but is rather intended to provide a basis upon which the BBC and AJE’s media coverage of OCL can be understood and analysed, particularly the extent to which certain narratives, themes and perspectives are represented or omitted.

The next chapter examines some of the key theoretical concepts, frameworks and scholarly debates underpinning the present research, notably the question of journalism's mission and values in a globalised context and the role of news production factors in shaping coverage.

CHAPTER FOUR: Reporting Conflict: A Theoretical Overview

4.1 Introduction

The present thesis is, to a significant extent, an empirically centred research effort, which uses quantitative and qualitative research tools and methods to comparatively investigate and analyse news output and identify key factors of news production. Nevertheless, any empirically based research enterprise must take place within a coherent theoretical framework. In this chapter, a theoretical basis is presented for the present research which situates it within the key debates and traditions across several strands of media and communication studies.

Any scholarly examination of media coverage must, at a fundamental level, be underpinned by key assumptions regarding foundational concepts and questions. In the context of the present research, such questions may include:

- What constitutes 'news' and what makes an event 'newsworthy'?
- Is there such a thing as the 'role' of journalism? And, if so, what is it?
- Are there 'journalistic values' that news journalists are expected to uphold or adhere to? How do we assess the extent to which they are being met when examining journalistic output?
- Are journalistic roles and values universal or do they depend on, and vary across, political, cultural, ideological and geographical contexts?
- Are there particular considerations journalists must especially take into account in contexts of war or conflict? Should journalism in a context of conflict pursue a specific mission or objectives?
- How important is the news production process to understanding news output? Are there news production factors that are especially relevant in the context of conflict reporting?

Of course, this chapter does not presume to attempt a systemic or comprehensive account of the scholarly literature on theories of journalism and news production, which is far beyond the scope of the present thesis, or to engage with the above questions at a highly theoretical level. Rather, by delineating some of the key scholarly concepts, frameworks and debates elicited by the above questions, the chapter seeks to establish a coherent theoretical basis within which the empirical investigation can be understood and conducted.

4.2 Newsiness and News Values

'News', 'news values'²² and 'newsworthiness' are deeply and inherently fluid concepts which have been the subject of intense academic debates for decades (e.g., Brighton & Foy, 2007; Bednarek & Caple, 2017; Cohen and Young (eds), 1981; Chibnall, 1977; Hartley, 1982; Hall et al., 1978). An examination of this literature suggests several definitional approaches to what constitutes 'news'. These include an audience-centric view, as represented by Fuller (1996), who argues that the term 'news' should simply refer to any "report of what a news organisation has learned about matters of some significance or interest to the specific community that news organisation serves" (Fuller, 1996:6). A second approach foregrounds the professional dimension of journalism, as exemplified by O'Sullivan et al. (2006:201) who define 'news values' as "the professional codes used in the selection, construction and presentation of news stories in corporately produced mainstream press and broadcasting." A third approach, as articulated by Street (2001), centres the journalist's own frame of reference, and defines news values as "the working assumptions of journalists about the extent to which an event matters and what is significant about it" (Street, 2001:19).

How news values are, or should be, determined is a matter of ongoing debate, both among practitioners and scholars. Attempts to establish value-based frameworks for identifying or measuring newsworthiness can be traced to the early days of communications scholarship. In a highly influential 1965 paper, Galtung and Ruge (1965) proposed a model of '12 news values' which, they argued, determined the newsworthiness of a story: 'Frequency'; 'Threshold'; 'Unambiguity'; 'Meaningfulness'; 'Consonance'; 'Unexpectedness'; 'Continuity'; 'Composition'; 'Reference to elite nations'; 'Reference to elite people'; 'Reference to persons'; and 'Reference to something negative' (Galtung & Ruge, 1965:71). Although the model was based on foreign news reporting in Danish media, it had a globally significant impact on the field of media scholarship in the decades since (Brighton & Foy, 2007), including being described as the "most influential explanation" and "the foundation study of news values" (Bell, 1991:155). Galtung and Ruge's work has subsequently been developed by others, notably Schulz (1982) who proposed his own model featuring six dimensions of news selection comprising 19 news factors²³ (Schulz, 1982, cited in O'Neill and Harcup, 2009:165).

²² In this thesis, the term 'news values' is generally used to refer to values ascribed to news media *output*, while 'journalistic values' is used to refer to values ascribed to (or expected of) media journalists and outlets.

²³ These are: "status (elite nation, elite institution, elite person); valence (aggression, controversy, values, success); relevance (consequence, concern); identification (proximity, ethnocentrism,

However, the conception of news values as being inherent features of news content has been widely contested. For instance, Bednarek and Caple (2017) argue that news values should be “dependent on target audiences and other contextual factors”, and that any attempt to define newsworthiness should thus be done in reference to the target community (Bednarek & Caple, 2017:6). For O’Sullivan et al. (2006) and others, news values cannot be dissociated from the process of news production and, consequently, they are not intrinsic to the stories themselves but reflect the “result of the productive needs of industrialized news corporations” (O’Sullivan et al., 2006:201).

What these different conceptions of news values make clear is that what a media outlet or individual journalist consider ‘news’, and why, often tells us as much about the media and journalists reporting the story as it does about the story itself. ‘Newsiness’, in other words, is not an absolute or abstract ideal, but a relative construct fundamentally rooted in the assumptions and experiences of those who produce the news as well as of those who consume it. To understand news content, in other words, we must understand the people, organisations and processes behind it.

4.3 Journalistic values

Any scholarly examination of news media coverage must necessarily be underpinned by some assumptions about what news journalism is, what it is seeking to achieve, and what the professional, ethical, institutional, and other standards journalists are (or should be) trying to comply with are. Scholarly debates over what news journalism is, its professional values, roles, and ethical standards — including whether journalism can be considered a profession — have been ongoing for decades (e.g. Beam 1990; Glasser 1992; Splichal & Sparks 1994; Weaver & Wilhoit 1986; Weaver, 2012). For instance, in 1923 the American Society of Newspaper Editors published ‘The Canons of Journalism,’ a code of ethics in which it advocated the journalist’s “responsibility for the general welfare, sincerity, truthfulness, impartiality, fair play, decency, and respect for the individual’s privacy”.

The debates around the nature and purpose of journalism have often been framed around the notion of ‘journalistic values’, the professional ideals that should govern news reporting and news reporters, including values such as ‘objectivity’, ‘neutrality’, ‘fairness’, ‘balance’ and ‘impartiality’. For instance, Street (2001) offers the following definition of the aims of news reporting:

personalization, emotions); consonance (theme, stereotype, predictability); and dynamics (timeliness, uncertainty, unexpectedness)”

News reporting aspires to objectivity, to stating the fact, or it aspires to balance and impartiality in recording competing interpretations of an event, without favouring one view over another. (Street, 2001:18)

This definition highlights an intrinsic and fundamental tension between two journalistic ideals: that of 'objectivity', on the one hand, and of 'impartiality' and 'balance', on the other. In the first, the aim of news reporting is to reconcile the news reporter's output with the manifest 'reality' of a situation. In the second, the desired aim of news reporting is to offer a fair representation of the various interpretations or viewpoints relating to a particular event or situation. While the two aims are not inherently mutually exclusive, they are not necessarily congruent either. Indeed, as Street and others have argued, ideals such as 'objectivity', 'neutrality' and 'balance' not only are impossible to achieve in the absolute, but pursuing them often requires markedly different — sometimes even conflicting — journalistic practices. As Street further notes:

To be objective is to let *news values* determine the coverage an event receives ... To be balanced, by contrast, is to give *equal coverage* to all the parties to an event, irrespective of the news value of their contributions. (Street, 2001:19) [*author's italics*]

This tension, between ensuring a 'balanced' representation of all parties and viewpoints, and ensuring the coverage adheres to an ideal of 'objective' representation of the world, is often at the heart of the editorial process and its dilemmas and complexities, as will be shown in relation to the coverage of the Gaza War of 2008-9, notably in the empirical and discussion chapters (Chapters Eight, Nine and Ten) of this thesis.

4.4. Questioning Objectivity

The notion of objectivity has been central to most conceptions of the role of journalism in the literature. In this view, the role of journalists is to find out the 'objective reality' presented by the available facts around a particular event or situation in order to 'objectively' report their findings to their audiences. For instance, Soloski (1989:213) argues that "objectivity is the most important professional norm and from it flows more specific aspects of news professionalism such as news judgment, the selection of sources and the structure of news beats." However, the notion of an absolute ideal of 'objectivity' has been the subject of significant debate in the literature. For instance, Boudana (2011) suggests that "journalistic objectivity is an evolving notion which can no longer be considered a synonym for neutrality or detachment," and argues that "unlike alternative standards which are centered on personal moral values, objectivity conceives of journalism as a performance" (Boudana, 2011:385). Furthermore, the notion, long prevalent among western media professionals and academics, of a single universal conception

of objectivity is also being challenged and questioned by a growing body of scholarship concerned with non-Western journalistic practices and traditions. For instance, el-Nawawy and Iskandar have coined the alternative concept of “Contextual Objectivity”, which they describe thus:

Contextual objectivity implies that the medium reflects all sides of the story, while retaining the values, beliefs and sentiments of the target audience, and thus expresses the inherent contradiction between attaining objectivity in news coverage and appealing to a specific audience. This inherent dilemma of news reporting is never more evident than during periods of war and conflict. (el-Nawawy & Iskandar 2002:209)

This coinage was largely in response to what the authors felt was an inadequacy of standard western conceptions of objectivity to represent important contextual elements of the news reporting reality. As they note:

The notion of contextualization was seen as a correction to some of the limitations related to the notion of objectivity. Contextualization demonstrates a situational position, a way by which collectivism among participants within the same ‘context’— whether cultural, religious, political, or economic— is realized and engaged. It is precisely this contextualization that aggravates and complicates the pursuit of “objective” coverage within the news media setting. Contextualization further confuses attempts at evenhandedness and efforts to cover all sides of a story. Particularly in times of war, it is the context within which a reporter operates that makes communication with the ‘enemy’ unacceptable. (el-Nawawy and Iskandar 2004: 320, cited in Harb, 2008:142)

el-Nawawy and Iskandar have argued that such ‘contextual objectivity’ can be seen in the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict by Al-Jazeera Arabic and other Arab networks. For Cottle (2006), ‘Contextual Objectivity’ describes a journalistic approach that “seeks to provide ‘objective’ news reports, dissociated from obvious partisanship and political interests, while nonetheless recognizing and responding to its target Arab audience and its cultural expectations” (Cottle, 2006:163). For Harb (2008:151), “ultimate objectivity was actually unachievable as journalists are affected by the historical, cultural, social and political context they operate within. Objectivity is contextual.” However, Hafez (2006) and others have expressed criticism of contextual objectivity for, as they see it, amplifying or justifying bias in Arab media coverage, arguing that the notion can result in damaging the reputation and credibility of Arab media.

One of the most notable aspects of the above conceptions of 'contextual objectivity' is the importance given to the nature of the intended audience and its cultural and political assumptions, and the foregrounding of the relationship of the journalist to that audience. In the context of the present research, which conducts a comparative examination of two broadcasters based within two relatively distinct cultural and political spheres, and serving two relatively distinct core audiences, the question of how objectivity is understood by each media institution and its journalists is thus of extreme importance, as will be discussed in further detail in Chapters Nine and Ten.

4.5. Bias and Framing

To talk about journalistic values such as 'objectivity', 'balance', 'neutrality' and 'impartiality' is necessarily to invoke another fluid and problematic concept, that of 'bias'. According to Street (2001):

'Bias' refers to any systematic favouring of one position, but it has further implications. It entails a critical judgement. To call someone or some account 'biased' is to challenge its validity and to see it as failing to be 'truthful', 'impartial', 'objective' or 'balanced', terms which appeal to slightly different ideals. (Street, 2001:17)

McQuail (1992) identifies three categories of journalistic bias: Propaganda bias, Unwitting bias and Ideological bias (cited in Street, 2001:20). However, many have pointed out that bias should not refer solely to journalism that favours political actors or ideologies, as it can operate on a multiplicity of dimensions and levels. As Street puts it:

The notion of bias is not confined to the battle between political parties. It applies equally to competing value systems, to the representations of women and men, to the portrayal of ethnic groups and to the priority accorded to whole countries and their peoples. (Street, 2001:17)

This conception of bias, which problematises such a wide range of moral, political and ideological inclinations, leads to an important question: is journalistic objectivity — i.e., a completely unbiased and disinterested representation of reality — possible at all? Many believe the answer to be a definitive no. A compelling articulation of this position is presented by Schlesinger (1978), who notes:

News does not select itself, but is rather the product of judgments concerning the social relevance of given events and situations based on assumptions concerning their interest and importance. The 'reality' it portrays is always in at least one sense

fundamentally biased, simply in virtue of the inescapable decision to designate an issue or event newsworthy, and then to construct an account of it in a specific framework of interpretation. News must be assessed as a cultural product which embodies journalistic, social and political values. It cannot be, and certainly is not, a neutral, impartial, or totally objective perception of the real world. (Schlesinger, 1978:164-5)

Street (2001) gives the same answer with regards to the notion of 'neutrality.' Whilst it is easy to define it, he notes, "it is impossible to get even close to this notion" in practice (Street, 2001:18). Newton (1989) goes further, arguing that a "neutral media", which "will present a full and fair account of the fact" is not just practically but theoretically problematic (Newton, 1989:131).

The questioning and problematising of the notion of objectivity highlighted by the rise of alternative notions such as 'contextual objectivity' inextricably calls for a more critical focus on the 'selection' function of journalism, and raises important questions with regards to the political, cultural and ideological dimensions of the news selection process. As Street (2001) notes, no news report can reflect the full reality of an event, since news reporting is inherently and inevitably an act of *interpretation* and *selection* of facts:

... [R]eporters cannot record *all* the facts. Any event contains an infinity of facts ... Facts have to be selected on some criterion of relevance ... Secondly the selected facts have to become part of a story with a narrative that links them together. These processes of selection and interpretation obviously cause reporting to deviate from the ideal of recounting the fact. (Street, 2001:18)

One of the most important theoretical traditions in this regard is that of framing theory, which contends that through the selection and privileging of particular news frames, the media actively adopt and promote specific positions over others, especially on contested or controversial issues (Entman, 1993; Semetko and Valkenburg, 1999, Wolfsfeld, 1997). As Norris et al. (2003) put it:

The essence of framing is selection to prioritize some facts, images, or developments over others, thereby unconsciously promoting one particular interpretation of events. (Norris et al., 2003:10-11)

Understood this way, any journalistic text is, at a fundamental level, an exercise in framing, involving the deployment of news 'frames' that "simplify, prioritize, and structure the narrative flow of events" (Norris et al., 2003:10). The act of framing is thus enacted not only through

using, or prioritising, particular words, themes or explanations, but also through the selection of sources and voices included in the coverage. Notable examples of framing that have been highlighted in the literature include the ‘Cold War’ and ‘War on Terror’ news frames, through which a great deal of international news reporting has been presented over the past decades (Norris et al., 2003; Thussu & Freedman, 2012; Allan & Zelizer, 2004).

Thinking about news reporting as an act of framing is especially apt when it comes to examining coverage of conflicts that are fundamentally shaped around competing historical narratives, such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and in which the reporter is thus continuously faced with the task of selecting between two sets of competing news frames, terminologies, themes and explanations. Identifying the dominant framings, in this view, becomes an essential component of understanding the political, cultural and ideological factors shaping the coverage.

4.6 Journalistic values in a global context

As alluded to above, much of the scholarship on news and journalistic theory is premised on an often-undeclared assumption that Western codes and practices represent a universal normative standard²⁴. As Hallin and Mancini (2004) put it, “Anglo-American or Liberal media is typically taken as the norm against which other media systems are measured” (Hallin & Mancini, 2004:38). Chalaby (1996) examined the reasons for this dominance of Anglo-American conceptions of journalism, tracing it to a range of political, economic, linguistic, educational and legal factors (Obijofor & Hanush, 2011:4). This is not a new issue: the 1970s and 1980s witnessed major debates around, and critiques of, Western media portrayals of non-Western regions, people and stories, and the “disproportionate flow of overseas news from the West to the non-west and vice versa, including the quality (nature) of news about developing societies” (Obijofor & Hanush, 2011:10). One of the key grievances expressed by non-Western media scholars and practitioners was the narrow news lens through which much of the non-Western world was being reported. For instance, as Norris et al. (2003) note:

Western media organizations have been accused of framing news of developing countries only in terms of ‘natural disasters’ like earthquakes, famines, and tidal floods, while neglecting broader political conditions or economic development issues, such as government corruption or the lack of international investment in public services and

²⁴ This is evidenced for instance by the under-examination of non-Western journalistic practices and experiences in the Western scholarly literature until recently.

economic development, which may have contributed towards events. (Norris et al., 2003:14)

Critiques have also been levelled at specific Western media practices, such as ‘parachute journalism’ — whereby Western news organisations send European or American journalists to zones of interest in the Global South but only when events are deemed ‘newsworthy’ enough, rather than relying on permanently-based or local journalists — as damaging both to “the quality of foreign coverage” and to “public interest in foreign news” (Wolter, 2006; Obijofor & Hanush, 2011:115-116). These debates resulted in a proposal for a New World Information and Communication Order (NWICO), an idea which dominated intellectual discussions at the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) until the early 1980s, and culminated in the MacBride commission’s report²⁵ of 1980 that sought to redefine the balance of media representation between the West and the developing world (MacBride, 1980; Obijofor & Hanush, 2011:10).

Scholarly critiques have since continued to highlight the ongoing absence of non-Western views and cultures from coverage of global news and issues (Cottle, 2009; Hafez, 2009), and to challenge Western-centric conceptions and understandings of journalistic values and practices (Chalaby, 1996; Hallin & Mancini, 2004; Wasserman & de Beer, 2009). The past decades notably saw the emergence of alternative journalisms — including peace journalism, public interest journalism and development journalism — that sought to “challenge traditional (i.e. Western) news values, dominant news agendas, privileged elite access and ‘professional’ journalist practices” (Cottle, 2006:10).

In this context, a growing body of research has emerged dedicated to exploring the question of universal notions of journalistic roles and values through examining journalistic cultures and practices across the globe, including how these shaped journalists’ professional assumptions and self-conceptions (Deuze, 2002, Hanitzsch, 2009; Hanitzsch et al., 2011; Harb, 2011). These studies have uncovered similarities as well as differences in how journalists around the world conceive of the values, methods and ethos of their profession. For instance, aside from the journalistic ideal of “getting information to the public,” Weaver (1998a) reports, there was “much disagreement over how important it is to provide entertainment, to report accurately and objectively, to provide analysis of complex issues and problems, and to be a watchdog on government” (Weaver, 1998b:478). For their part, Splichal and Sparks’s (1994) survey of

²⁵ Formally titled ‘Many voices, one world: towards a new, more just, and more efficient world information and communication order.’ (MacBride, 1980)

journalists in 22 countries concluded that “some universal ethical and occupational standards were emerging in journalism,” while Weaver (2012) — in a study across 21 countries — found that

There were still many differences on a variety of possible measures of professionalism (perceived roles, reporting ethics, membership in professional organizations, perceived importance of different aspects of the job, and images of the audience). (Weaver, 2012:536)

One of the earliest and most influential scholarly attempts to examine the relationship between media and politics in a global context is that by Siebert, Peterson and Schramm in their 1956 work, *Four Theories of the Press*. The book was framed around key questions about the role and purpose of the media:

Why is the press as it is? Why does it apparently serve different purposes and appear in widely different forms in different countries? (Siebert et al., 1956:1)

Other comparative models have been proposed by Hachten (1981), Blumler and Gurevitch (1995) and others. Much of the scholarly efforts in this arena have attempted to account for the rich diversity of the global journalistic experience, including journalistic traditions and practices that are primarily observed in the Global South, such as developmental journalism.

4.7 The Production of News

Any examination of media coverage has to contend with the real-life conditions, challenges and circumstances under which this coverage is actually produced. As Brighton and Foy (2007) put it, “anyone who studies journalism needs an awareness of the pressures, motivations and compromises that operate in the construction of news output” (Brighton & Foy, 2007:194). Scholarly attempts to theorise and examine the production and organisation of news have broadly fallen into two main categories: the political economy approach and the sociology of news work approach (Cottle, 2006:14; Devereux, 2011:4). A political economy approach foregrounds how media systems are embedded within the structures of capitalism and are used to reproduce and promote its dominant narratives and ideologies. Mosco (1996) offers a review of works in this tradition, including landmark studies by Graham Murdock (1981), James Curran (1981) and others. One of the most extensive surveys of the literature on news production is that conducted by Cottle (2003, 2006)²⁶. Studies by Rock (1981) and others have highlighted

²⁶ Notable contributions from this era include examinations of the gatekeeping function of news editors (White, 1950), the causes of journalistic conformity (Breed, 1955; Warner 1971), the relationship

the extent to which “news was an organisational accomplishment guaranteeing that sufficient amounts of news were produced on time and to a predetermined form” (Cottle, 2006:14-15). Halloran et al. (1970), Schlesinger (1978, 1987) and others documented how routinisation was accompanied by a shift towards an ‘event-centric’ approach to news output, which in turn has resulted in the emergence of “temporal routines of production” (Cottle, 2003:15). Another consequence of routinisation, highlighted by Hall et al. (1978) and others, is the growing journalistic dependence on official sources, making the latter de-facto ‘primary definers’ of what counts as important news. One of the most important studies of news production factors in the context of the present research is Murdock’s (1981) six ‘mutually reinforcing production-based determinants’ which, he argues, shape the news production process. These include *the demands of the 24-hour production cycle, commercial imperatives, institutional concern for ‘objectivity’, Media competition, Elite access and political consensus, and the socialization of journalism* (Murdock, 1981: 208).

4.8 Reporting Conflict

Debates over the role of the media and its relations to politics are even more fraught in the context of reporting conflict and war. There is a voluminous scholarship on the media’s reporting of conflict, including within the ‘war journalism’ tradition (e.g. Allen & Seaton, 1999; Allen & Zelizer, 2004; Spencer, 2005; Cottle, 2006). A ‘mediatized conflict’ approach, Cottle argues, places greater analytical emphasis on the “constraints and controls – political, technological, professional, regulatory, normative and cultural [that] condition the operations of media professionals and media organizations” in the coverage of conflict. Furthermore, this approach foregrounds the circumstances and causes that can lead media organisations and professionals to be “complicit or resistant to various forms of external and internal control, containment and censorship” (Cottle, 2006:7-8). Several studies²⁷ of media coverage of conflict have adopted what Cottle (2006) terms the ‘media contest’ paradigm. One of the most influential incarnations of this paradigm, particularly in the context of the present research, is the Political Contest Model, developed by Gadi Wolfsfeld²⁸, which conceptualises the competition between political actors over the media space as “part of a larger and more significant contest among political antagonists for political control,” with a focus on “unequal

between journalistic self-conceptions and practice (Lang & Lang, 1953; Halloran et al., 1970) and the deployment of institutional ‘objectivity’ to deflect criticism (Tuchman, 1972). Later studies used testimonies and interviews with practitioners to examine news production processes in the British media. (Tunstall, 1970; Burns, 1977; Tracey, 1978)

²⁷ E.g., Livingstone and Lunt 1994; Elliott et al. 1996; Clayman and Heritage 2002.

²⁸ Notably in his *Media and Political Conflict: News from the Middle East* (1997).

political contests” (Wolfsfeld, 1997:2), including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Wolfsfeld contends that the antagonists in a conflict are competing to dominate the media space on two fronts: over access to the news media, and over access to media frames (Wolfsfeld, 2003:81). In this perspective, the extent to which the parties in a conflict have been successful on either of the two fronts defined by Wolfsfeld can become an important test of journalistic impartiality or objectivity.

4.9 Conclusion

This chapter has offered an overview of some of the key theoretical concepts, frameworks and debates underpinning the study of news values, journalistic values, journalistic roles, and the production and organisation of news. What is clear from surveying the scholarly literature is that the values and professional ‘codes’ of a news organisation, and the subjective assumptions and self-conceptions of individual journalists, are inescapable reference points for what constitutes ‘newsiness’. In the context of the present thesis, a comparative examination of the BBC and AJE coverage thus clearly must take into account the professional assumptions about news and journalistic values adopted within these institutions.

Another insight highlighted by the examination of the literature is that the act of news reporting is, above all, an exercise in *making choices*: about the topics, themes, framings, perspectives, voices, and terminologies to include or exclude when reporting a particular story. Understanding the role of the news production process in shaping these choices and decisions is critical in this context. As Schlesinger (1987) notes, “to put a construction on the news, impose a meaning on it, is inescapable, since the production process is one that at all stages involves the making of value judgements” (Schlesinger, 1987:135). The question of how journalists can collect, select and interpret facts while remaining mindful of the requirements for ‘objectivity’, ‘neutrality’ and ‘balance’, as they understand it, thus becomes one of supreme importance.

Wolfsfeld’s (1997) notion of the media as an arena in which protagonists, narratives and perspectives battle for dominance and supremacy is a resonant one in the context of Israel-Palestine reporting. Any examination of the media coverage of an “unequal political contest” such as the Gaza War of 2008/9, must thus take into account the political contest dimension of the parties involved in the conflict, especially in terms of their attempt to impose their own framings so as to dominate ‘the information space’. As highlighted by Cottle’s (2006)

'mediatized conflict' paradigm, the need to pay close attention to the role of production factors is even more imperative in contexts of conflict.

The scholarly debates around, and critiques of, universal conceptions of journalistic roles, values and professional standards, especially in contexts of conflict, have highlighted the western-centric nature of much of the scholarship. This provides further validation to the comparative cross-cultural dimension of this thesis, which will help address an important gap in the literature in this regard, as identified by Weaver:

Media scholars have done an impressive job of analysing how journalists consider their profession and their daily work. They also have successfully compared such views across nations and have contemplated possible reasons for these perceptions, norms, and values. What they have not done, however, is investigate whether and how these beliefs influence the work of journalists around the world. (2012:545)

CHAPTER FIVE: News reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

5.1 Introduction

The literature on news reporting of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is very extensive (as shown by Mousa, 1984; Evensen, 1990; Ibrahim, 2009) and a comprehensive review is beyond the remit of this thesis²⁹. However, in the context of the present research, it is important to highlight some of the key scholarly findings relating both to Western news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to the key news production factors behind it. It is crucial to mention at the outset the work of the Palestinian-American scholar Edward W. Said in this regard, particularly in works such as *Orientalism* (1978), the *Question of Palestine* (1979), *Covering Islam* (1981) and *Culture and Imperialism* (1993), which mapped-out in some depth the complex political, cultural and ideological relations and forces underpinning and shaping Western representations of, and engagement with, 'the Orient'. In these works, Said catalogued the long-running, systemic and ubiquitous presence of negative portrayals of Arabs and Muslims in Western culture and discourse, and the Western media's central and problematic role in promoting official discourses and policies, notably through "demeaning stereotypes that lump together Islam and terrorism, or Arabs and violence, or the Orient and tyranny" (Said, 2003:347).

The modern history of negative western representations of Arabs and Muslims is probably most visible in Western popular culture, including TV, Film and Music, and there is a voluminous and ever-expanding literature on the subject³⁰. These studies show that Western depictions of Arabs as "fabulously wealthy, barbaric, uncultured, backward, terrorists, murderers, oil sheikhs, Bedouins, desert dwellers" have been common in Western popular cultural production for decades (Hashem, 1997:156). Shaheen (1984) refers to a "synergy of images [which] equates Arabs from Syria to the Sudan with quintessential evil," and extensively documents the connections between negative representations of Arabs and Muslims in Western news and cultural production and their effects in constructing social knowledge which is then reproduced in Western political discourse and policies (Shaheen, 1984:14). For Pinn (2000), the "perception of the Orient as uncivilised, barbaric and despotic" remains entrenched in Western culture. "'Classical' Oriental stereotypes," he notes, "continue to shape images of the Islamic

²⁹ For a contemporary overview of the topic, see *Islam in the Eyes of the West: Images and Realities in an Age of Terror*, by Tareq Y. Ismael, Andrew Ripplin (2010).

³⁰ Alsultany, 2012; Al-Qazzaz, 1983; Ghareeb, 1983; Kamalipour, 1997; 1981; Said, 1997; Shaheen, 1984, 2009; Suleiman, 1983

world today, influencing areas such as tourism advertising and media reporting” (Pinn cited in Hafez, 2000:57).

5.2 A survey of the literature

One of the most comprehensive surveys of media coverage of the Middle East is by Ibrahim (2009), who examined key scholarly contributions to the field. Numerous studies have shown that pro-Israeli perspectives were dominant in Western reporting of the Arab-Israeli Wars of 1948, 1967 and 1973 (Suleiman, 1988; Batarfi, 1997), with coverage regularly presenting Arabs and Palestinians as “backward, dishonest, unreliable, undemocratic, and with low standards of education and living”, while Israelis were depicted as “having high education and living standards, and as democratic and Western.” Writing in the early 1980s, Ghareeb (1983) offered a synopsis of the evolving representations of the Middle East conflict in US reporting from 1948 onwards:

Most Americans picture Arabs as backward, scheming, fanatic terrorists who are dirty, dishonest, oversexed and corrupt. On the other hand, the Israelis are seen as tough energetic, hard-working, persecuted and courageous people. They are modern pioneers who have made the desert bloom and democracy a reality in the midst of the backward Middle East ... Following the 1967 War another dimension was added to the Arab image, that of the ‘bumbling cowardly Arab.’ When the Palestinian commando movement came to prominence, this image was replaced by that of an “Arab terrorist.” The 1973 War and the ensuing oil embargo gave rise to yet another image: that of the super-rich Arab sheikh controlling world oil... (Ghareeb, 1983:5)

Arabs were thus “presented as the aggressors against peace-loving Israelis, and when Israel attacked its neighbouring countries, these attacks were framed as retaliatory” (Ibrahim, 2009:513). Arab or Palestinian perspectives were “not presented fairly and objectively” (Suleiman, 1988, cited in Ibrahim, 2009: 513) and there was “a rather consistent pro-Israeli and anti-Arab bias” (Terry & Mendenhall, 1974:130). Editorial positions were “more likely to legitimise the Israeli position and marginalise Arab opinion” (Ibrahim, 2009:516). Ghareeb (1983) notes that while there were “improvements in the coverage and accuracy of reporting on Middle East issues” at the end of the 1970s, “coverage of the Arabs and of the Arab-Israeli conflict remains inadequate” (Ghareeb, 1983:4-5).

Several studies examined Western news reporting of the first Intifada (D’Amato, 1991; Cohen & Wolfsfeld, 1993, Daniel, 1995; Gilboa, 1989, 1993; Sayigh, 1992; Wolfsfeld, 1997; Zaharna, 1995), and all show broad agreement that the episode marked a pivotal moment in Western

coverage of the conflict, both in qualitative and quantitative terms. Images of “young Palestinians being beaten with truncheons and rifle butts, being shot by Israeli soldiers, and being brutally arrested by Israeli security forces” were regularly shown on American TV screens, thus presenting ‘unfamiliar images’ which “sent shock waves through the U.S. public” (D’Amato, 1991:352, cited in Daniel 1995:62). For Wolfsfeld (1997:153) the ‘street’ character of Palestinian actions “clearly had an important impact on framing” the news coverage, as there was “no escaping the obvious inequality of these skirmishes,” and Israel’s attempts to impose its own framing, he concludes, were “doomed to failure”. This is echoed by Daniel (1995) who argues that US coverage of the Intifada undermined “conventional wisdoms” about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and seriously challenged predominant conceptions, such as that of “Israel as a tiny democracy surrounded by hostile forces and constantly threatened by Palestinian terrorists” (Daniel, 1995:62). Zaharna (1995) further contends that the Intifada marked, for the first time, the convergence in Western coverage between “the images of the [Palestinian] people and the leadership”, which until then were generally presented in dichotomous terms of “victims and villains, pitting images of ‘helpless refugees’ against those of ‘threatening terrorists’” (Zaharna, 1995: 44). Several studies of coverage of the intifada have suggested that news frames were becoming more sympathetic to the Palestinians. Sayigh (1992) found that the imagery of Palestinian stone-throwers, who were often children, provided a stark contrast to that of the “voiceless, helpless, and exiled refugee” that had often characterised Western media representations of the Palestinians in previous decades (Sayigh, 1992: 265). Noakes and Wilkins (2002) examined changes and trends in *the Associated Press* and the *NYT’s* media coverage of Palestinian issues between 1948 and 1998, and found that “after the First intifada and signing of the Oslo Peace accords, the media coverage increased and framing of Palestinians became more positive” (Noakes & Wilkins, 2002:661).

Zelizer et al. (2002) conducted a comparative analysis of coverage of the Second Intifada by *The New York Times*, *The Washington Post* and the *Chicago Tribune*, based on 30 days’ worth of reporting, and concluded that:

The content of the three newspapers was markedly similar ... all three newspapers displayed a perspective on events that resembled each other. Such a perspective involved using words that were more closely aligned with the Israeli perspective on events than with that of the Palestinians. (Zelizer et al., 2002:293)

In *Bad News from Israel* (2004), Philo and Berry examined British media coverage of the Second (‘al-Aqsa’) Intifada, using a thematic analysis of BBC and ITV coverage, combined with

focus group-based studies of audience reception and interviews with media professionals. The audience studies revealed a significant gap in viewers' understanding of key elements of the historical background and political context of the conflict. In one of their starkest findings, the authors noted that "many in our audience samples did not even understand that there was a military occupation or that it was widely seen as illegal. There was very little knowledge of the conditions of the occupation or its effects on the Palestinian economy". (Philo & Berry, 2004:258) Moreover, Philo and Berry's content analysis findings revealed a significant lack of historical context in the media output of both channels. Out of 3000 transcribed lines of coverage, only 17.5 referred to the history of the conflict. The authors also found an imbalance between the amount of coverage given to the competing perspectives (Israeli, Palestinian), stating that "it is hard to avoid the conclusion that one view of the conflict is being prioritised" (Philo & Berry, 2004:144). They note:

Israeli perspectives were more frequently featured in headlines and were often highlighted to the exclusion of alternatives. A frequency count of the coverage given to interviews and reported statements also showed the Israeli dominance. Journalists sometimes adopted the language of Israeli statements and used it as their own direct speech in news reports. On controversial issues such as the Israeli settlements in occupied territory, there was a tendency to present these as 'vulnerable' and under attack without indicating that many are heavily fortified and play a key military and strategic role. (Philo & Berry, 2004:259)

Several studies have combined audience surveys with analyses of media coverage to examine the relationship between the two (Gilboa, 1989; Griffin, 1990, Philo & Berry, 2004, 2011). As Ibrahim (2009) notes, this group of studies has been "more valuable in determining the scope of the effects of negative press portrayals" (Ibrahim, 2009:522).

5.3 Thematic and structural patterns of Western coverage of the Middle East

The survey of the literature suggests that although Western news reporting of the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has evolved over the past century, some persistent themes and patterns in the coverage can be discerned throughout.

Negative portrayals of the Palestinians

Zaharna states that "the birth of Israel in May 1948 erased not only Palestine from the map but the national identity of the Palestinians as well". Whereas "human interest stories and personalized images" of the Jews in Palestine were "abundant", she notes, those of

Palestinians were “conspicuously absent.” “Personalized” Palestinian stories, Zaharna observes, never appeared with any meaningful frequency in US media until the first Intifada (Zaharna, 1995:38-39). In their survey of the literature, Noakes and Wilkins (2002) found that three main themes dominated representations of the Palestinians in Western coverage: “that they are violent terrorists; that they are Islamic militants; and that they are at the root of political problems in the Middle Eastern region” (Noakes & Wilkins, 2002:661). Work by Mousa (1984), Hafez (2000) and others has shown that Western coverage has regularly represented Palestinians exclusively in terms of religiously motivated violence and conflict. In the 1970s, Zaharna (1995) notes, Palestinians became “synonymous with terrorists, skyjackers, commandos, and guerrillas.” with terms such as “Fedayeen³¹”, often used “but rarely translated,” thus heightening “the mysteriousness and deviousness” of Palestinian groups (Zaharna, 1995: 43). Ismail (2008) analysed US news media coverage of the second Intifada and found that journalists applied the term “terrorism” almost exclusively to Palestinians. Seif and Aqtash (2004), in their examination of coverage³² during the same period, found that representations of Palestinian children almost exclusively “centred on a discourse of violence and conflict,” where the “dominant image is a victim or witness of violence.” Such coverage, they noted, was “routinely one-dimensional in character and the real horror of their suffering is sanitized by clichéd and obtuse language” (Saif & Aqtash, 2004: 404).

Palestinians and their actions were often portrayed in Western reporting as ‘irrational’ and driven by ‘fanatical’ urges, an image often reinforced by the absence of historical or political context in the reporting of the region (Said, 1978, 1981). Zaharna notes how Palestinians were regularly portrayed as “dedicated, vicious political fanatics,” whose acts were “savage and irrational” and amounted to “insensible terror” (Zaharna, 1995: 43). Said (1997) saw in this emphasis on irrationality a manifestation of a wider perception of Muslims:

In other words, Muslims today react only because it is historically, and perhaps genetically, determined that they should do so; what they react to are not policies or actions, or anything so mundane as that. What they are fighting on behalf of is an irrational hatred... (Said, 1997: xxxiii)

Another theme of Western media coverage, as noted by Ghareeb (1983) and others, is the portrayal of Arabs and Palestinians as implacable enemies of the West. According to Shaheen:

³¹ In fact, “‘Fedayeen’ means ‘freedom fighter’.” (Zaharna, 1995: 43)

³² Outlets included in the study were NBC TV, BBC World Service radio station, The Guardian, Al Jazeera, The New York Times and The Jerusalem Post.

... through the Arab-Israeli wars of 1948, 1967, and 1973, the hijacking of planes, the disruptive 1973 Arab oil embargo, along with the rise of Libya's Muammar Qaddafi and Iran's Ayatollah Khomeini — shot after shot delivered the relentless drum beat that all Arabs were and are the Godless Enemy Other. (2003:188)

Contrasting Imageries: Israelis 'like us' vs the Palestinian 'Other'

Negative depictions of the Palestinians as “backward, dishonest, unreliable, undemocratic, and with low standards of education and living” were often contrasted with portrayals of Israelis as “having high education and living standards, and as democratic and Western” (Suleiman, 1988, cited in Ibrahim, 2009:513). Moreover, Western reporting of casualties “tended to list at length Israelis who died while not always according the same treatment to Palestinians”. Whereas extensive biographical details often accompanied reports of Israeli victims of Palestinian violence, Palestinian victims of Israeli violence rarely did (Zelizer, et al 2002:291). These disparities often manifested themselves in linguistic choices in the reporting. In their survey of the scholarship on international coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, Deprez and Raeymaeckers (2011) noted how in much of Western reporting, “Palestinians are ‘killed’ or ‘lose their lives’, whereas Israelis are ‘murdered’ or ‘lynched’” (Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2011:189). Ghareeb (1983) also notes the disparity in portrayals of Palestinian and Israeli victims, which he ascribes to an underlying assumption that “Arab deaths are accepted as necessary to maintain Israeli security and as punishment for “terrorist acts” (Ghareeb, 1983:14-15).

Dominance of official Israeli sources and framings

A further pattern of Western news reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict highlighted in the literature has been the dominance of official Israeli sources and narratives in the way journalists construct and present their news reporting of the region — sometimes seen in the explicit adoption of Israeli terminology and framings. In her review of the scholarship on Western coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past two decades, Figenschou (2014) found that it showed “most news media have a tendency to systematically subscribe to the Israeli government's framing of the conflict” (Figenschou, 2014:123). For instance, Ghareeb (1983) notes how US newspapers in the 1970s frequently referred to Israeli raids against Palestinian refugee camps in Lebanon as “reprisals against terrorism”, directly repeating official Israeli descriptions. A similar finding is offered by Kressel (1987) who notes how “Palestinian attacks against Israelis generally are labelled ‘terrorist’ while Israeli bombings of Arab villages are

called 'retaliatory,'" thus echoing official Israeli descriptions (Kressel, 1987:214). This is echoed by Deprez and Raeymaeckers's (2011) findings, whose survey of the literature shows that:

While the Israelis and their actions are principally described in positive terms, Palestinians are very often labelled negatively. For instance, Palestinian actions are mostly related with terrorism, while Israeli lethal actions are described as necessary measures to protect the country against hostile attacks by the Palestinians. (Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2011:189)

Another example is presented by Zelizer et al. (2002), who conducted a comparative analysis of coverage of the First and Second Intifada in *The New York Times*, *Washington Post* and *Chicago Tribune*, and found that all three newspapers largely adopted pro-Israeli framings. As they note:

All three newspapers chose similar labels when describing those engaged in violent acts against Israeli citizens, calling such individuals 'terrorists' or 'suicide bombers' ... Phrases describing victims who were 'caught in the ceasefire' ... appeared intermittently. Contested terms like 'occupation' disappeared from all three newspapers, 'occupied lands' became 'disputed lands' and 'Israeli settlements' were often labelled as 'Israeli neighbourhoods.'" (Zelizer et al 2002:290)

Deprez and Raeymaeckers (2011:189) conclude their survey of the literature by stating that "these studies show that the international media coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict is biased and imbalanced."

Marginalised Palestinian sources and perspectives

The survey of the literature also shows that Palestinian sources and perspectives have historically been significantly underrepresented in Western media coverage (Ibrahim, 2009; Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2011; Figenschou, 2014). Several studies show that Western sources were more frequently invoked than Arab or non-Western ones in Middle East coverage (Batarfi, 1997; Mousa, 1984; Suleiman, 1988). As Suleiman (1988) reports, sources used in the reporting were "overwhelmingly American, followed by Israeli sources, then European, then Arab countries" (Suleiman, 1988, cited in Ibrahim, 2009: 513). Deprez and Raeymaeckers (2011) note that "the British media pay some attention to Palestinian sources [...] but still use Israeli sources more often" (Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2011:189).

Furthermore, as Hafez (2000) and others have shown, even when Palestinian sources and perspectives are included, Western news reporting tended to foreground 'extremist' voices. As

a result, he observes, “media and public opinion in the Western world tend to perceive Islamic politics and culture through a prism of extremist governments and groups” (Hafez, 2000:10). Shaheen (2014) reaches the same conclusion, noting how:

New reports *selectively* and relentlessly focus on a minority of a minority of Arabs, the radical fringe. The seemingly indelible Arab-as-villain image wrongly conveys the message that the vast majority of the 265 million peace-loving Arabs are ‘bad guys’. (Shaheen, 2014:28) [*Author’s italics*]

Another finding of the survey of the literature is that Palestinian declamatory statements tend to predominate over explanatory articulations of Palestinian rationales and grievances. For instance, studies by Zaharna (1995) and others have highlighted how Arab and Palestinian statements are often “chosen for their dramatic effect, rather than for adding positive understanding of the Arab position” (Zaharna, 1995: 39).

Lack of historical and political contextualisation

Another significant pattern of Western news reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict highlighted in the surveyed literature is the regular absence of historical background or contextualisation from the reporting, particularly when it relates to Palestinian perspectives or grievances. US press reports on the Israeli-Arab conflict, Ghareeb (1983) notes, often offered “no information on the nature of Palestinian claims ... or their situation as refugees” (Ghareeb, 1983:4). Zelizer et al. (2002) found that US print media coverage of the second Intifada systemically adopted framings that “simplified the complexities of the events they addressed” and tended to eschew “more complex broader contextual, historical or geo-political explanations” (Zelizer et al., 2002:293-294). Similarly, Ackerman (2001) found that “crucial issues of Israel’s ongoing occupation” had been frequently ignored in US print media coverage. The word ‘occupation’, Ackerman comments, “hovers” above the reporting but never appears. He concludes that the word had “become almost taboo for American reporters.” The term “occupied territories,” he adds, has “vanished” (Ackerman, 2001:62). Deprez and Raeymaeckers (2011) note that not only does Western media “provide only minimal background on the history of the conflict” but that even when “contextual data are included in the media coverage, it is mainly the Israeli point of view that is reflected” (Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2011:189).

5.4 Key Production Factors of Western reporting of the Middle East

Much of the scholarly literature on media representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has focused on analyses of media texts and output rather than examinations of the news production processes and factors (Ibrahim, 2009). One of the earliest and most influential studies of news media production in coverage of the Middle East is Edmund Ghareeb's 1983 study, *Split Vision: The Portrayal of Arabs in the American Media*, which offers insights into "the process of crafting Arab and Muslim media depictions that quantitative studies lack as a result of their focus on content" (Ibrahim, 2009:520). Ghareeb's study featured seventeen wide-ranging, in-depth interviews with prominent US journalists with experience of Middle East reporting. While most of his interviewees agreed that there was bias in US coverage of Arabs, some were reluctant to admit to its presence in their own institutions (Ibrahim, 2009:520). Ghareeb's study catalogues many of the news production factors and constraints that have become familiar to students and scholars of the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts, highlighting five factors which, he argues, shape the news production process of Middle East coverage:

There are five major reasons for the media's failure to cover the Middle East fairly and objectively: (1) cultural bias; (2) the think-alike atmosphere within the impact media; (3) the Arab-Israeli conflict; (4) media ignorance of the origins and history of the conflict; and (5) the determined, sophisticated Israel lobby. (Ghareeb, 1983:19)

In line with Ghareeb's findings, Israeli political pressure and censorship were often invoked in the literature as a key constraint on Western news reporting of the I-P conflict. For Zaharna (1995) a significant factor in the change in coverage during the First Intifada was that many Western journalists reporting in the occupied territories were themselves subjected to harsh treatment at the hand of Israeli soldiers. For instance, in early weeks of 1988, a CBS television crew were attacked by IDF troops and had their filming equipment destroyed or confiscated. In total, "nearly 100 journalists have been attacked by Israeli soldiers" (*The Time Magazine* 11 April 1988:56, cited in Zaharna, 1995: 44). As a result, Israel "severely restricted media access to the territories and thus the Palestinian story" (Zaharna, 1995:44).

The role of pro-Israeli Lobbying and PR efforts was a major theme in news production studies by Ghareeb (1983), Philo and Berry (2004, 2011) and others. Ghareeb's study (1983) documents how Israel's sophisticated PR system was "constantly available to journalists both in Israel and the US" and the impact of this in facilitating US reporting of Israeli perspectives. He also notes that "a number of prominent journalists who were critical of Israel were subjected to intense pressure, and pressure was put on their employers to control their pens" (Ghareeb,

1983:20). Several studies have specifically examined the role of the pro-Israel Lobby (notably Mearsheimer and Walt, 2006; Terry, 2005), especially in the US, as well as the lack of pressure on the media from Arab and pro-Arab groups in the West — both of which contributing to the dominance of pro-Israeli perspectives and framings in Western coverage. Ghareeb also highlights the role of self-censorship, "...editorial or self-censorship is rampant in the coverage of the Arab-Israeli issue. Many times a reporter may consciously cable only that information which he knows is acceptable. Some stories sent by reporters are not printed". He gives an example of a *National Observer* correspondent who was told by his editor to drop the term "Palestinian People" from his story (Ghareeb, 1983:15). Ghareeb (1983) also notes that "many Americans, Arab-Americans and Middle East experts complain that major newspapers often fail to publish their responses to pro-Israeli articles..." (Ghareeb, 1983:9)

The failures of Arab/Palestinian information and Public Relations strategies is a recurrent theme in the scholarship as a key reason behind the pro-Israel slant of Western news reporting. Many interviewees in Ghareeb's (1983) study complained about issues of access, and described how difficult it was to talk to Arab officials because of heavy bureaucratic hurdles. This prompted Ghareeb to comment that "the Arab is virtually without a spokesman in the United States, while Israel benefits from the support of many articulate Americans" (Ghareeb, 1983:11). Ghareeb attributes the reluctance of Arab leaders and diplomats to engage with Western media to a lack of knowledge of how the media operate. This state of affairs, he argues, has given rise to a "vicious circle" whereby information from the Arab side is difficult to obtain" leading to "slanted content" which then results in increased "Arab government suspicion of Western reporters' intentions" which, once again, leads to even less understanding and cooperation (Ghareeb, 1983:23-24). Ghareeb also mentions the tendency among Arab politicians in the 1970s and 1980s to reject the need to argue the merits of their cause because, as Ghareeb quotes of them as saying, "we have the truth." (Ghareeb, 1983:23) As he concludes,

Unlike the Israeli propaganda effort, which has been successful primarily because of its ability to tell the Americans what they want to hear in a language they can understand, the Arabs have at times alienated even those people sympathetic to their cause. (Ghareeb, 1983:24)

Several production studies have highlighted the role of cultural, organisational and logistical factors. Zelizer et al. (2002) note how major US newspapers all "favoured high-ranking US or international sources over local voices in the conflict." This preference, they suggest, is the

result of organisational culture and the pressures of routinized reporting, and has led to the voices of ordinary people going missing (Zelizer et al., 2002:293-294). They also note that “coverage tended to peak around events rather than offer a continued and consistent level of attention to the process underlying the coverage,” this event-orientation of most 24-hour news coverage, they argue, discourages an emphasis on providing appropriate historical and political context in the coverage (Zelizer et al. 2002:289). Collins and Clark (1992) analysed coverage of the first Intifada on ABC’s ‘Nightline’, and found that journalists — often due to logistical pressures — were deploying “ready-made scripts” to present the conflict. A study by Liebes (1992) shows that such scripts were often adapted from other wars or conflicts. Lederman (1992) documents the increasing routinisation of the news production process, and suggests it is partly prompted by the predictable behaviour of the parties. Ghareeb argues that the reliance on “on wire service correspondents or the dispatching of a correspondent to an area only during times of crisis” will produce “superficial coverage” (Ghareeb, 1983:19).

Journalists inevitably are affected by the cultural biases of the media traditions and practices they operate within. Ghareeb highlights the “inordinate influence” of prominent pro-Israeli journalists in the US media on the Arab world (Ghareeb, 1983:19). Lichter’s (1981) survey of American journalists is frequently cited by Arab researchers as evidence of staunch support within US media for Israel. The study found that 72 percent of US media members believe the US has a “moral obligation to prevent the destruction of Israel.” Lichter concludes that the “vast majority of America’s leading journalists” can be considered “defenders of Israel” (Lichter, cited in Ibrahim, 2009: 251). “Many American journalists,” Ghareeb argues, “carry into their work a strong subconscious tendency to ascribe virtue to Israel and malevolence to the Arabs...” (Ghareeb, 1983:19). In this regard, Zaharna (1995) argues that the early imageries and media trends “established in the late 1940s,” are significant in understanding subsequent patterns of Western coverage of the Middle East. This was because “once established, these patterns proved to be most enduring” (Zaharna, 1995:37). For instance, Ghareeb notes the role of “the cultural and linguistic gap” between US journalists and the Middle East region and its people. Many Western journalists who cover the Middle East are not proficient in local languages or customs. As such, Ghareeb argues, this will “make it difficult for them to accurately assess the Arab viewpoint” (Ghareeb, 1983:22). In their study, Zelizer et al. (2002) found that the largest number of stories was coming from journalists based in Israel, and noted that “this discrepancy, a common result of reporting from the place of the reporter rather than the place of the event, in itself set in place a prism for reporting – and understanding- events in ways that undercut the supposed neutrality of the coverage” (Zelizer et al, 2002:290).

In a study by Sreebny (1979), which surveyed American correspondents covering the Middle East since 1973, respondents stated that problems they faced included censorship, restrictions and “a cultural gap between foreign correspondents and Arab societies” (Sreebny, cited in Ibrahim 2009: 521). Ghareeb warns against the Western media’s practice of sending reporters to the Middle East who lack the cultural knowledge of the region and the conflict, which can lead to ‘sins of conscious omission.’ As he put it:

But the misleading headline, the composition technique that magnifies or underplays a story, and the deadly weapon of neglect or burial of a story — all are petty techniques of oppression when compared to the new trend in news reporting of sending out writers and broadcasters with only superficial knowledge of their topic to cover serious important events. (Ghareeb, 1983:19)

5.5 Conclusion

The survey of the major scholarly literature on Western media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, highlights a number of long-running thematic and structural patterns. These include the dominance of Israeli sources, perspectives and framings and the marginalisation of Palestinian ones; the emphasis on violence and conflict in representations of Arabs/Palestinians; and the lack of historical and political contextualisation. The literature on production factors that have shaped media reporting of the Middle East highlights the role of political lobbying and public relations, the importance of ‘cultural gaps’ and biases, and the organisational imperatives of routinisation and access that affect much of international news reporting. The chapter has also highlighted the role of Western cultural representations of the Palestinians and the Middle East in shaping the cultural and political context of Western media discourse.

The next chapter presents the historical, organisational and political backgrounds of the BBC and Al-Jazeera news organisations.

CHAPTER SIX: Al-Jazeera and the BBC

This chapter presents an overview of the historical, political and organisational backgrounds of the BBC and Al-Jazeera Media Network, with a focus on the BBC News and Al-Jazeera English (AJE) news channels. This is intended to establish a key element of context for informing the empirical examination undertaken in this research. The chapter is divided into three main sections. The first two sections examine Al-Jazeera and the BBC, respectively. The last section reviews some of the key studies of AJE and BBC coverage of the Gaza War of 2008-9, and the questions the chapter raises in the context of the present research.

6.1 The Al-Jazeera Media Network

The Al-Jazeera³³ Media Network (AJMN) was launched in October 1996 by the Qatari government as the first pan-Arab news media network. Setting out his vision for the network, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Hamad bin Khalifa al-Thani, declared that AJMN “would deal predominantly with news and current affairs, establishing a network of correspondents around the world”. According to Pintak:

The Al-Jazeera Team was given a \$140 million subsidy by the Emir and a mandate: launch an independent television station free from government scrutiny, control and manipulation. The staff proceeded to do just that. (2011:40)

For much of the first decade of its existence, AJMN’s media offering was almost exclusively in Arabic, principally through its flagship channel, Al-Jazeera Arabic (AJA). Whilst this research is concerned with Al-Jazeera English (AJE), which did not come into existence until 2006, understanding the organisational, political and ideological origins and context of AJMN and AJA is essential for understanding that of AJE itself.

6.1.1 Al-Jazeera Arabic

Headquartered in the Qatari capital, Doha, and broadcasting initially for six-hours daily, Al-Jazeera Arabic (AJA) became a 24-hour channel in February 1999. Its initial newsroom was almost entirely staffed by veterans of the BBC’s Arabic Television service³⁴, which, after struggling for several years, had closed down in April 1996, six months before Al-Jazeera Arabic’s launch (Sakr, 2001:13–14). Most of the BBC Arabic television service’s editorial team

³³ Throughout this thesis, the term ‘Al-Jazeera’ is used to refer to the parent organisation and network (i.e. AJMN) of the Al-Jazeera Arabic (AJA) and Al-Jazeera English (AJE) channels.

³⁴ The BBC Arabic TV channel was a joint venture, launched in 1994, between the BBC and a Saudi media company owned by the Saudi Royal family. BBC Arabic TV’s failure, Achcar argues, was because “Saudi programme content requirements were incompatible with the BBC programmers’ need for freedom in this domain” (Achcar, 2013:135).

were made redundant after its collapse, and were recruited by Al-Jazeera to form the ‘nucleus’ of the nascent network (Pintak, 2011). By 2001, AJA housed a staff of about 350 journalists and 50 foreign correspondents, largely originating from various parts of the Arab world and working across 31 countries. Within a few years of its launch, AJA became the flagship of the ‘satellite revolution’ which had transformed the Arab world in the early and mid-90s (Lynch, 2003:61). Adopting the motto “the Opinion, and the other opinion,” AJA presented itself as the first Arab news channel to offer Arab audiences an “uncensored 24-hour news service,” featuring live phone-in shows and political debates that, for the first time, aired the “perspectives of opposition leaders, dissidents and intellectuals” from across the Arab world (el-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002; Hanley, 2004; Zayani & Ayish, 2006; Fahmy & Johnson, 2008:341-342). The channel’s “ground-breaking” talk shows and lively debates on the region’s most sensitive and controversial topics contrasted sharply with the bland and heavily censored offerings of other Arab state satellite channels (Chalaby, 2005:162; El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2002; Marozzi, 2002). As a transnational channel benefiting from new broadcasting technologies, AJA’s coverage stood out in marked contrast to the long-established Arabic state and private channels, most of which were known to be heavily-censored mouthpieces of various governments (Wojcieszak, 2007:120). As such, the channel’s coverage represented a dramatic and unprecedented break with what Achcar (2013) calls the ‘unwritten code’ that had long operated in the Arab region — according to which Arab governments rarely offered platforms on their own state media for opposition voices of other Arab countries. The strategy of opening up the spectrum of opinion was pivotal to AJA’s popularity in the region. As Achcar notes:

By providing a forum for the whole spectrum of oppositional forces in Arab countries — Islamic opposition of all stripes, Al-Qaida included, and nationalist, liberal, and even occasionally left-wing opposition — Al Jazeera succeeded in capturing a significant share of the audience interested in politics throughout the region and in the Arabic-speaking diaspora all over the world. (2013:136-137)

However, despite this unprecedented level of openness to dissenting views, AJMN still operated within limits. As Achcar observes:

In the political domain, the network’s journalists had a blank check as far as the Arab states went — with the exception of Qatar, of course, and, albeit to a lesser extent, its Saudi big brother, as well as the other GCC member states. (2013:136)

Within a decade of its launch, AJMN had established itself as a major force on the global media landscape. AJA’s on-the-ground live reporting — unique among Arab networks at the time —

of the US's Operation Desert Fox (1998) in Iraq included footage from raids and extensive discussions of the impact of sanctions on the country (EL-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003:58). AJA made its name with Arabic audiences with its coverage of the Second Intifada, but it was its coverage of the 9/11 attacks, during which its reporters "transmitted to Arab viewers live scenes of the twin towers crashing to the ground" (EL-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003:51) and the subsequent Western military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq that first brought Al-Jazeera to the attention of international audiences (Pintak, 2008:21). Al-Jazeera was the only network on the ground in Iraq at the onset of the bombing campaign, and AJA's emphasis on reporting the humanitarian impact of both conflicts, often including graphic detail, rather than the 'military objectives' and 'war on terror' framings used by 'embedded' journalists of Western outlets, particularly enhanced Al-Jazeera's credibility with audiences in the Global South, and prompted some to describe it as "the face of the frontline" (England, *Financial Times*, 13 January 2009). Al-Jazeera was soon earning plaudits in the West. In 1999, *the Harvard International Review* called it a "pioneering network". Two years later, in May 2001, it was profiled favourably on the influential CBS show, '60 Minutes'. Later that year, *New York Times* columnist Thomas Friedman hailed Al-Jazeera as "a beacon of freedom" and "the biggest media phenomenon to hit the Arab world" (Friedman, cited in Zayani, 2005:21). For Zayani and Ayish, it was through "breaking the Western monopoly over news" that Al-Jazeera became a "global media player" (2006:480).

Unsurprisingly, the station's reporting, both of the Arab region and globally, also earned it criticism from all corners. "Virtually every Arab government criticized Al-Jazeera," notes Pintak, "The Saudis were particularly incensed" (Pintak, 2011:40). Over the course of its first ten years, Al-Jazeera's coverage prompted the closure of its offices in several Arab capitals, and even led some Arab governments to break off diplomatic relations with Qatar (or threaten to do so). In 2006, Qatar's five fellow members on the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) passed a resolution to boycott Al Jazeera "if it did not tone down its coverage" (Ayish & Zayani, 2006:480).

In the West, Al-Jazeera was accused of "galvanizing Arab radicalism" and feeding anti-Western sentiments – accusations which AJA persistently rejected, insisting on its professionalism and denying having any agenda other than "presenting the view and the opposing view" (EL-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003:22). AJA's coverage of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, notably its graphic depiction of the destruction and casualties of the conflict, including among Western forces, was in marked contrast to the sanitised coverage Western viewers received from the BBC, CNN and others, and prompted accusations of "sensationalism and demagoguery," with

some calling the channel “inflammatory, sensationalist, biased, irresponsible and anti-Western” as well as a “propaganda machine” (Makovsky, 2001). Many Western critics have also denounced what they perceived to be AJA’s “uncontextualized violence, death and torture”, accusing the channel of “hampering the democratization efforts in Iraq”, and blaming it for the “rise of insurgence and the increase in kidnapping incidents” (Abrams, 2003; Darwish, 2001; Kuntzman, 2003, cited in Wojcieszak, 2007:115)

AJA’s coverage of the US-led ‘War on Terror’ and Western interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan frequently earned it the opprobrium of US officials. When Al-Jazeera was the only network allowed in Kabul, some US officials accused it of collaborating with the Taliban leadership. When bin Laden declared AJA to be his preferred station for exclusives of his taped messages, turning “the once anonymous Al-Jazeera” into a “household name” (EL-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003:22), US officials accused the channel of being a mouthpiece for Al-Qaeda. The station broadcast bin Laden’s messages alongside “statements from Washington and elsewhere” but these “went unnoticed by a US administration that saw only ‘enemy propaganda’ and lies” (Snow & Taylor, 2006:395). The attacks on Al-Jazeera were not merely rhetorical. Its offices in Kabul and Baghdad were hit by US-airstrikes, and several of its staff were killed, injured or imprisoned in the course of the two conflicts. In the words of Lamloum (2004), AJA “has come to be perceived as the channel that advocates all the dangerous ‘isms’ that supposedly plague the Arab world: ‘Islamism’, ‘terrorism’, ‘populism’, ‘anti-semitism’” (Lamloum, 2004: 12, cited in Zayani & Ayish, 2006:480-481). For the Independent’s veteran Middle East correspondent, Robert Fisk, Al Jazeera was “a phenomenon in the Arab world, a comparatively free, bold initiative in journalism that was supported by the Americans-until it became rather too free” (Fisk, 2001, cited in Zayani, 2005:21).

6.1.2 Al-Jazeera English

Despite its meteoric rise as an Arabic-Language network, AJMN’s leadership recognised that expanding its global influence required extending its reach to English-speaking audiences. After several years of planning, Al Jazeera English (AJE) was duly launched on 15 November 2006, becoming the first English-language news channel to be headquartered in the Middle East, with principal broadcast centres in Doha, Washington, London, and Kuala Lumpur. (Seib, 2008:42) AJE’s declared purpose was that of “revolutionising the global news scape.” Boasting over 25 bureaus, 1,200 staff and 600 reporters from more than 45 nationalities, it promised to reach an audience of 180 million households worldwide as well as “anyone with an internet connection” (el-Nawawy & Powers, 2010:71; Figenschou, 2010:86; Zayani, 2005:6). In its

public relations statements, AJE promised to deliver its mission by giving voice to “untold stories,” promoting debate, and “challenging established perceptions” through a unique “grassroots perspective,” from underreported regions around the world to a global audience (Corporate profile, English.Aljazeera.net; Figenschou, 2010:86).

Many saw in the circumstances of AJE’s creation a notable change in direction for its parent network. AJMN’s founding mission statement had defined it as an “Arab media service with a global orientation,” and Al-Thani’s choice of Nigel Parsons, a Briton, as managing director of AJE, thus caused controversy, especially because, as Pintak notes:

[Parsons] proceeded to largely fill the management ranks, as well as many of the on-air slots, with British, US, Australian, and New Zealand nationals, provoking accusations that Arabs were being actively discriminated against. (Pintak, 2011:3-4)

From the outset, Al-Jazeera English explicitly presented itself as ‘the voice of the South.’ Parsons (2008) described the channel as ‘the first news channel based in the Mid-East to bring news back to the West’ (cited in El-Nawawy & Powers, 2009:272). AJE’s corporate messaging highlighted its ambition of “balancing the current typical information flow by reporting from the developing world back to the West and from the southern to the northern hemisphere” (*Al Jazeera International: Corporate profile*, English.Aljazeera.net, 18 August 2006) — a clear reference to the intellectual debates, at UNESCO notably, over Western media representations of the developing world discussed in Chapter Four. AJE accordingly came to be seen as an important player in ‘redressing global imbalances in the flow of information’ (Sakr, 2007:120). For Thussu (2007), AJE represents a “textbook example of contra-flow in global media products,” by challenging “Anglo-American domination” of news and current affairs, and providing an “alternative source of information” in one of the world’s most geo-politically sensitive regions (Thussu, 2007:24). For their part, El-Nawawy & Powers (2010) argue that AJE occupies a unique position of, on the one hand, “not being dominated by geopolitical nor commercial interests”, and, on the other, being the first news outlet of its kind to have “the resources, mandate and journalistic capacity to reach out to typically ignored audiences throughout the world” (el-Nawawy & Powers, 2010:62), thus offering a “fresh break” from traditional news offerings of CNN, the BBC World Service and others (Adolphsen & Wessler, 2008:440).

6.1.3 Al-Jazeera and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Since its inception, Al-Jazeera’s coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been a major source of controversy and criticism directed at the network. One of AJMN’s most notable, and

controversial, contributions to the Arab media landscape was to feature Israeli politicians and voices in its coverage, which had until then been a taboo in Arab broadcasting. In 1998, AJA hosted Prime Minister Ehud Barak on one of its talk shows, followed, months later, by the Israeli Foreign Minister, Shimon Peres. This earned the channel praise from Israeli officials for its “credibility and professionalism” (EL-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003:51). Gideon Ezra, former deputy head of the Israeli General Security Service (GSS), and a regular guest on AJA’s talk shows, told the Jerusalem Post in 2001:

There I was in Jerusalem, with Marwan Barghouti [West Bank Fatah chief] in Ramallah, and the moderator was sitting in Al-Jazeera’s London studio, and they were hearing me out, even though little of what I said could have been agreeable to them ... All of a sudden, an Israeli called in claiming to be a former GSS man who quit because he could no longer stand coercing Palestinian into becoming collaborators. Now that’s what I call free discussion. (cited in EL-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003:51)

“I wish all Arab media were like Al-Jazeera,” he concluded.

Nevertheless, AJA routinely faced accusations of pro-Palestinian bias in its coverage, notably for its emphasis on showing Palestinian suffering in its reports and, its critics argued, for adopting Palestinian framings and terminologies. During the Second Intifada, the channel regularly aired graphic scenes of Palestinian casualties and Palestinian stone-throwers confronting Israeli tanks and heavy artillery, scenes which were rarely broadcast by Western media, prompting calls within Israel for AJA to be banned from the country’s airwaves. Similar accusations would later be levelled by Israeli officials at Al-Jazeera English for its coverage of the Gaza War of 2008-9 (Gilboa, 2012).

An important dimension for understanding AJE’s coverage of OCL and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is Al-Jazeera’s relationship with the disparate parties and factions comprising the Palestinian leadership. After Hamas’s election victory in the 2006 elections and its short but bloody confrontation with Fatah a year later (as described in Chapter Three), a regional alignment took place whereby Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Syria and others sided with the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority (PA), while Qatar and a number of GCC countries were more sympathetic towards Hamas, leading to accusations that Al-Jazeera had become a mouthpiece for the Islamist group. Achcar (2013:135) notes that in its early years Al-Jazeera had “incorporated many members of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) from a number of different Arab countries into its staff”. Wadah Khanfar, appointed Director General of AJA in 2003 and later of AJMN from 2006 to 2011, was himself a former member of the Jordanian MB and of Hamas’s Information

Bureau in Sudan. However, Achcar (2013) argues that this early influx of MB supporters did not signal ideological alignment with political Islamism but was part of an effort by the Qatari leadership to promote a more ideologically diverse composition at the network. At the launch of Al-Jazeera, Achcar points out:

The emir took pains to diversify the political makeup of Al Jazeera's staff in the hope of establishing its credibility. The Muslim Brothers who dominated the staff thus found themselves working side by side with Arab nationalists and liberals. (Achcar, 2013:136)

A recent study by Cherribi (2017), which featured a framing analysis of AJA's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past decade, including of intra-Palestinian disputes, is worth noting in the context of the present research. The study references "four key facts" for "understanding the regional narrative" of Al-Jazeera's Palestine coverage:

The first is Al Jazeera's portrayal of the relationship between Israel and the government of Qatar ... as one of mutual enmity ... Second is the network's characterisation of Qatar as playing a leading role during the 2011 eruption of the Arab Spring ... Third is the fact that Al Jazeera's positive coverage of Hamas directly reflects the emir of Qatar's view of the group as an instructive model of democratic governance by homegrown Islamist parties in Arab nations. Fourth is the close political relationship between Wadah Khanfar, the managing director of Al Jazeera, and Hamas (Cherribi, 2017:105)

Accordingly, Cherribi contends, Al-Jazeera's Israel-Palestine coverage promotes specific narratives by deploying "a set of recurring frames and narrative conventions that consistently reinforce the worldview of Al Jazeera leadership and blur the lines between reporting and analysis" (2017:105). Cherribi highlights, by way of example, AJMN's decision, in January 2011, at the height of Arab Spring protests in Tunisia and Egypt, to devote significant coverage to the 'Palestine Papers', a cache of leaked classified documents belonging to senior Palestinian Authority officials and relating to Peace Process negotiations in the 1990s and early 2000s, revelations that caused considerable embarrassment to the PA. "The focus by Al Jazeera on years-old events in the midst of two major revolutions," writes Cherribi:

... illustrates the network's embrace of its role as newsmaker rather than news reporter, its traditional gatekeeper media role, and its tendency to draw the attention of its audience to news events that advance a broader narrative of the state of affairs in the Arab world. (2017:105)

6.1.4 Al-Jazeera and Qatar

Since AJMN's launch, the Qatari government publicly maintained a degree of distance, for instance keeping any references to Qatar out of the Al-Jazeera channel's logo and other branding (Rinnawi, 2006:98). However, this didn't ward off scepticism over the network's claims to political and editorial independence, with some insisting its real mission was "promoting Qatar while undermining other regimes" (Tabar, 2002: 57). Although Al-Jazeera has come to represent for many a "free, bold initiative in journalism" that "shook the region and restored credibility to Arab media", for others the network is no more than a "tool at the service of the miniscule but ambitious state of Qatar" (Lamloum, 2004: 55, cited in Ayish & Zayani, 2006:480). One key argument presented in this regard is that while AJMN is officially privately-owned by a mixed enterprise, and meant to be commercially sustainable in the long run, it has remained entirely dependent on the Qatari state for its funding (Achcar, 2013:135).

In this context, Al-Thani's motivations for launching the channel remain a matter of dispute. Pintak (2011) highlights the Emir's ambitions "to be a player in the region," while Rinnawi identifies combination of economic interests, a desire to deflect criticism over Qatar's "open-trade relationship with Israel", and an ambition to challenge Saudi Arabia's primacy in the Gulf, by promoting an independent Qatari voice (Pintak, 2011:74; Rinnawi, 2006:97). For Zayani (2005), Qatar's ownership of AJMN combines two templates of media-politics relations in the region. First, the venture reflects a global "new trend which is characterized by the politicization of media ownership," which Zayani compares to similar arrangements in Italy and Lebanon, where political leaders are also dominant media owners (2005:14). The second template is a more familiar one in the region, and is described by Zayani as follows:

Al Jazeera fits in with a deep-seated regional tradition. In the Arab world, the media in general, and satellite channels in particular, operate under a patron who is either the government or some rich owner who in many cases is associated, in one way or another, with the ruling elite or the government. Most television systems in the Arab world are subsidised by the government partly because they need a great deal of money and partly because Arab governments have a stake in the media. (Zayani, 2005:14)

In Zayani's reading, the Al-Jazeera network (and, by extension, AJA and AJE) is, effectively, a conventional state TV media outlet in all but name. This view is supported by Al-Sadi (2012:19), who invokes Al-Jazeera Arabic's 'fatalistic' coverage of the 2003 Iraq War which, in his view, echoed and promoted Qatar's own "passive wait-and-see position toward the war". Al-Sadi goes on to note that AJA's "post-war discourses problematised the question of anti-occupation

resistance, thus lending credence to Qatar's position as expressed by its foreign minister, who asked rhetorically: "Why should we resist occupation?" (2012:19). Textual analyses of AJA's Arabic's anti-establishment discourse, al-Sadi argues, show it is merely a 'superficial' attempt at furthering Qatari state policy. As he notes:

The evidence emerging from textual analysis of the channel's political discourse indicates that identification between the channel and the majority of the Arab masses does not signal a substantive, liberational rhetoric ... The channel's anti-establishment discourse is far removed from a liberational, substantive rhetoric that threatens the Qatari establishment. On the contrary, the channel's anti-establishment rhetoric signifies a relentless effort to defend the policies and perspectives of the host state by superficially identifying it with the beliefs, attitudes and aspirations of the Arab public. In this analysis, Al Jazeera falls in line with other state-sponsored Arab media, whose main objective is to defend the legitimacy of the state in order to perpetuate the existing political order. (2012:19)

Qatar might be a "reformed, self-democratizing Arab autocracy", he concludes, but "it is an autocracy nonetheless" (al-Sadi, 2012:19). Pintak echoes al-Sadi's conclusions, seeing in Al-Jazeera Arabic and other satellite channels an attempt by the region's governments to contain, rather than encourage, political dissent:

What arose on Al-Jazeera and its successors ... was a forum for discussion, offering debates that were "a verbalisation of Arab politics" critiques of government. On some level, these broadcasts acted as a safety valve, releasing the pent-up anger within the Arab body politic overtly threatening government. (2011:48)

What is unarguable is that the launch of Al-Jazeera gave Qatar a level of influence far beyond its borders. Hassan (2012) argues that Qatari foreign policy "is motivated by what can only be described as extreme cynicism," playing a bridging role between "seemingly irreconcilable forces", such as Western and Islamist interests, Israel and Hamas, the US and the Taliban, not to mention hosting the operational headquarters of the 2003 Iraq war "while unleashing a fierce media attack on the war from Al Jazeera's offices not far from that very base" (Hassan, 2012; Miles, 2011).

After the start of the 'Arab Spring' in 2010/2011, Al-Jazeera's relationship with the Qatari state has been argued to undergo a major shift, towards a more explicit alignment with official Qatari foreign policy (Miles, 2011). The unexpected resignation, on September 20th, 2011, of Al-

Jazeera's Director General, Wadah Khanfar, after eight years at the helm (2003-2011), was a significant turning point in this regard. Khanfar's tenure had been widely credited for establishing and consolidating the network's regional and international credibility as a serious and professional news operation, notably through its coverage of the Iraq invasion of 2003, the Lebanon war of 2006 and the Gaza war of 2008/9. Months earlier, the release of the Wikileaks cables revealed that Al-Jazeera had agreed to self-censor its Iraq coverage during the US-led intervention at the request of the US administration; revelations that were seen as deeply damaging to Khanfar's credibility in the Arab world, and a confirmation in the eyes of many observers, that there were "limits to what satellite channels in the Arab world can do". The replacement of Khanfar by a member of the Qatari Royal family³⁵, seemed for many to confirm the end of Al Jazeera's editorial independence (Harb, 2011:4; Miles, 2011; Haddad, 2011). Reflecting on Al-Jazeera's role in the Arab Spring, Achcar (2013) argues that the network has mainly acted as a 'vehicle' for the MB and Qatar's political plans:

Ultimately, Al Jazeera has turned out not only to have made a major contribution toward creating the political conditions for the Arab uprising, and even helping it unfold. The network has also served as the main vehicle for two strands of influence that have been woven together in this uprising, those represented by the Emirate of Qatar and the Muslim Brothers. (2013:141)

Until 2011, Hasan argues, Qatari foreign policy was "following in the footsteps", he notes. After 2011, Al Jazeera began "to follow Qatar" and gradually lose "its uniqueness" (Hassan, 2012).

6.1.5 Al-Jazeera: A complex picture

Since its creation, the Al-Jazeera network has utterly transformed the media landscape, not only in the Arab world and the Middle East, but globally. Achcar believes Al-Jazeera "worked a veritable revolution in Arabic news broadcasting," and launched a "structural transformation of the Arab public sphere" (Achcar, 2013:136-137). Al-Jazeera Arabic was hailed by supporters as 'The CNN of the Arab world' (Fahmy & Johnson, 2008; Fouda, 2001; Lynch, 2006) and praised for its hard-hitting and independent style of journalism, its "unique source of visual information" offering "realistic pictures of wars and military conflicts," its "refusal to regurgitate the official line" of Arab governments, and its commitment to "accuracy and balance," while at the same time providing "an Arab perspective" on the news (el-Nawawy, 2002; el-Nawawy &

³⁵ Khanfar's replacement coincided with a visit by the Qatari ruler to the United States. According to Miles (2011) this was arguably a "sign to Washington" that Al-Thani had "taken control of the network". (Miles, 2011)

Iskandar, 2002; Schleifer, 2001; Fahmy & Johnson, 2007a, Fahmy & Al Emad, 2011:219-220). This has earned it accusations of “flouting Arab customs and politics”, “cozying up to terrorists”, and being a mouthpiece for anti-Americanism.

Some have gone as far as claiming that Al-Jazeera was, at various junctures, an arm of Al-Qaeda, the CIA and Mossad (Kim & Jang, 2004; Miles, 2005; Osborne, 2004; Zayani & Ayish, 2006; Zednik, 2002). However, Al-Jazeera’s relationship with Qatar, while the reason for its existence, has also been one of the most problematic areas in terms of assessing and understanding the network’s editorial values and approach, as well as its role (if any) in the political and social transformations in the region and beyond. The emergence of Al-Jazeera is considered by many to have been a key catalyst for greater press freedom in the Arab world (Fahmy & Johnson, 2007b; Cherribi, 2006; El-Nawawy & Iskandar, 2003; Hanley, 2004; Nisbet et al., 2004). At the global level, by breaking the Western monopoly over English-language news production and dissemination, Al-Jazeera English asserted its place as a global media player in its own right, “proving itself to be more than a curiosity or a junior version of the BBC or CNN” (Seib, 2008:42).

6.2 The British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC)

This section presents a brief overview of the historical, political and organisational background of the BBC. This will be followed by a discussion of the literature on the BBC’s journalistic approach and values, especially in the context of its Middle East coverage.

6.2.1 The BBC: A historical overview

The BBC started life in 1922 as the ‘British Broadcasting Company’, a group of radio-set manufacturing companies. It was established by Royal Charter as the ‘British Broadcasting Corporation’, with John Reith as its first Director General, in December 1926. The Charter defined the BBC’s “objectives, powers and obligations”, and enshrined its right to exact a license fee. In November 1936, the BBC’s Television Service was launched, making the BBC the “first broadcaster in the world to provide a regular ‘high definition’ television service.” The BBC’s first ever foreign-language broadcast, in January 1938, was in Arabic (BBC, *The BBC Story*, Fact Sheets 1920s, p.1; Schlesinger, 1987:18; Briggs, 1961:3-4). When its Television Centre opened in 1960, the BBC’s output consisted of three main domestic radio channels — the Home Service, the Light Programme and the Third Programme — and two television services: BBC1 and BBC2. In November 1997, BBC News 24, the BBC’s first rolling TV 24-hour news channel was launched, followed a month later by BBC Online, the BBC’s first online

platform. In March 2008, the BBC re-launched its Arabic TV service, mainly focused on news (Aitken, 2007:13-14).

6.2.2 The BBC's organisational structure and values

Over the years, the BBC has acquired a vast and elaborate organisational structure tasked with fulfilling the institution's remit under the Royal Charter and "enshrining its editorial independence" ('Broadcasting Copy of Royal Charter for the continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation', 2006:2). The BBC's organisational structure is headed by a Director General (DG) and a BBC Board led by a non-executive Chairman. Until 2007, the BBC was overseen by a 'Board of Governors' which governed its public service statutory obligations, after which the Board was replaced by the 'BBC Trust', an independent body entrusted with representing the interests of license fee payers. In 2017, the Office of Communications (Ofcom), the UK's Broadcasting regulatory body, took over the BBC Trust's regulatory remit (BBC, Structures and Governance).

The BBC's mission has seen a few changes over the century since its creation. In the 1920s, John Reith defined the BBC's role as "[bringing] the best of everything to the greatest number of homes" (BBC, The BBC Story 1920s). As of 2021, the BBC's official mission is "to act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output and services which inform, educate and entertain" (BBC, Mission, values and public service). The BBC's Charter sets out "five public purposes", the first of which is "to provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them". According to the charter "The BBC should provide duly accurate and impartial news, current affairs and factual programming to build people's understanding of all parts of the United Kingdom and of the wider world. Its content should be provided to the highest editorial standards" (BBC, Mission, values and public service). The BBC's fifth 'public purpose' is "to reflect the United Kingdom, its culture and values to the world." According to the Charter, "The BBC should provide high-quality news coverage to international audiences, firmly based on British values of accuracy, impartiality, and fairness" (BBC, Mission, values and public service). Concurrently, the BBC established a public set of 'Values' that its own staff are expected to adhere to, the first of which stipulates that "Trust is the foundation of the BBC. We're independent, impartial and honest" (BBC, Mission, values and public service).

In addition to its institutional values, the BBC has adopted set of 'Editorial Values' which "embody the [BBC's] freedoms and responsibilities and, like the Editorial Guidelines, apply to

all [BBC] content” (BBC, Editorial Values, n.d). According to the BBC’s statement of its editorial values:

In our journalism in particular, we seek to establish the **truth** and use the highest reporting standards to provide coverage that is **fair** and **accurate**. Our specialist expertise provides professional judgement and clear analysis. We are **impartial**, seeking to reflect the views and experiences of our audiences – so that our output as a whole includes a breadth and diversity of opinion and no significant strand of thought is under-represented or omitted. We are independent of outside interests and arrangements that could compromise our **editorial integrity**. Our editorial standards do not require absolute neutrality on every issue or detachment from fundamental democratic principles. (BBC, Editorial Guidelines: The BBC's Editorial Standards, n.d) *[emphasis in the original]*

6.2.3. The BBC and the British State

From its very beginnings, the BBC’s relationship with the British state has been a complex and, at times, fraught one. According to the BBC’s official history, John Reith “fought off the politicians’ attempts to influence the BBC, while offering the British people programmes to educate, inform and entertain” (History of the BBC, BBC.co.uk). While officially independent, both editorially and operationally, the BBC has nevertheless always been inextricably entwined with the structures and interests of the British state (Schlesinger, 1978; Mills, 2016) This was especially the case in wartime contexts. For instance, the BBC was an essential vehicle of the British war propaganda effort during the Second World War, working in tandem with the Ministry of Information (headed by Reith himself, who had left the BBC by then). In his study of the history of the BBC World Service, Webb (2015) documents this fraught relationship between the BBC and the British Government, particularly during the Cold War. One notable instance he highlights is the British Government’s decision, in October 1956, in the days leading up to the Suez Crisis, to drastically cut the BBC’s World Service budget, and that “a Foreign Office liaison officer with a desk in Bush House would be imposed on the broadcaster” in order to “advise the BBC on the content and direction of the overseas programmes and thereby enforce a measure of governmental editorial control” (Webb, 2015). Until 2014, the BBC’s World Service was funded by a “grant-in-aid” from the UK Foreign Office. Although the service has since been funded directly from the license fee, the World Service’s “objectives, targets and priorities” are still decided in agreement with the UK Foreign Secretary. Furthermore, grants

awarded by the British Government for the modernisation of the World Service are still administered by the UK Foreign Office (BBC, Structures and Governance).

There is a voluminous body of scholarship on the political, institutional and organisational and cultural history and aspects of the BBC, and it is beyond the scope of this chapter to review it. However, it is important to note some of the key themes running across the literature. One of the most influential studies of the BBC's political and institutional history and culture is Philip Schlesinger's *Putting 'reality' Together: BBC News* (1978, 1987), which represents the first major examination of the role of political, cultural and organisational factors in the BBC's news production process. Schlesinger was among the first to rigorously examine what he described as the 'contradictions of liberal democracy' between the BBC's claims to editorial and political independence and the realities of its relationship with the British state, notably in its coverage of key political events. For instance, the book documents the various ways in which the BBC faced Governmental restrictions of its coverage of the conflict in Northern Ireland during the 1960s-1990s (popularly known as 'the troubles'), which, Schlesinger shows, involved a 'combination of external state pressure and internal self-censorship' (Schlesinger, 1978). In this context, Schlesinger identifies "two erroneous views of the relationship between the BBC and the state. One is the view that the BBC is simply a subservient tool which uncomplicatedly 'takes the army line'. The other is the myth that the Corporation is completely independent..." (Schlesinger, 1987:242). Schlesinger is thus quick to dismiss the idea that the BBC is simply a governmental mouthpiece:

[The BBC] has not just been a conduit for official views because there are real differences of interest between broadcasting and the state...Broadcasting, while politically, and financially dependent upon the state, is also legitimised by an ideology of independence in public service. (Schlesinger, 1978: xvi)

Schlesinger identifies what he terms the "micro and macro myths" of BBC independence. As he explains:

The BBC's micro-myth of independence stresses the autonomy of the production staff, and delegation of responsibility downward from the Director-General. The macro-myth of the BBC's independence, is, of course, the view that the BBC is largely socially unattached. Together, the two myths support a considerable sense of autonomy. (Schlesinger, 1987:135-137)

Schlesinger especially highlights the role of ideology to the BBC's conception of its status and mission. In particular, he notes the BBC's claim of 'impartiality' which, he argues, is central to its 'myths' of independence. Far from being ideologically impartial, Schlesinger notes, the BBC is fundamentally aligned with "the present social order":

On the one hand, therefore, the BBC's account of itself proclaims an ideology of detachment — corporate independence, and consequently, true impartiality — yet, on the other hand, the ideological commitment of broadcasting is clearly to the present social order, as it is *represented* by parliamentary democracy. (Schlesinger, 1987:169) [italics in original]

This is echoed by Mills (2016), whose study investigates the BBC's role in British political life, mostly through the prism of its domestic coverage. When it comes to the BBC's "relationship with the centres of power in British society, principally corporations and the state," Mills argues, the notion of BBC independence from either state or corporate influence is contradicted by the evidence. As he notes:

The basic picture is clear enough, even if it is rarely acknowledged in official discourse. The BBC has never been independent of the state in any meaningful sense, while the relative autonomy it once enjoyed from corporations and the logic of the market has been steadily eroded since the 1980s. (Mills, 2016:9)

A notable examination of the BBC's institutional culture is the comparative study of the BBC and CNN conducted by Küng-Shankleman (2003), which examined the role of organisational culture, which she defines as "a paradigm of interrelated assumptions, or unconscious beliefs, about the meaning, function and purpose of their professional activities shared by those working in these organisations" in shaping the two broadcasters' output (Küng-Shankleman, 2003:77). For Küng-Shankleman, the role of corporate cultural assumptions "plays a unique and important role in broadcasting organisations" and "for both the BBC and CNN, their core products and competitive strengths are deeply rooted in the inner beliefs common to those working there (Küng-Shankleman, 2003:95). Küng-Shankleman identifies a "strong correlation between organisational and national culture," noting that "the similarities, which emerged during research between the cultures of the organisations and their host nations, were striking. Corporate cultures appear to be fractals of their national parent" (Küng-Shankleman, 2003:94). In her findings, Küng-Shankleman identifies "four core common assumptions" underpinning the BBC's institutional culture:

[A] belief that public funding makes the organisation special, different and important; a belief that the BBC is 'the best in the business' and that given appropriate resource, scope and opportunity, is capable of producing the best broadcasting in the world; a belief that the BBC serves a unique national role and is part of the fabric of Britain; and a belief that those working at the BBC are custodians of a unique and important broadcasting heritage. (Küng-Shankleman, 2006:95)

One of the crucial aspects of the BBC's organisational culture examined in the scholarship is the role and operation of editorial control. Schlesinger identifies several major features of the BBC's institutional and editorial culture in this regard. For instance, he argues that the "various features of the BBC's editorial system act routinely to ensure broad conformity with the desired approach to the news" (Schlesinger, 1987:135). In his view, this is specifically true of the news broadcasting part of the BBC where, as he notes:

Dissidence and non-conformity are not the accepted style in 'hard news' production. While newsmen in other areas of broadcast journalism — notably some current affairs teams — may be permitted a more maverick approach, 'the news', with its flagship function, is the home of the conformist (Schlesinger, 1987:161).

Schlesinger also describes what he calls "the invisible framework of guidance" governing the BBC's editorial processes, according to which "there is a continual process of reference downwards, of judgments and decisions, which goes largely unacknowledged". However, he points out, "it is only the difficult marginal cases which are the actually visible occasions on which advice is sought. Otherwise, unacknowledged, the invisible framework of guidance is omnipresent" (Schlesinger, 1987:137). Overall, Schlesinger argues that the BBC "command structure does not usually perform its work of editorial control through obvious routine intervention at the production level" but "works according to a system of retrospective review" which becomes "part of the taken for granted assumptions of those working in the newsrooms". This, he argues, "permits an orthodox ideology of editorial control to flourish" (Schlesinger, 1987:162).

6.2.4. The BBC and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

Few aspects of the BBC's output elicit more controversy, scrutiny and criticism than its coverage of the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The BBC's sensitivity to such critiques is such that its internal guidelines now feature a dedicated section on Middle East coverage, which includes a 'glossary of terms' to be used by reporters. According to Barkho

(2010), this glossary, which is confidential except for a small selection of 24 terms, includes recommendations to avoid certain terminological choices, such as the word 'Palestine'³⁶ and suggests preferred alternatives such as 'the Palestinians'. Some of 24 terms are presented below, along with Barkho's selected excerpts from the BBC's guidelines:

- **Targeted killing:** "This phrase is sometimes used by Israel and should be attributed".
- **Barrier:** "BBC journalists should try to avoid using terminology favoured by one side or another in any dispute".
- **Border:** "Be careful with this word. Do you mean boundary? See Green Line".
- **Palestine:** "Be careful with the use of word "Palestine" as its meaning can depend on the context".
- **Settlements:** "Settlements are residential areas built by Israelis in the occupied territories. They are illegal under international law: this is the position of the UN Security Council and the U.K. government among others- although Israel rejects this". (Barkho, 2010:149-150)

In October 2005, the BBC Governors commissioned a panel, led by Sir Quentin Thomas, to "assess the impartiality of BBC news and current affairs coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with particular regard to accuracy, fairness, context, balance and bias, actual or perceived" (BBC, 2 May 2006). The panel commissioned and examined both quantitative and qualitative research and concluded that the majority of news reports did not provide viewers with "sufficient historical context," failing to mention, for instance, the fact that land annexations were still on-going in both East Jerusalem and the West Bank. The report also found that Israeli fatalities generated more coverage than Palestinian ones, and concluded that "overall the coverage tended to be "in favour of Israelis" (Gaber et al., 2009:240-241; Loughborough University, 2006:87). Some of the Panel's most significant conclusions include:

- A broad parity in BBC coverage taken as a whole in the amount of talk time and appearances given to Israeli and Palestinian party-political actors.
- A disparity (in favour of Israelis) existed in BBC coverage taken as a whole in the amount of talk time and appearances given to Israelis and Palestinian actors.

³⁶ This is explained as being due to the fact "there is no independent state of Palestine today". (Barkho, 2010:149)

- Aside from Israelis and Palestinians, talk time was given largely to either UK or US political or non-political actors. Third party positions either from the Middle East or from the rest of the world were marginalised in comparison to the presentation of UK and US perspectives.
- Some important themes were relatively overlooked in the coverage of the conflict, most notably in the recent period, the annexation of land in and around East Jerusalem.
- BBC journalists generally did not provide historical context in their reporting of the conflict.
- BBC broadcast news reported Israeli and Palestinian fatalities differently in that Israeli fatalities generally receive greater coverage than Palestinian fatalities. (2006:22)

Despite these shortcomings, a majority of participants in the research commissioned by the Panel were found to hold a view of the BBC as “impartial in its coverage of the conflict” (Gaber et al., 2009:240-241; Loughborough University, 2006:45). Overall, the Thomas Panel, while finding no evidence of “deliberate or systematic bias”, found that the BBC’s Middle-East output failed to “consistently give a full and fair account of the conflict”. To remedy these failures, the panel issued a list of conclusions and recommendations, most prominently the call for better provision of historical context (Gaber et al.,2009:241; Thomas, 2006:3–4). In a document presented to the Panel, the BBC’s management outlined the corporation’s overall Middle East editorial strategy, stating that “the choice of language in covering this part of the world is often seen as a determinant of impartiality, or its failure” (BBC 2005).

Several studies published over the past decade, including by Philo and Berry (2011); Loughborough University (2006) and Gaber et al. (2009:240), have reaffirmed many of the Thomas Panel’s conclusions, such as the unequal time allotted in the BBC’s coverage to representatives of the two sides of the conflict, as well as the amount of historical context provided to viewers. For Gaber (2009), there has been a distinct failure to adequately inform audiences about the twin major narratives of the ‘Holocaust’ and the ‘Nakba’, whose roles in shaping national identities, perceptions and discourses in the conflict are fundamental (Gaber et al., 2009:256). Barkho, who has produced extensive scholarship particularly focusing on the textual and discursive patterns of BBC coverage, often in a comparative context against that of Al-Jazeera or CNN, argues that BBC editors and journalists are often unaware of “how language, particularly at levels other than vocabulary, could be a good measure of impartiality” (Barkho, 2010). For instance, in his comparative examination using Critical Discourse Analysis

of the TV coverage of CNN, AJA and the BBC, Barkho (2009) found key differences in their editorial guidelines and approach, notably in their deployment of terminology. Whilst the BBC and CNN always referred to Israeli troops as “Israeli Defence Forces” or “IDF soldiers”, AJA used the term “Israeli occupation troops” (‘quat al-ihitlial al israeli’). Moreover, while the BBC and CNN referred to anti-Israeli groups as “militant”, AJA used the more positive term “resistance” (“muqawama”). Barkho’s findings lead him to conclude that a “discursive asymmetry” can be seen at work in the BBC’s editorial approach, and that the BBC fails in its responsibility to challenge the power discourse around the Middle East by taking into account the disparity in power between the two sides. As he states:

This is not a question of the respective merits of the two sides. It is simply a matter of fact that Israel is a functioning state with established democratic institutions, an advanced economy and a highly effective diplomatic, defence and intelligence capability. None of this is true of the Palestinian side... (Barkho, 2010: 147-148)

6.3 BBC and AJE’s coverage of the Gaza War of 2008-9

Recent years have seen a growing scholarly body of research into media coverage of the Gaza War of 2008-9/Operation Cast Lead. This notably includes studies by Edwards and Cromwell (2009), Pintak (2009), Ayish (2010), Barkho (2009, 2010), Philo and Berry (2011), Gilboa (2012), Merriman, (2012), Figenschou (2014), Kaposi (2014) and others. Pintak (2009) examined US domestic coverage of OCL, concluding that “the humanity, the scale and the context of the conflict” went “AWOL” particularly on US television coverage (Pintak, 2009:4). Kaposi (2014) conducted a “systematic, multimethod analysis” of OCL coverage in UK national broadsheets, including The Daily Telegraph, The Times, The Guardian, The Independent and The Financial Times, and found that conservative newspapers “were dominated by news articles ... thus putting more emphasis on news than on context” (Kaposi, 2014:33). Many of the reviewed studies noted the absence or inadequate inclusion of historical context in Western news reporting. For instance, Edwards and Cromwell (2009) examined the BBC’s online coverage of OCL and found that “despite mentioning that Hamas rockets had killed 28 Israelis since 2001”, there was “no mention of the fact that 5,000 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli strikes over the same period” (Edwards & Cromwell, 2009:154). In *More Bad News from Israel* (2011), Philo and Berry revisited and expanded their 2004 study, notably with the addition of an examination of news reporting of the Gaza War of 2008-9 in BBC and ITV evening news bulletins. Their findings, the authors state in their conclusion:

In some respects echo those of the earlier studies. While the broadcast media give a clear account of the Israeli perspective on this conflict, many journalists, and especially in the BBC still find great difficulty in doing the same for the Palestinians. (Philo & Berry, 2011:394)

Studies by Gilboa (2012) and Merriman (2012) examined AJE's coverage of OCL from an Israeli and Palestinian perspective, respectively. Gilboa (2012) conducted a comparative framing analysis of AJE, BBC and CNN coverage of OCL, and used el-Nawaway and Powers's conciliatory media model to assess whether AJE's OCL reporting fulfils the model's criteria. "In this particular warfare", he argues, "AJE's coverage followed the typical symptoms of war journalism," failed to provide "necessary context," and "fully adopted the Hamas humanitarian disaster framing and casualties' strategy" (Gilboa, 2012:151). He concludes:

Given all these failures, and the results of the framing comparative analysis, viewers and readers of BBC World and CNN International and other global networks received a much more accurate and balanced picture of OCL than did those of AJE. AJE may have positively contributed to certain areas of broadcasting about the Arab world. Unfortunately, so far this hasn't been the case for the Arab-Israeli conflict. (Gilboa, 2012, in Seib, 2012:156)

For her part, Merriman (2012) examined AJE's overall coverage of the Gaza War 2008-9 with a focus on the wider political context. She found that AJE's coverage was "professional" and provided a counter to Israeli PR. As she concludes:

The achievement of AJE is that it succeeded, through its reporting, in counteracting the propaganda the Israeli military had spread before and during the assault on Gaza, with the American mainstream media's willing help. So, for example, by allowing viewers to see and hear Gazans quietly assembling over the rubble of mosques to pray, it showed that terrorism is not inextricably linked to their schools or mosques. (Merriman, 2012, in Seib 2012:134)

Perhaps the most comprehensive comparative study of OCL reporting to date is Figenschou's (2014) study of BBC, CNN and AJE coverage, which comparatively examined thematic and sourcing aspects over a 7-day period of OCL coverage, noting the contrast between the scale of coverage dedicated by the BBC and AJE to the conflict, which "demonstrated how strongly the Al Jazeera Network prioritized the Gaza War" (Figenschou, 2014:129). For Pintak (2009),

AJE's "War on Gaza" on-screen banner was an explicit indication of its stance of identifying with the civilian population rather than Hamas. For Figenschou, however:

AJE's template WAR ON GAZA underlines that it is Gaza that is being attacked (by Israel) although Hamas continued firing rockets into Israel throughout the war. The Anglo-American templates present the war as a crisis or conflict without stressing the asymmetry between the actors. (Figenschou, 2014:128-129)

Figenschou's study will be revisited in further detail in the discussion chapter, but some of her most important findings in the context of the present research are worth noting here. The study found that "the BBC stress[ed] the political developments, CNN underscore[ed] the military developments, and AJE underlin[ed] the social aspects." The study also found that AJE "prioritized live coverage to a much higher extent" than the BBC. Examining the location of the broadcasts, the study found that twice as many AJE news items were reported from the Palestinian territories than from Israel, which, Figenschou notes, "sets it apart from the overwhelmingly Israeli-centered Western reporting." The study also found that the BBC's reporting from Israel and Gaza accounted for 35% and 16% of its coverage, respectively. Whereas AJE's reporting from Gaza accounted for a quarter of all coverage, compared to 16% from Israel (Figenschou, 2014:129-130). Figenschou notes that "both AJE and the BBC seem to have striven to balance Israeli and Palestinian official voices, whereas CNN interviewed solely Israeli officials who were all repeating the Israeli core frame". However, "Israeli and Palestinian officials were granted about the same airtime, while AJE devoted more time to the Palestinian side (Hamas and Fatah) than to the Israeli officials" (Figenschou, 2014:133-134).

6.4 Conclusion

The survey of the scholarly literature on the historical, political and organisational contexts of Al-Jazeera and the BBC conducted in this chapter highlights some key parallels between the two organisations and their respective English-language news channels. Despite clear differences in terms of their history, institutional culture, organisational structure and core audience, both BBC News and Al-Jazeera English share a number of important similarities: Both belong to national broadcasters with financial and structural links to national governments, and have at various junctures dealt with political pressures from their national governments. Yet both fiercely maintain their claims to having an independent and distinct organisational culture and values. Moreover, both the BBC and Al-Jazeera place the pursuit of professional

excellence in their journalism at the heart of their official institutional and corporate identity. Ideals such as objectivity, fairness and impartiality receive great emphasis in both broadcasters' official articulation of their journalistic mission and editorial values. Furthermore, both Al-Jazeera and the BBC have attracted scrutiny and criticism over their coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, often for contrasting reasons.

And yet, as the findings of previous studies suggest, Al-Jazeera and BBC coverage of the Gaza War 2008-9 featured significant qualitative and quantitative differences. This raises important questions in the context of the present research, notably about the specific nature of these differences in coverage and the reasons behind them. For instance, what are the key thematic production factors that have most shaped their editorial approach in their coverage of the Gaza War of 2008-9? What role did the professional assumptions and self-conceptions of AJE and BBC journalists play in shaping their respective approaches to the coverage? How did Al-Jazeera's extensive presence in Gaza during the conflict, at a time when the BBC's international team of correspondents was unable to access the territory, impact differences in coverage across various thematic areas? Did Qatari and British foreign policy positions with regards to the Gaza War 2008-9 influence AJE and BBC's editorial choices?

That Al-Jazeera's emergence is deeply entwined with the BBC's own attempt to launch an Arabic TV channel in the mid-1990s heightens these parallels. These cultural, operational and technical overlaps bolster the significance and merit of the comparative empirical examination of their news coverage and news production undertaken in this research.

To answer these questions, the empirical investigation undertaken in this research operates along two strands: a comparative content analysis of AJE and BBC coverage of OCL, on the one hand, and fieldwork interviews with former and current BBC and Al-Jazeera journalists, many of whom with extensive knowledge and personal experience with BBC/AJE coverage of the 2008-9 conflict, on the other. The next chapter presents the methodological framework underpinning the empirical component of the research.

CHAPTER SEVEN: Methodology

The previous four chapters (Chapters Two to Six) have provided an overview of the literature across four main strands of scholarship and theory underpinning this research:

- The histories and dual narratives of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- Theories of journalistic values and news production in a global context.
- Scholarship on news reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.
- The political, cultural and institutional backgrounds of Al-Jazeera and the BBC.

This survey of the scholarly landscape offers the basis for a conceptual and theoretical framework to inform and guide the empirical research. The second half of the thesis — the next four chapters — is thus concerned with presenting and critically engaging with the empirical research findings. In this chapter, the methodological approach adopted for the empirical component of this research, which combines content analysis and fieldwork research and interviews, is presented.

7.1 Research Aim and Questions

As indicated in the introduction, the aim of the present research is to map out the differences between BBC News and Al-Jazeera English's respective coverage of Operation Cast Lead, and to examine the role of news production factors in shaping these differences. To that end, and informed by the theoretical framework presented in the first half of this thesis, the researcher will seek to answer the following key research questions:

1. What are the significant features, both qualitative and quantitative, of BBC and AJE's reporting of Operation Cast Lead? In particular:
 - a. What are the key thematic areas of BBC/AJE coverage, and the key similarities and differences between BBC and AJE in terms of their thematic, sourcing and framing approaches?
 - b. How were Israeli and Palestinian narratives and perspectives represented in the BBC and AJE's coverage, respectively?
2. What are the principal news production factors that have shaped BBC News and AJE's coverage of Operation Cast Lead?

3. How do the empirical findings, of the content analysis and the interviews, relate to and inform the scholarly literature on news reporting of the Middle East and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict?
4. How do the two categories of empirical findings — the content analysis and interview findings — inform and relate to one another?
5. What role did BBC/AJE journalists' professional assumptions and self-conceptions, especially regarding the values and mission of journalism, play in shaping their approach to the coverage?

The two main empirical chapters, Chapter Eight (Content Analysis) and Chapter Nine (Interview Findings) address Questions 1 and 2, respectively. The Discussion Chapter (Chapter Ten) brings together the findings and insights of the previous nine chapters in order to address Questions 3, 4 and 5.

In seeking to answer these questions, the researcher aims to help fill a gap in the existing literature by providing:

- The first in-depth and systemic comparative examination of AJE and BBC News reporting of the Gaza War of 2008-9 that brings together sourcing, thematic and close textual analyses of the coverage across its entire 22-day duration.
- The first examination of BBC News and AJE reporting of OCL to systemically analyse the five thematic categories of the coverage: Israeli/Palestinian perspectives, historical and political contextualisation, world reactions and protests, humanitarian Impact and legality, and operational and military updates.
- The first major comparative examination of the role of differences in professional assumptions and journalistic self-conceptions in shaping BBC and Al-Jazeera's news coverage of the Gaza War of 2008-9.

In order to address the research questions, the present research combines two key empirical components:

- **Content Analysis:** The researcher conducted a series of comparative sourcing, thematic and textual analyses of AJE and BBC's coverage of OCL, in order to identify their key patterns, similarities and differences. In particular, the content analysis examined how AJE and BBC covered key thematic areas — historical and political

context, world reaction and protests, legality, humanitarian impact and military updates — as well as how they reported Israeli and Palestinian explanatory themes, rationales and defences of action. The analysis also examined patterns of sourcing and the dominant framings of BBC/AJE coverage.

- **Fieldwork interviews:** The researcher conducted a series of fieldwork interviews, in the UK and in Qatar, with media scholars, journalists and media professionals with experience of reporting the Israeli-Palestinian conflict — including BBC and AJE journalists with first-hand involvement in coverage of the Gaza War of 2008/9.

The key findings of the comparative content analysis and fieldwork interviews are presented in the next two chapters (Chapters Eight and Nine), respectively, and will form the basis for a discussion, presented in Chapter Ten, of the content analysis results and how they relate to the production factors and constraints – organisational, institutional, ideological, political, logistical and cultural — that have shaped AJE and BBC’s coverage of OCL. Some final comments and recommendations for both media professionals and researchers are presented in the Conclusion chapter (Chapter Eleven).

7.2 Data Collection

The content analysis undertaken in this research involved examining BBC News and AJE news coverage of the Gaza War of 2008/9, also known as ‘Operation Cast Lead’ (OCL)³⁷. The *BBC News at Ten* and AJE’s *Newshour* evening news programmes were selected for this purpose, principally because they share a similar status as their respective channels’ flagship news programmes with a similar editorial remit focused on international news³⁸. Launched in November 2006, *Newshour* is AJE’s main news bulletin, and the first English language global news programme to be broadcast from the Middle East. The show is produced either in Doha or London, sometimes in combination, with seven daily editions (broadcast at 0200, 1000, 1300, 1500, 1800, 2100 and 2300 GMT). The programme is 60-minutes long³⁹ and features a

³⁷ As indicated at the outset of this research, the terms ‘Operation Cast lead’, ‘OCL’, ‘the Gaza War 2008/9’, ‘the Gaza conflict 2008-9’, will be used interchangeably throughout this thesis for the sake of readability and convenience. This is not to ignore the problematic or contested aspects of these terms.

³⁸ BBC News at Ten is also broadcast on the BBC One and BBC Parliament domestic channels.

³⁹ For much of the duration of the conflict, AJE increased the duration of NewsHour from the standard 65 minutes to 90-minute editions.

global news and sport round-up. *BBC News at Ten* is the BBC's flagship evening news programme, broadcast daily on the BBC News channel and BBC One channels. It is 30-minutes long and features both national and international news. DVD recordings of Newshour (6PM GMT/9PM Doha bulletin) and BBC's 'News at Ten' bulletins were requested and obtained from the broadcasters for the 22-day period of Operation Cast Lead (27 Dec 2008 to 17 Jan 2009).

The researcher's preference was to examine the World News Today programme on the BBC News channel for this research, which runs at an hour per edition, as this would have provided a closer comparative equivalent to AJE's NewsHour. Although the researcher was able to secure a handful of the relevant daily editions of World News Today from BBC contacts, requests for digital copies of the programme for the entire 22-day period of OCL were unsuccessful as the content was no longer available on the BBC's online archive. The researcher contacted BBC Studios, the BBC's commercial subsidiary, at bbcstudioslearning@bbc.com with a request for the material. However, commercially purchasing the content proved prohibitively expensive. The researcher asked whether screener copies could be made available for academic purposes but received the following response: "Unfortunately, we do not have any readily available screeners of that content. There may be options on YouTube." However, the researcher was not able to locate any usable copies of World News Today bulletins on YouTube or any other similar platforms (this remains the case as of August 2021). In this context, the researcher decided to use the BBC's News at Ten bulletins for the comparative content analysis. A detailed account of the procurement process for both AJE and BBC archival content is provided in Appendix E.

7.3 Data Analysis

In total, the researcher viewed all 44 DVDs of BBC and AJE archival material in their entirety, in order to locate and transcribe any segments relating to Israel/Palestine or OCL/Gaza in each one. The researcher personally carried out the transcription process, which took a total of approximately 150 hours, spread over several weeks. This resulted in an AJE transcript of 182,690 words and a BBC transcript of 22,705 words, totalling 205,395 transcribed words. In addition to transcribing the videos, the researcher noted and recorded all key metrics relating to each segment of OCL/Gaza coverage, including its duration, length (in lines of text) and word count. Table 7.1 below provides an overall summary, including daily breakdowns, of these statistics for both BBC and AJE for the 22-day period of coverage:

Day	Date	Lines		Duration		Word Count	
		BBC	AJE	BBC	AJE	BBC	AJE
1	27-Dec-08	48.25	376	00:05:27	1:02:13	1975	6873
2	28-Dec-08	51	408.25	00:05:22	1:01:05	856	7596
3	29-Dec-08	54.5	376.75	00:06:12	1:03:22	922	6565
4	30-Dec-08	67.5	1016.25	00:07:28	1:52:00	1195	14805
5	31-Dec-08	19	459.5	00:02:05	0:55:55	1224	8687
6	01-Jan-09	25.25	272.5	00:02:53	1:03:03	431	5091
7	02-Jan-09	39.5	405.25	00:04:27	0:55:35	677	7677
8	03-Jan-09	60.25	340	00:06:12	1:10:03	1013	6455
9	04-Jan-09	81.75	435.25	00:08:09	1:50:24	1396	8292
10	05-Jan-09	90.75	588.25	00:09:21	1:47:19	1550	11331
11	06-Jan-09	98.25	483	00:10:18	1:03:05	1655	8887
12	07-Jan-09	98	578	00:10:17	1:36:59	1687	10405
13	08-Jan-09	68	392.75	00:07:19	1:50:32	1165	7135
14	09-Jan-09	64.75	383.5	00:07:13	1:45:04	1128	6776
15	10-Jan-09	44.5	377	00:04:45	1:01:03	721	6796
16	11-Jan-09	40.25	331.75	00:04:08	1:37:16	647	5811
17	12-Jan-09	27.5	388.25	00:02:45	1:36:22	463	6806
18	13-Jan-09	20.75	522.25	00:02:42	1:38:15	330	9325
19	14-Jan-09	63	463.5	00:06:16	1:38:15	725	8461
20	15-Jan-09	48.25	559.5	00:05:01	1:32:52	813	10028
21	16-Jan-09	57.25	490	00:05:33	1:34:15	985	8641
22	17-Jan-09	69.25	564.8	00:07:11	1:48:44	1147	10247
TOTAL		1237.5	10212.3	02:11:04	31:23:41	22705.00	182690.00
AVERAGE		56.25	464.195455	00:05:57	1:25:37	1032.05	8304.09

Table 7. 1 BBC News at Ten and AJE News Hour Daily Coverage of OCL – Statistical Overview

As can be seen, while both transcripts represented a big enough sample for the purposes of the study, the AJE transcript was more than eight times as long as the BBC one — a significant disparity considering a Newshour episode is only twice the length of a News at Ten bulletin. A key factor behind the disparity was Al-Jazeera English’s decision during the 22-day period of the OCL to allocate almost the entirety of its Newshour airtime to covering the conflict in Gaza and its impact, and at times to extend the programme into a 90-minute edition. This disparity naturally posed a methodological dilemma. In order to address this, the researcher reviewed the Newshour footage and decided to restrict the analysis to the first half hour, as it usually was dedicated to the most important and urgent breaking news developments (whereas the second half-hour was more focused on reporting the broader context and analysis). While this was far from being an ideal solution, the first half of *Newshour* was deemed to offer an acceptable

counterpart to News at Ten’s coverage in the context of the present research, since they both focused on the latest daily developments. Nevertheless, the disparity in length had to be taken into account in undertaking the content analysis and thus, in order to minimise or mitigate its effect, the researcher made the decision to examine thematic patterns and distributions proportionally (in terms of % of output) as well as in absolute terms of lines of text (as is more common in thematic analyses such as the GMG methodology and others).

The researcher then proceeded to produce a detailed information sheet for each daily bulletin, including key timestamps and length (in lines of text) of each individual segment:

- The name of the source⁴⁰ speaking: e.g., Jeremy Bowen or Shereen Tadros
- The title of the speaker: e.g., AJE newscaster, BBC editor, UN spokesperson
- The location of the speaker/segment
- Broadcast category of segment: Live or recorded interview, video-link, studio guest etc

In total, 44 such information sheets were produced, covering all 44 BBC and AJE bulletins. One of the information sheets, for Day 11’s BBC bulletin, is reproduced in Table 7.2 below:

BBC — OCL — Day 11									
06-Jan-09									
Day 11									
	Lines	Duration		Lines	Start	Finish	Length	Type	
Newscaster	23.25	00:01:58	FULL REPORT						
BBC staff	55.5	00:06:01	BBC Newscaster, London	2.25	00:00:00	00:00:15	00:00:15	Live London Studio	
Israel Spox	4	00:00:25	John Ging (Head of UN), Gaza	1.5	00:00:16	00:00:26	00:00:10	Recorded Clip	
Palestinian Spox	2.5	00:00:21	Mark Regev, Israeli PM’s Spokesman, Tel-Aviv	1	00:00:26	00:00:32	00:00:06	Recorded Clip	
Israeli voices	2.25	00:00:23	BBC Newscaster, London	1	00:00:33	00:00:38	00:00:05	Live London Studio	
Palestinian voices	2.75	00:00:20	BBC Newscaster, London	6.25	00:01:39	00:02:12	00:00:33	London Live Studio	
US Spox	0	00:00:00	BBC Correspondent (Paul Woods) Israel-Gaza border	4.25	00:02:14	00:03:02	00:00:48	Recorded Report	
EU - Quartet	4	00:00:23	John Ging, (Head of UN), Gaza	2.5	00:03:02	00:03:19	00:00:17	Recorded Clip	
Protesters	0	00:00:00	BBC Correspondent, Paul Wood	3.5	00:03:21	00:03:46	00:00:25	Recorded Report	
Arab spox	0	00:00:00	Fauzi Barhoum, Hamas Spokesman, Gaza	2.5	00:03:47	00:04:08	00:00:21	Dubbed Recorded Interview	
Dissident Israeli voices	0	00:00:00	Mark Regev, Israeli PM’s Spokesman, Tel-Aviv	3	00:04:09	00:04:28	00:00:19	Recorded Interview	
UN & NGO	4	00:00:27	BBC Correspondent (Paul Woods) Israel-Gaza border	2	00:04:31	00:04:45	00:00:14	Recorded Report	
Experts	0	00:00:00	Unnamed Palestinian resident	1	00:04:48	00:04:56	00:00:08	Dubbed Recorded Interview	
US voices	0	00:00:00	BBC Correspondent (Paul Woods) Israel-Gaza border	1.75	00:04:57	00:05:08	00:00:11	Recorded Report	
Israeli Journalists	0	00:00:00	BBC Producer (Rushdi Abu-Alouf), Gaza	4.25	00:05:09	00:05:34	00:00:25	Recorded Report	
Qatar Emir	0	00:00:00	BBC Producer (Rushdi Abu-Alouf), Gaza	1	00:05:35	00:05:39	00:00:04	Recorded Interview	
AJE staff	0	00:00:00	Khaled, Gaza Resident	1.75	00:05:40	00:05:52	00:00:12	Recorded Interview	
TOTAL	98.25	00:10:18	BBC Correspondent (Paul Woods), Israel Gaza border	5.75	00:05:54	00:06:32	00:00:38	Recorded Report	
			BBC Newscaster, London	7.25	00:06:33	00:07:10	00:00:37	Live London Studio	
			BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem	9.75	00:07:16	00:08:15	00:00:59	Recorded Report	
			Israeli citizen	2.25	00:08:17	00:08:40	00:00:23	Recorded Interview	
			BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem	11.25	00:08:43	00:09:56	00:01:13	Recorded Report	
			BBC Newscaster, London	1.75	00:09:57	00:10:04	00:00:07	Live London Studio	
			Gordon Brown (British Prime Minister)	4	00:10:05	00:10:28	00:00:23	Recorded Clip	
			BBC Newscaster, London	4.25	00:10:29	00:10:49	00:00:20	Live Interview	
			BBC Correspondent (Matthew Price) New York	12	00:10:50	00:11:54	00:01:04	Live Interview	
			BBC Newscaster, London	0.5	00:11:56	00:11:57	00:00:01	Live London Studio	
			TOTAL LINES	98.25		TIME	00:10:18		

Table 7. 2 An example of a daily News Bulletin Information Sheet

⁴⁰ For convenience, throughout this thesis the term ‘source’ is used to denote both ‘internal’ sources (i.e. BBC/AJE anchors and reporters) and ‘external’ sources (e.g. officials, experts, ordinary citizens).

7.4 BBC Online Coverage

For the purposes of exploring a number of research questions raised by the content analysis findings, the researcher conducted a further round of thematic analysis examining the BBC's 22-day online coverage of OCL. All articles published on the BBC website in relation to the Gaza War/OCL during the 22 day-period of the conflict were collected and collated. The material was then thematically coded using the same coding methodology adopted for the rest of the content analysis (and described in detail later in this chapter). In total, the researcher examined 76 articles published on the BBC News website during the 22-day period of OCL, which corresponded to 3420.25 lines and 56,249 words. A detailed list of all 76 articles is included in Appendix G.

The aim of including the BBC online content analysis in this research was principally to inform the discussion of the content analysis and production factors findings conducted in Chapter Ten, notably by highlighting any significant similarities or differences in thematic emphasis between the BBC's broadcast and online coverage. The researcher considered integrating the BBC's online content into the main analysis but opted against it for considerations of methodological consistency. The researcher also considered including AJE's online coverage in the analysis but this proved to be beyond the scale and scope of this thesis.

7.5 Content Analysis: A methodological overview

This section provides an overview of the theoretical basis of the content analysis concepts, tools and methodologies used in this research. There is a substantial scholarly tradition, first emerging in the 1960s, of conducting media and communication research through the close examination of media texts and discourses as "outward manifestation of a communication event" (Garrett & Bell, 1998: 3). This has produced an ever-growing plethora of frameworks and methodologies for content analysis, including most notably: Discourse Analysis, Critical Discourse Analysis, and Thematic Analysis. (Fairclough, 1989; Van Dijk, 1988; Philo, 2011; Stubbe et al., 2003; Smith & Bell, 2011)

Most notably, Van Dijk (1988) introduced a framework for analysing news discourse by combining the production and interpretation of news output with a textual analysis — principally using a syntactic structure, which he termed a 'schemata', to describe the rules guiding the structural and thematic patterns of news content. Fairclough (1995) subsequently proposed a framework for critical discourse analysis involving "three overlapping dimensions of text, discourse practice and sociocultural practice" which placed great emphasis on the interrelationship between the three dimensions (Smith & Bell, 2011:86).

Over the past three decades, the Glasgow University Media Group (GMG) has developed its own framework for thematic analysis, which it applied in empirical studies examining a number of news topics — such as international conflicts and industrial disputes — and which explored the role of the media in ideological contests and the impact of news reporting on audience understanding (Glasgow University Media Group, 1980,1985; Philo, 2007, 2012). In his comparative review of the models proposed by GMG, Van Dijk and Fairclough, GMG co-founder Greg Philo (2007) notes that:

Discourse analysis which remains text-based has problems in its ability to show: (1) the origins of competing discourses and how they relate to different social interests, (2) the diversity of social accounts compared to what is present (and absent) in a specific text, (3) the impact of external factors such as professional media practice on the manner in which the discourses are represented, and (4) what the text actually means to different parts of the audience. (Philo, 2007:175)

The fourth limitation listed by Philo is highlighted by Smith and Bell (2011), who note that “it is important to acknowledge that audiences can interpret media language (signs or codes) in ways that differ from what the creator of those codes intended as the preferred reading.” This echoes the observation made by Stuart Hall (1980) in his “encoding/decoding” model that “audiences are not passive, but capable of decoding messages according to their own social identity. The meaning of the text is seen as situated somewhere between its producer and its reader.” (Smith & Bell, in Devereux, 2011:82-83)

Overcoming these limitations of purely text-based approaches, Philo argues, “requires a method which analyses processes of production, content, reception and circulation of social meaning simultaneously” (Philo, 2007:175). This proposal is endorsed by Cottle (2003), who contends that:

If we want to understand why media representations assume the forms that they do as well as the silences found within media discourse, we cannot rely upon readings of media texts alone, no matter how analytically refined and methodologically sophisticated these may be. (Cottle, 2003:5)

Accordingly, the GMG thematic analysis approach involves not only textual analysis of media output, but also the investigation of news production factors and the impact on audience reception and understanding produced by the media discourse. In this context, the concept of

'circulation' is central to the GMG framework, and involves a continuous interaction between "the key dimensions of production, content and reception" (Philo, 2011:129).

Due to methodological limitations of scope, the present research is primarily focused on the two first dimensions highlighted by Philo: "production" and "content". Accordingly, the empirical component of this research will involve deploying content analysis methodologies and tools to examine the 'content' dimension of BBC/AJE coverage, whilst the 'production' dimension will be investigated principally through a combination of fieldwork research and interviews, and secondary research.

Thematic Analysis

The second dimension of the content analysis is the thematic analysis. As Philo and Berry explain, a thematic analysis approach:

... is based on the assumption that in any contentious area there will be competing ways of describing events and their history. Ideas are linked to interests and these competing interests will seek to explain the world in ways which justify their own position. So ideology (by which we mean an interest-linked perspective) and the struggle for legitimacy go hand in hand. (Philo & Berry, 2011:174)

This is an important dimension of the analysis because it allows for disparities in the coverage to be detected even if there is an apparent 'balance' at the surface level of the explicitly stated perspectives in the text. In the context of the present research, the thematic analysis aims to examine AJE/BBC coverage of OCL by investigating the ways in which each is organised around — and includes or excludes — key thematic explanations.

A central concept in this regard is that of 'explanatory theme', which is defined as "an assumed explanation" that "gives a pattern or structure to an area of coverage" (Philo & Berry, 2011:175) Crucially, an explanatory theme does not necessarily need to be explicitly articulated in the coverage for it to be operational, but rather, as Philo and Berry put it:

The crucial point is that the pattern of the coverage and the subjects that it highlights can assume the explanation even without it being directly stated. (Philo & Berry, 2011:175)

This highlights another notable aspect of the GMG approach, which is that it starts by surveying and documenting not only the relevant historical and political context of the topic area of the news text, but also of the different narratives and arguments put forth by various parties. As

such, this approach is well placed to uncover thematic patterns that might not be self-evident from a reading of the text on its own.

As discussed in Chapters Two, Three and Four, media coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian conflict has largely been shaped around a twin set of narratives, Israeli and Palestinian, regarding the historical and political origins and dimensions of the conflict. Over the past decades, these narratives have often come to be represented largely in the form of explanatory themes of the sort highlighted by Philo and others. Moreover, as discussed above and in earlier chapters, the role of production factors in shaping media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been especially notable. As discussed in Chapter Four, there is notable evidence in the literature of the importance of factors such as public relations, political lobbying, logistical considerations, and professional and ideological assumptions in shaping reporting of the I/P conflict. In light of the above, the researcher concluded that GMG-style **content thematic analysis** is the ideal methodological approach for addressing the research questions guiding this research.

Based on this, the researcher assembled a list of more than 150 Palestinian and Israeli explanatory statements and perspectives, which were found to commonly feature as part of the wider twin set of 'narratives' deployed by the two sides. The list encompassed explanatory themes relating to historical questions, such the 1948 and 1967 wars, the refugee question and the Israeli occupation, as well as themes around the immediate context of the Gaza War 2008/9, such as the causes of the conflict and the rationales and defences of actions put forth by the two sides. The list was informed by the literature review conducted in Chapters Two to Four, as well as by a survey of official and unofficial statements made by Israeli and Palestinian representatives and non-official voices before and during OCL. Overall, the following sources were used as the basis for formulating the table of explanatory themes used in the research:

- The findings of the literature review surveyed in Chapters Two and Three of this thesis.
- Transcripts of AJE and BBC coverage of OCL.
- Public statements and press releases published by Israeli and Palestinian officials, as made available online on official governmental websites or reported in media coverage.
- Statements and reports relating to the conflict released by the UN and Non-Governmental organisations.

- A survey by the researcher of media coverage of OCL in a selection of English and Arabic-language sources, including the BBC News website, the Guardian, Al-Quds Al-Arabi and Haaretz.

The explanatory statements were divided into several categories reflecting different dimensions and aspects of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as ‘Histories and origins of the conflict’, ‘Causes of Operation Cast Lead’ and ‘Israeli defences of OCL actions.’ The full list of the explanatory themes/perspectives is provided in Appendix A. For instance, Table 7.3 below presents the list of explanatory themes in the ‘Israeli defences of OCL actions’ category:

Israeli defences of OCL actions	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives
	501 Israel has a right to defend itself	601 OCL is an act of aggression
	502 Heavy civilian toll is not intended	602 Heavy civilian toll is deliberate
	503 Israel only strikes military/terror targets	603 Israel routinely attacks civilian targets
	504 Israel tries hard to minimise casualties	604 Israel's priority is minimising risk to its soldiers
	505 Any civilian casualties are mistakes	605 Israel deliberately targets civilians
	506 Israel uses leaflets/SMS to warn civilians	606 Civilians have nowhere to flee
	507 Police stations are military targets	607 Police stations are civilian buildings
	508 Civilian locations are used to launch attacks	608 Hamas does not use civilian locations
	509 Hamas uses human shields	609 Hamas does not use human shields
	510 Hamas places military targets next to civilians	610 Densely-populated civilian areas should not be targeted
	511 Israel's strikes are 'surgical'	611 These strikes often hit civilian targets
	512 Hamas actions to blame for heavy civilian toll	612 Israel is to blame for heavy civilian toll
	513 Israel is a very moral army	613 Israeli soldiers often breach international law
	514 Israel is acting within international law	614 Israel is breaching international law

Table 7. 3 Israeli defenses of OCL actions: Explanatory themes

It is important to highlight there that the list of explanatory themes is not intended to be exhaustive, nor is it meant to reflect the views of all Palestinians and Israelis. Rather, it was produced to help inform both the thematic coding process and the discussion of the results, as well as when deploying textual analysis to examine the use of Israeli/Palestinian framings by AJE/BBC journalists.

In order to conduct the thematic analysis, the researcher classified coverage into a set of key thematic areas. The researcher experimented with a number of configurations of themes and sub-themes, based on using the resources listed above, including an examination of the transcripts, the scholarly literature (notably Philo and Berry’s own approach in *Bad News from Israel*), and the wider coverage and commentary relating to Gaza War of 2008-2009.

After experimenting with several iterations and configurations, the researcher settled on the following five main thematic areas of coverage, which comprised a total of 97 sub-themes (i.e. coding variables):

Thematic Area 1: Israeli and Palestinian Perspectives

This thematic area groups together all passages in the coverage where Israeli or Palestinian perspectives are being presented or reported.

Israeli perspectives:

This includes Israeli explanatory statements or rationales for launching OCL, such as the need to ‘protect Israeli citizens’ or to ‘stop Hamas rockets’; as well as Israeli defences of the state’s actions and conduct of the war, such as claims that Hamas uses ‘human shields’ or that the IDF uses “surgical strikes” and tries to warn civilians ahead of strikes against buildings in their area. A summary version of the key themes of the Israeli narrative around the Gaza War 2008/2009 is presented in Table 7.4 below.

Gaza War/OCL: The Israeli Narrative
<p>Operation Cast Lead was launched by Israel as an act of self-defence, in response to an increase in rocket attacks by Hamas. After years of being subjected to such attacks, Israel had a duty to act to protect its citizens, and was thus left with no other option than to respond militarily. Israel’s war is on Hamas and not on the people of Gaza. Throughout OCL, Israel’s use of military force was precise, targeted and proportionate. Israel took great efforts to minimise the impact of military actions on Palestinian civilians, such as by dropping leaflets or sending warning messages. Hamas, on the other hand, deliberately targeted Israeli civilians and used Palestinian civilians as “human shields”. Israel is a Western democracy surrounded by radical extremist enemies, such as Hamas, Iran and Hezbollah, who are ideologically committed to its destruction. OCL, and Israel’s conflict with the Palestinians in general, is part of the global “war on terror” waged by other Western democracies against the forces of radical Islam.</p>

Table 7. 4 Gaza War/OCL: The Israeli Narrative

Palestinian Perspectives

This thematic area groups together all instances in the coverage where Palestinian perspectives are presented or reported. This includes Palestinian explanatory statements and rationales for action, such as “we have a right to resist” or “Hamas was democratically elected and has a duty to defend the people”, criticisms of Israeli defences, such as “there is nowhere safe in Gaza”

and “Israeli uses human shields”, as well as declamatory statements such as “Israel will weep tears of blood.”

Table 7.5 below provides a summary of the key themes of the Palestinian narrative around the Gaza War/OCL:

Gaza War/OCL: The Palestinian Narrative
<p>Israel deliberately broke the June 2008 Ceasefire with Hamas by killing 6 Palestinians inside Gaza on November 4, 2008. Hamas resumed rocket attacks in response to Israel breaking the ceasefire and not abiding by its conditions, including its refusal to lift its 18-month blockade on Gaza and allow food and medical supplies in. The siege has created a humanitarian crisis in Gaza which has left the population woefully unprepared for Israel’s assault and has been made much worse by the conflict. Hamas has no other option but to respond militarily to Israel’s occupation, blockade and aggression. OCL is an act of collective punishment against the Gaza population for voting for Hamas, and is intended to turn them against their democratically elected government. Israel’s military actions are deliberately intended to wreak significant human and material destruction on Gaza’s population and its civilian infrastructure. Gaza is a densely populated area with sealed borders, there is nowhere safe for civilians to run to. Hamas is a liberation and resistance movement against Israel’s occupation and dispossession of the Palestinian people. Israel is a Western ally and receives crucial support and patronage from the United States and other Western countries. By failing to act against Israeli aggression and impunity, the international community is complicit in the suffering and dispossession of the Palestinian people.</p>

Table 7. 5 Gaza War/OCL: The Palestinian Narrative

Thematic Area 2: Human Impact on Israelis/Palestinians & Legality

This topic covers any references to the impact of the conflict on the Israeli and Palestinian (principally Gazan) populations, respectively. This includes reporting of casualties, references to damage or destruction to civilian infrastructure (homes, hospitals) and mentions of the psychological impact (trauma, distress) of the violence on Israeli and Palestinian civilians. This thematic area also groups any references in the coverage to the subject of international law, principally any passages where the

legality or otherwise of military action (by either side), and accusations of breaches or war crimes, are mentioned or discussed.

Thematic Area 3: Historical and Political Context

This thematic area refers to any instances in the coverage where key elements of the historical and political context are presented to viewers. As such they encompass both historical references and more immediate elements of context:

Historical Background:

Several studies (Philo & Berry, 2004, 2011; Rotik, 2006) have shown how crucial knowledge of historical background can be in shaping audience perception and understanding of coverage of the Israel-Palestinian conflict. This thematic area thus encompasses any references in the coverage to important historical events and concepts relating to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, notably the 1947/48 war and the refugee question, the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli conflicts and Israel's subsequent occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, the First and Second Intifadas, the Oslo peace process and the building of illegal settlements, and Israel's unilateral disengagement from Gaza in 2005.

Immediate Context of OCL

This thematic area specifically groups all references in the coverage to the immediate context and circumstances of the launch of Operation Cast Lead. This notably includes references to the Egyptian-brokered ceasefire of June 2008, the Israeli raid of Nov 4th 2008, which some argue signalled the end of the ceasefire, as well as references to rocket attacks in the second half of 2008. The researcher also opted to include here key events that followed Israel's 'disengagement' from Gaza in 2005, notably the Lebanon War of 2006, Hamas's election victory in 2006, the siege and blockade imposed by Israel on the Gaza Strip since 2006/7, and the subsequent rise of the 'tunnel economy'.

Thematic Area 4: World Reaction and Protests

This thematic topic groups references in the coverage to reactions to OCL from the international community, particularly influential stakeholders in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, such as Quartet members (UN, US, EU, Russia) and Arab governments. This includes reporting of international mediation and UN diplomacy efforts, statements by world leaders in support or condemnation of either or both sides, as well as calls for

calm or for a ceasefire. This thematic area also includes all references in the coverage to regional and global protests taking place in relation to the Gaza War, whether in support of Israel, the Palestinians or just calling for an end to the bloodshed. Finally, this thematic area also includes references in the coverage to the US role, both in general terms and specifically in the context of Operation Cast Lead.

Thematic Area 5: Military and Ceasefire Updates

This thematic area groups any references in the coverage to reports of military actions and planning, including troop movements or descriptions of operational or logistical aspects of the conflict. This includes references to IDF strikes taking place or rockets being launched. Mentions of Israel's media ban on journalists, or AJE mentions that they are "the only broadcaster on the ground" are included as a sub-category under this theme. This thematic area also includes references to the prospects of a ceasefire, notably the conditions for one made by either or both sides.

The above-listed five thematic areas of coverage were further divided into a total of 97 subthemes which represent the coding variables. Using this list of thematic and sub-thematic categories, and the list of key explanatory themes discussed above, the researcher conducted a thematic coding of the AJE and BBC coverage under examination. Each of the 44 daily transcripts was converted into a Microsoft Excel sheet and colour-coded thematically, as can be seen in the screenshot reproduced in Figure 7.1 below. The transcript for each bulletin was divided into discrete rows. Each row corresponds to a single source speaking, whether this is the news anchor, a reporter or an outside source. For each row, the researcher thematically coded the text of what the source says. The length (calculated in lines of text) given to a particular theme is recorded in the relevant column (out of 97). For each bulletin, totals are also calculated for the number of lines and words per source, theme, and subtheme.

Sourcing Analysis

In addition to the thematic colour-coding, the researcher also developed a separate a colour-coded scheme to distinguish between source categories. This was used to produce a visual mapping of thematic as well as source distribution patterns of BBC and AJE coverage. The colour-coding scheme used in the sourcing analysis is presented in Table 7.6 below.

SOURCE CATEGORY	DESCRIPTION
Israeli Officials	Israeli political and military leaders and spokespeople
Palestinian Officials	Palestinian political and military leaders and spokespeople
Israeli Voices	Israeli civilians, Israeli dissidents
Palestinian Voices	Palestinian civilians and non-officials
UN/NGO officials	UN/NGO staff and representatives
Protesters	Individuals taking part in protests
Quartet/EU/US officials	Leaders and officials representing Quartet nations
Host Gov (UK/Qatar)	UK and Qatari Prime Ministers
Arab leaders	Arab leaders, diplomats officials
Experts	Nominally non-partisan political, legal, military and other experts
Other	Other sources
BBC reporters	BBC editors, correspondents, producers
AJE reporters	AJE editors, correspondents, producers
Newscasters	BBC/AJE anchors and newscasters

Table 7. 6 Source categories and colour-coding scheme

The colour coding scheme for different thematic areas can be seen in the top left corner of the sheet shown in Figure 7.1 The colour coding for the different sources/voices can be seen in the top right corner of the sheet.

Themes				VOICES																
IEX (end terror/rockets/hit Hamas/tunnels/end of ceasefire) ID (leaflets/no crisis/civilian cas/hum shields)				AJE Anchor		Dissident Israeli voices														
PEX (isolating Hamas, elections, under occupation, siege, resisting, liberation, Israel broke the ceasefire)				AJE reporter/correspondent/journalist		Protesters														
IC (ceasefire who?/Siege/Rockets decreased/tunnels/humanitarian crisis/4th Nov)/Elections/Isolating Hamas/2006				Palestinian Spox		Western, EU, Quartet spox														
Human impact - Israel (casualties, impact of rockets, other impact, shelters etc)				Israeli Spox		Nominally non-partisan experts														
Human impact - Palestine (casualties, suffering, destruction, food, medicine shortages, fear, escape)				Arab Spox		Gaza eye witnesses/residents														
World (Pro Israel/Pro Palestine/Blame Israel, Condemn Israel Hamas,Both, US, West, World/ Criticise Israel/Criticise Hamas)				US Spox		Israel eyewitnesses/residents														
Protest (for Israel, against Israel attack)				Qatari Emir		US vox pop														
History (Occupation, Refugees, Rockets, Land Loss, 2005 withdrawal, 1948/67/73/82/2006/ Hamas elections)				UN/NGO Spox																
International Law (UN Schools, Mosque, Media Building, White Phosphorus, Samouni Family, War Crimes)				Israeli journalists																
Military Updates (Troops, Ground offensive, Ceasefire prospects, Media Access)																				
US Support for Israel (Military Aid/Financial Aid/Israeli Lobby)																				
				00:02:36																
				00:25:50																
DAY 17	AJE Evening News, 12 January 2009	Lines	Word Count	IEX	ID	3-hr I Warn Hume	RKT	TNLS	OBJ	EC	SFR	TER	CR	DIS	SWO	Palestinian Perspective	PEX	PD	Resis	OCU
		387.75	6831																	
	Tzipi Livni, Israel's Foreign Minister, Jerusalem:																			
	In this operation, Israel distinguished its War against terror against Hamas members from the civil population of Gaza Strip and, in doing so, we keep the Humanitarian situation in Gaza Strip completely as it should be"	2.25		36		1.25								1						
	AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha:																			
	Streets gone; homes destroyed; our latest pictures show the toll Israel's attack is taking on Gaza. Children of the Gaza war, their families wiped out, their wounds refusing to heal as calls for action are growing louder and angrier.	2.25		39																
#PI	John Ging, Director of UNWRA, Gaza:																			
	"Right now, right now, what we need is a stop to the fighting"	0.75		13																
	AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha:																			
	And as smoke chokes the Strip, a political chess match is being played out across the region. This is day 17 of the war on Gaza.	1.25		26																
	AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha:																			
	I am Sami Zeidan, and this is Al Jazeera NEWSHOUR Gaza is being reduced to rubble. All day long, the Israeli war machine attacked from air, from sea, and land, and have made a terrible mark. The number of killed is now 917, almost 4,100 people seriously wounded. Well let's take a look at Monday's events. The Israeli military took aim at the heart of Palestinian cities and residential neighbourhoods it also bombed the smuggling tunnels along the Rafah border with Egypt. Israeli ground troops are also reported to have moved deeper into the Northern Gaza Strip meeting resistance from Palestinian fighters there. Fierce clashes also erupted in Gaza city in the Tofah and Zeitoun neighbourhoods as well as on its outskirts in Jabalia.	6.75		124						0.75										
#PI#IP	AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza:																			
	a scene of devastation as far as the eye can see. This is what Israel has done to large parts of Rafah city. We do see it to rubble making refugees of its inhabitants. Building floors collapsed on top of each other roads cracked wide open. And if the message from Israel's war machine was not clearer on the ground the skies over Rafah had another message. Israeli military leaflets warning residents to flee. People heeded those calls grabbing whatever they can and running for safety more than 25,000 people have fled their homes across the strip.	5.5		97		0.75														
#PI#IP#P	Child, Rafah Resident:																			
	The Jews told us to leave so everybody left. They called us told us to leave. I am scared.	0.75		19																
	AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza:																			

Figure 7. 1 Sample of Thematic and Sourcing Coding Transcript

Examples of the colour coding scheme are provided in the two segments below. For instance, light green colour-coding corresponds to references to the humanitarian impact on Palestinians (casualties, injuries, impact of war), whilst red colour-coding represents references to historical context. Israeli perspectives and rationales are coded in dark blue, while Palestinian ones are coded in dark green. Purple coding indicates reporting of world reactions, while olive green indicates military updates. Table 7.7 below shows the colour-coding for each thematic area of coverage:

Thematic Area of Coverage	Colour-Coding scheme
Israeli and Palestinian Perspectives	Israeli Perspectives (blue)
	Palestinian Perspective (green)
Historical and Political Context	Historical background (red)
	Palestinian Humanitarian Impact (light green)
Humanitarian Impact & Legality	Israeli Humanitarian Impact (aqua)
	Immediate Context to the conflict (grey)

	Legality International Law (light aqua),
World Reaction & protests	World Reaction (purple)
	Protests (yellow)
	US Support (dark blue).
Military and Ceasefire Updates	Military updates (olive green)

Table 7. 7 Colour-coding scheme for thematic analysis

Tables 7.8 and 7.9 below present two segments after they had been thematically coded, and the coding results for each:

<p>AJE Newscaster: They've suffered bombardment for five days, nearly 400 people are dead, but Israel is adamant, there won't be a truce in Gaza. In the past hour, a leading member of 'Hamas' has said it's willing to consider any initiative that will stop the aggression and end the siege. Well, Israeli tanks are still lined up along the border with Gaza and a meeting of the Security Cabinet ended with a rejection of calls for a truce and a vow to continue military operations, but the push for a diplomatic solution goes on, the Arab league has been meeting in Cairo, and Turkey's Prime Minister, Tayyip Erdogan, is touring the region hoping to fill the diplomatic void. (AJE, 31 December 2008)</p>													
	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Theme/s</th> <th>Length of thematic unit</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>Palestinian Humanitarian Impact</td> <td>1</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Israeli Perspective</td> <td>0.75</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Palestinian Perspective</td> <td>1.75</td> </tr> <tr> <td>Military Update</td> <td>0.75</td> </tr> <tr> <td>World Reaction</td> <td>2.5</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Theme/s	Length of thematic unit	Palestinian Humanitarian Impact	1	Israeli Perspective	0.75	Palestinian Perspective	1.75	Military Update	0.75	World Reaction	2.5
Theme/s	Length of thematic unit												
Palestinian Humanitarian Impact	1												
Israeli Perspective	0.75												
Palestinian Perspective	1.75												
Military Update	0.75												
World Reaction	2.5												

Table 7. 8 Example of thematic colour-coding results

BBC Correspondent: Israel’s military power depends on United States backing and so far, Washington has resisted calls for a ceasefire that would allow Hamas to continue rocketing Israeli towns. (BBC,4 January 2009)		
	Theme/s	Length of thematic unit
	US Support	2

Table 7. 9 Example of thematic colour-coding results

Once the thematic coding was completed for all 44 transcripts, the researcher collated and analysed the data, producing a set of detailed and summary tables and charts of the results. Separate tables were produced for each thematic area of coverage, so as to examine the sub-thematic distribution within them. The data was also collated and analysed for the distribution patterns of sources/voices in the coverage. For instance, the researcher produced tables charting coverage statistics (in total lines of text) for each category of speaker (e.g., Israeli officials, AJE anchors, or Gazan civilians) and statistics on the daily, as well as total, number of appearances per political or professional category of source. These results were then used in the sourcing analysis presented in Chapter Eight.

Once the initial coding and analysis phase was completed, a further element of coding was undertaken. In a separate column on the far left of each sheet, the researcher coded each row based on whether it included specific textual combinations. Some of the most common combinations are listed in Table 7.10 below:

#PP	Palestinian perspective presented on its own
#IP	Israeli perspective presented on its own
#PD	Palestinian declamatory statement presented on its own
#IPPP	Israeli rationale or defence followed by a Palestinian perspective or criticism
#PPIP	Palestinian perspective followed by an Israeli rationale of defence of action
#PDIP	Palestinian declamatory statement followed by Israeli rationale/defence of action

Table 7. 10 Coding textual patterns of Israeli and Palestinian perspectives

For instance, the code #PPPI was used to denote instances where a Palestinian perspective (PP) or rationale is followed immediately by an Israeli one (IP). An example of how this coding was used is presented in Figure 7.2 below.

	BBC Newscaster, London studio: 0:11:02 – 0:11:36
#PI#IP#PD	Israeli war planes have carried out a wave of attacks on the Gaza Strip in one of the bloodiest days of the conflict. Palestinian officials say more than 200 people had been killed in the raids Israel says the air strikes were in response to missile attacks on its country and that now is the time to fight. The targets were security compounds belonging to Hamas the militant group that controls Gaza they have vowed to revenge. The International community strongly condemned both sides and called for a peaceful solution to the conflict. Paul Wood reports.
	AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza:
#IP#PP	Well it really means that a variety of things. We have also heard from other Palestinians factions but let me first begin with Hamas. In the run up to today's airstrikes and developments there was increasing comments coming out from the Israeli Political and security establishment that are full military operation against Hamas and against the Gaza strip will take place. That prompted some very sharp criticism from Hamas in defiance of those threats that Hamas would not be deterred, and they had the right of what they called self-defence in the face of Israel's military aggression. They did not limit those operations to anything specific saying they would use any means necessary to defend the Palestinian people and to defend their rights to liberation what that could only mean we will certainly become more clear in the coming days. We have heard from Hamas officials condemn that. We have also heard from Palestinian factions condemn that vowing to avenge today's attacks saying Israel's airstrikes was a deceleration of war and now they have opened the door of revenge on themselves.

Figure 7. 2 Examples of coding I/P perspectives patterns

This coding scheme was introduced to monitor the frequency of certain textual combinations, in order to examine, for instance, whether Israeli rationales were more likely to be presented on their own than Palestinian ones, and vice versa. The decision to include this additional dimension of analysis was taken by the researcher after several reviews of the coverage, and was motivated by an interest in confirming whether the apparent prevalence of certain framing patterns was reflected in the numbers. The results of the analysis are presented in Section 8.3.2 of Chapter Eight (Content Analysis).

All of the key results, tables and charts representing the results of the sourcing, thematic and textual analysis are presented in the next chapter.

7.6 Intercoder Reliability Test

Intercoder reliability is the commonly used term to describe the extent to which independent coders evaluate a characteristic of a message or artifact and reach the same conclusion. (Lombard et al, 2002:589)

To validate the coding scheme used in the analysis of BBC/AJE content in this research, and to ensure a high level of reliability and reproducibility, a researcher with familiarity with the topic area of media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict agreed to act as an inter-reliability coder by conducting a content analysis of representative AJE and BBC samples using the exact coding scheme employed by the researcher in the content analysis. The sample text covered a total of six days of coverage, representing 15,516 words and 13.5% of the total lines examined in the content analysis. These include:

- Days 2 and 3 and 21 of AJE coverage (12,747 words)
- Days 2 and 3 and 21 of BBC coverage (2,769 words)

The complete coding instrument is presented in the section below. The inter-reliability coder was provided via e-mail with the following documents:

- An MS Excel sheet containing extracts of the AJE and BBC sample text
- The colour-coding table (shown in Table 7.7 above)
- The thematic area descriptions (as presented above in Section 7.4 of this chapter)
- The list of key explanatory themes (as provided in Appendix A)
- A coding manual providing a description each of the 97 coding variables (Provided in Appendix B)

Once the external coder's results were received the researcher conducted a comparison test to evaluate the coder's results against those of the researcher for the same sample. Miles and Huberman's (1994) inter-coder reliability formula was used in this research, according to which:

$$\text{Inter-coder reliability score} = \frac{\text{Number of agreements}}{\text{Number of agreements} + \text{Number of disagreements}}$$

The inter-coder reliability score was calculated for each of the 97 coding variables, and the results are presented in Table 7.11.

Thematic Category	OVERALL LEVEL OF AGREEMENT		Sub-thematic Code (Coding Variable)	BBC								AJE											
	92.6%			BBC Day 3		AG	BBC Day 21		AG	BBC Day 2		AG	AJE Day 3		AG	AJE Day 21		AG	AJE Day 2		AG		
	N	R		C	R	C	R	C	R	C	R	C	R	C	R	C	R	C	R	C			
Israeli Perspective	91.7%	83%	1	IEK	2.75	2.75	1	3.5	3.75	0	2.5	2.5	1	5.75	5.75	1	0	0	1	2.75	2.75	1	
		83%	2	ID	1.75	1.75	1	2.5	2.5	1	0	0	1	1.75	1.75	1	0	0	1	2.25	2	0	
		100%	3	3-hr Jul	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
		100%	4	WarnC	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
		100%	5	HumanShields	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
		83%	6	RKTS	0	0	1	0	0	1	6	6	1	5.75	6	0	0	0	1	3.75	3.75	1	0
		100%	7	TNLS	0	0	1	1	1	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
		100%	8	OBJECT	0	0	1	2.5	2.5	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
		83%	9	CSFR	0	0	1	7.5	7.5	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	15.5	15	0	0	0	0	1
		83%	10	TEROR	0	0	1	2.75	2.75	1	0.75	1	0	1	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1
		100%	11	DISVOIC	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	6	6	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0
		83%	12	O	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.25	1.25	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	4.75	5	0	1
		100%	13	PEX	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	1
		83%	14	PO	0.75	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	3	3	1	2.25	2.25	1	2.75	2.75	1	0
100%	15	Resistance	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	7	7	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	16	OCCJ	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.75	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	17	SIE/BLK	0	0	1	0.75	1	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	18	LIBERA	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	19	IsfaiObj	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	20	CSFR	0	0	1	2.5	2.5	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.25	1.5	0	0	0	0	1		
100%	21	Conspiracy	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	22	Declama	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	23	DISVOIC	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	24	O	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.5	0	0	0	0	1	14.5	14.5	1	1.25	1.25	1	0		
100%	25	CSFR	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	26	BLKD	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.25	0.25	1	3	3	1	0	0	1	2.25	2.5	0	1		
100%	27	RKTS	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	28	TNLS	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.75	2	0	1		
100%	29	CRISIS	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	1	1	6	6	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	30	I Elect	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2.75	2.75	1	10.5	10.5	1	1.25	1.5	0	1		
83%	31	NewUS	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2.75	2.75	1	0.25	0.5	0	0	0	0	1		
100%	32	PlanAtk	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	33	IsolHam	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	34	PalDivi	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	26.5	26.5	1	0		
100%	35	Conspiracy	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	9	9	1	0	0	1	43.5	43.5	1	0		
83%	36	USdrpPC	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	29	25	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	37	DetrPow	3.75	3.75	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	38	Falldipl	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	11.25	11.5	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	39	I-CAS	1	1	1	0	0	1	0.25	0.25	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	40	RKTS	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.75	2	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	41	O	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	5.5	5.5	1	1.25	1.25	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	42	Pal Cas	4.75	4.75	1	1.5	1.5	1	1.75	1.75	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
67%	43	Pal Imp	0	0	1	12.25	9.25	0	1.75	1.75	1	5.5	5.5	1	21	21	1	3.75	3.5	0	1		
83%	44	PolSt	0	0	1	0.75	0.75	1	0	0	1	27.75	27.75	1	25.5	25.5	1	26.5	27	0	1		
100%	45	SamFam	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	7	7	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	46	UNCentr	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	47	UNSCent	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.75	1.75	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	48	WP	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2.5	2.5	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	49	Mosque	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.25	0.25	1	0	0	1	0.75	1	0	0	0	1	0		
100%	50	Mediabll	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.25	1.25	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	51	Hospital	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.75	0.75	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	52	Other	0	0	1	1	4	0	0	0	1	0.75	0.75	1	3.75	3.75	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	53	Blm-I	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0.5	0.5	1	0		
100%	54	Blm-P	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2.75	2.75	1	3	3	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	55	BlmBth	2.25	2.25	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.25	1.5	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	56	BlmUS	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2.25	2.25	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	57	BlmArb	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	7.5	11.25	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	58	Blm Wrld	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	12	12	1	2.75	3	0	1.25	1.25	1	0		
83%	59	BlmUN	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1	0	0	0	0	1	0.5	0.5	1	0		
100%	60	Pro-CSFR	1	1	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	61	PeaCal	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	14.75	19.25	0	5	5	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	62	UN Reso	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	17.75	15	0	0	0	0	1		
100%	63	USAbstain	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.75	1.75	1	0	0	1	0		
100%	64	HmConc	1.25	1.25	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0		
83%	65	IgrUNR	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	1.75	1.75	1	3.25	3.5	0	0	0	0	1		
83%	66	Other	2.25	2.25	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0		
100%	67	Why	2.25	2.25	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2	2	1	0.5	0.5	1	0		
83%	68	Violence	13	13	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	5.75	5.75	1	22.25	22.5	0	6.5	6.5	1	0		
100%	69	OCCP	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	5	5	1	0		
100%	70	BLKD	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	1	2.75	2.75	1	3.75	3.75	1	0	0	1	0		

Miles and Huberman's (1994) suggestion of "a standard of 80% agreement on 95% of codes" as a threshold for InterCoder Reliability is adopted in this research (Miles & Huberman, cited in O'Connor & Joffe 2020). As shown in Table 7.11 above, the overall inter-coder reliability score was of 92.6% agreement. None of the 97 coding variables achieved lower than 67% agreement, and 94 of the coding variables — representing 96.9% of the total— achieved scores of 83% or higher. As such, the coding scheme adopted in this research is deemed to satisfy the reliability criteria.

7.7 Fieldwork Research and Interviews

To understand more adequately the news production process shaping AJE and BBC coverage of OCL, the researcher conducted interviews with 11 current and former journalists and editors at both media organisations. All of the interviewees had direct working knowledge or experience of Palestinian-Israeli conflict media coverage, but some also had direct involvement in AJE and BBC reporting of the Gaza War 2008-9/Operation Cast Lead specifically. In particular, the researcher interviewed key AJE staff over a four-day period in May 2012 at the Al-Jazeera News Network's headquarters in Doha, Qatar. This was a highly valuable experience as it allowed the researcher to observe some of the operational realities of the news production process at close hand. The researcher collected additional testimonies and insights from journalists, academics, and media specialists at a number of seminars, workshops and public events.

Most interviews were conducted face-to-face. Due to practical constraints, however, some of the interviews took place over the phone or email. All interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analysed by the researcher. A list of all interviews is provided in Tables 7.12 and 7.13 below. The researcher adapted the scope and nature of the questions according to each interviewee's background and involvement in the coverage of Operation Cast Lead or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. One of the interviews conducted had to be subsequently excluded from the research at the request of the interviewee, due to the sensitivity of the information revealed in the interview. A list of all interview requests that were unsuccessful or which had to be later excluded from the research is provided in Appendix F.

AJE interviewees

As discussed earlier, to access Al-Jazeera English Network, the researcher applied for and obtained a permit from Dr. Jamal M. Abdullah, Head of Publishing, Distribution and Relations, at the Al Jazeera Centre for Studies, and was provided with a contact person at AJE's

Headquarters in Doha, Mr. Osama Hamza, Newsroom Coordinator at AJE. Upon arrival in Doha, the researcher was granted access both to Al-Jazeera English and Al-Jazeera Arabic's headquarters. The researcher was also issued a driver to travel between the Al Jazeera Centre of Research studies and Al Jazeera English's Main Building. Mr Hamza greatly facilitated the researcher's ability to plan and undertake interviews with AJE media professionals by giving the researcher access to their working schedules.

Field research trip to Al-Jazeera HQ:

During the visit to the Al-Jazeera Center for Studies and AJE HQ, the researcher met with a number of political and media figures and professionals. The researcher conducted interviews and succeeded in building a great network of contacts within various departments of Al Jazeera (English and Arabic) Network. All interviews were personally conducted by the researcher. An audio recorder was used throughout the interviews. The meetings with Ramsey Zarifeh and Ruben Banerjee were held in private meeting rooms; Ibrahim Helal and Carlos Van Meek were interviewed at their work desks; Riyaad Minty was interviewed in Al Jazeera English's staff hall; Shereen Tadros was interviewed over the phone line, while Ben Bradshaw was interviewed at the Doha Forum. All interviews were personally arranged by the researcher, who contacted or approached the interviewees directly.

At the time of the researcher's visit to Doha, Qatar, AJE correspondent Sherine Tadros was based in Egypt, where she was covering the Egyptian parliamentary elections of 2012. The researcher initially arranged to meet her in person in Egypt. However, due to the political unrest at the time (country-wide protests), the researcher did not feel it was safe to travel to Cairo and, as a result, agreed with Tadros to conduct the interview over the phone instead, which took place on 11 June 2012.

On 17 April 2012, the researcher contacted Ayman Mohyeldeen, AJE's Gaza correspondent during OCL, to arrange face-to-face interviews in Egypt, where both he and Tadros were based at the time. Tadros was still working for AJE at the time, but Mohyeldeen had already departed for NBC News, and the researcher needed to obtain NBC's approval to conduct the interview. Mohyeldeen provided the researcher with contact information for NBC's News Communications officer, Amy Lynn. Unfortunately, NBC were not willing to grant the researcher direct access to Mohyeldeen. An interview request was put in on April 17th 2012, and the following response was received on May 2nd, 2012, "Thank you so very much for thinking of Ayman, however due to his schedule he is unable to accommodate this interview request."

Table 7.12 below provides a list of all 6 interviews conducted with AJE staff by the researcher.

Interviewee	Title	Location	Date(s)	Type of Interview	Length
Ibrahim Helal	Director of News - Al Jazeera Arabic	Doha, AJA HQ	21 May 2012	In person, Recorded	44.48 mins
Riyaad Minty	Head of New Media, AJE	Doha, AJE HQ	22 May 2012	In person, Recorded	22.56 mins
Ramsey Zarifeh	Executive Producer, AJE	Doha, AJE HQ	23 May 2012	In person, Recorded	13.51 mins
Ruben Banerjee	Senior Editor, AJE	Doha, AJE HQ	23 May 2012	In person, Recorded	8.26 mins
Carlos Van Meek	Head of Output, AJE	Doha, AJE HQ	24 May 2012	In person, Recorded	11.35 mins
Sherine Tadros	Middle East Correspondent, AJE	N/A	11 June 2012	By telephone, Recorded	30.13 mins

Table 7. 12 AJE Interviewees

BBC interviewees

The researcher put in a formal request with the BBC Motion Gallery to interview BBC journalists and editors who had direct involvement in the coverage of ‘Operation Cast Lead’. A contact name, Jonathan Baker at BBC News, was provided, and the researcher was asked to have the interviews arranged through him. The researcher contacted Mr Baker on 12 June 2014 to request access to the main BBC reporters of the Gaza 2008/2009 conflict, Jeremy Bowen and Paul Wood, and was advised to contact them directly.

The researcher emailed Paul Wood directly on June 13, 2014 to request an interview and he responded on the same day to suggest giving him a call on Skype or his mobile. He was based in Erbil, Iraq, at the time, and warned the researcher that since the OCL/Gaza War “was a long time ago” he wasn’t sure how good his recall will be. The researcher’s subsequent repeated attempts to reach Mr Wood over the phone and Skype proved unsuccessful. On July 7th 2014, the researcher suggested to conduct the interview over email. Questions were emailed and this response was received:

“it’s a long time back and I will have to delve deep to recall. Also, am not entirely sure I agree with your premise [that the Israeli perspective dominated the coverage]. Have you spoken to our bureau chief at the time, James.stephenson@bbc.co.uk - and our ME editor Jeremy.bowen@bbc.co.uk? They might have some useful thoughts?”

Despite further attempts to pursue the conversation, this was the last communication the researcher received from Paul Wood.

The researcher also emailed Jeremy Bowen on June 9, 2014 requesting an interview. Having received no response, the researcher sent a follow-up email on July 4, 2014, to which Mr Bowen responded positively on the same day. Mr Bowen said he would be glad to help and was happy to receive interview questions through email. The researcher sent a list of questions that same day (4 July 2014). On July 7, Bowen wrote back to say he had completed half of the questions but that he was very busy (he was in Baghdad at the time). The researcher responded to say they would be happy to receive the partial list of answers, but did not hear back from Mr Bowen. The researcher emailed again on July 25, 2014, again with no response. The researcher made further attempts on August 18, 2014 and January 24, 2015, also with no response.

Due to the limited number of interviews the researcher was able to obtain from BBC staff, the researcher approached Dr Mike Berry, who had previously interviewed BBC staff for his own research (Philo & Berry, 2004, Philo & Berry, 2010), and was given contacts of two former BBC Middle East Correspondents, James Rodgers and Tim Llewellyn. The researcher contacted both and received positive replies. The researcher conducted an interview with James Rogers at his office at City University in London on June 7th, 2018. The interview with Tim Llewellyn took place on July 23rd, 2018, via email (due to logistical constraints).

On March 26, 2019, the researcher contacted Bowen again over email. Mr Bowen immediately emailed back with responses to all of the interview questions.

The list of the five BBC interviewees is provided in Table 7.13 below.

Interviewee	Title	Location	Date(s)	Type of Interview	Length

Ben Bradshaw	UK Member of Parliament and former BBC Correspondent	Doha Forum	22 May 2012	Recorded	6.57 mins
James Rodgers	Journalism lecturer and former BBC Correspondent in Gaza	City University of London	7 June 2018	Recorded	32.38 mins
Tim Llewellyn	Former BBC Middle East Correspondent	N/A	23 July 2018	Email	N/A
Jeremy Bowen	BBC's Middle East Editor (since 2005)	N/A	26 March 2019	Email	N/A
Richard Sambrook	Deputy Head of School and Director - Centre for Journalism, Cardiff University Former Director of Global News at the BBC where I worked as a journalist for 30 years as a producer, editor and manager.	NA	1 Sept 2020	Email	N/A

Table 7. 13 BBC Interviews

Interview format and questions

Most interviews were semi-structured in format. To prepare for the interviews, the researcher produced a set of principal interview questions (sample provided in Appendix C). For each interview, the researcher then adjusted or expanded on the questions based on the profile and expertise of the interviewee. During the interviews, further adjustments were made based on the answers and the direction of the interview.

In line with the research aim and questions, the interview questions prepared by the researcher were broadly divided into three broad categories:

1) Questions about production factors and constraints:

This group of questions primarily invited interviewees to talk about their views and/or experiences of:

- The key factors and constraints impacting the reporting of OCL, or the I/P conflict more broadly, this notably included questions about the impact of public relations, language issues and media access.
- The role of political factors and constraints in impacting the reporting of OCL, or the I/P conflict more broadly, including issues such as political pressure, lobbying and flak.

2) Questions about journalistic self-conception and values

This group of questions invited interviewees to talk about their conception of what the role of journalism is, and the journalistic and news values informing their personal conception of their professional mission. When relevant, the questions also touched upon the interviewee's conception of the journalistic mission and values of their media organisation (BBC/AJE).

3) Questions about the content analysis findings:

In this final group of questions, interviewees were invited to comment on some of the key findings of the content analysis, such as quantitative and qualitative imbalances or disparities in coverage of Israeli and Palestinian perspectives. Some questions also touched upon specific aspects of the coverage such as the reporting of historical, political and legal context.

Conclusion

This chapter has provided an overview of the methodological framework and tools underpinning the empirical component of this research. In the next chapter, the findings of the content analysis are presented.

CHAPTER EIGHT: Content Analysis Findings

8.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the content analysis of AJE and BBC's⁴¹ coverage of Operation Cast Lead, and is broadly structured into three main parts, representing three levels of analysis:

- **Sourcing Analysis:** A comparative analysis of AJE/BBC's sourcing choices and patterns.
- **Thematic Analysis:** A comparative analysis of AJE/BBC's thematic areas of the coverage.
- **Textual Analysis:** Close analysis of key textual patterns and framings of AJE/BBC coverage.

The chapter thus begins with an overview of the sourcing analysis findings, including the amount of coverage dedicated to various categories of sources (Israeli/Palestinian, Governmental/non-Governmental, internal/external) and how these were represented in BBC and AJE coverage. The main quantitative and qualitative findings of the thematic analysis are then introduced, comparatively examining the thematic distribution of AJE and BBC coverage (in line with the methodological approach and considerations presented in the previous chapter). Each of the five main thematic areas of coverage is then examined in turn:

- Israeli/Palestinian perspectives, rationales and defences of action
- Historical and political context
- The humanitarian impact and legal dimension of OCL
- The global context and reaction, including protests
- Military and ceasefire updates

Furthermore, significant patterns, similarities and differences between how AJE and BBC reported and represented Israeli and Palestinian explanatory themes are examined through textual analysis of an extensive selection of samples from the coverage. The chapter concludes with a brief overview of the results of the thematic analysis of the BBC's online coverage of OCL. A summary of the findings, including the dominant framings of BBC and AJE's respective coverage of OCL, is also provided. Throughout the chapter, and in line with the research aim

⁴¹ All references to 'BBC coverage' in this chapter refer to the BBC News channel unless otherwise specified.

and questions, the sourcing, thematic and textual analyses operate along two main comparative axes:

- Key patterns, similarities and differences between BBC and AJE's sourcing, thematic and textual approaches in their OCL coverage.
- Key patterns, similarities and differences between how Israeli and Palestinian narratives and perspectives were represented in each broadcaster's respective coverage.

The next chapter presents the findings of the interviews, while Chapter Ten offers a discussion of the significance of the empirical findings in the context of the research aim and questions, including how the content analysis findings inform and relate to those of the interviews and vice versa. As indicated in the Methodology Chapter, the content analysis was conducted on a combination of AJE and BBC broadcast transcripts. DVD recordings of AJE's Newshour (6PM GMT/9PM Doha) and the BBC's News at Ten were analysed for the 22-day period of Operation Cast Lead (27 Dec 2008 to 17 Jan 2009). As stated in the previous chapter, the content analysis also separately examined BBC online coverage of OCL over the 22-day duration of the conflict. In total, more than 350,000 Words of BBC and AJE content were examined in the course of this research, including 300,000 words of transcribed TV broadcasts, corresponding to more than 35 hours of coverage, and approximately 60,000 words of online content.

8.2 Sourcing Analysis

As highlighted in previous chapters, how and which sources and voices are represented (or not represented) is a major aspect of analysing and understanding news coverage, not least because it is one of the principal ways in which disparities in representing competing perspectives or framings can emerge. As highlighted in Chapter Five, sourcing imbalances — between Israeli and Palestinian voices, or official/non-official ones — have frequently been highlighted in the literature on news reporting of the Israeli-Palestine conflict.

In the context of this chapter, the term 'source' is used to refer to 'who' is speaking at any one time during the coverage. This refers to direct sources only, therefore, rather than those whose statements are merely quoted or reported indirectly by the anchor or reporter. In this view, sources include 'internal sources', namely the broadcaster's own team of newscasters, correspondents and reporters, as well as 'external' or 'outside' sources — such as government officials, independent experts or ordinary civilians — whose perspectives are featured in the

coverage in the form of interviews or through the use of clips or archival footage⁴². Table 8.1 presents an overview of the three broad categorisations of sources adopted in this chapter: Internal vs External Sources, Governmental vs non-Governmental Sources, and Israeli vs Palestinian Sources.

<i>Categorisation of Sources</i>	
Internal vs External Sources	<i>Internal Sources:</i> BBC/AJE newscasters, editors and correspondents
	<i>External/Outside Sources:</i> Officials, experts, protesters
Government/Authority vs non-Government/Authority Sources	<i>Official Government/Authority sources:</i> National political and military leaders, government officials and spokespeople.
	<i>Non-Government/Authority sources:</i> Ordinary citizens speaking in an individual capacity, protesters, NGO representatives, independent experts and analysts.
Israeli vs Palestinian Sources:	<i>Israeli Sources:</i> Israeli officials and spokespeople, both political and military. Israeli politicians and activists, commentators and ordinary citizens.
	<i>Palestinian Sources:</i> Palestinian officials including Hamas, Fatah and PA representatives. Ordinary Palestinians in Gaza or elsewhere. Palestinian activists, analysts and experts.

Table 8. 1 Categorisation of Sources

A list of every named source — across all categories — that was featured in AJE or BBC’s respective coverage under examination is provided in Appendix D. Table 8.2 below presents

⁴² The term ‘source’ is often used in the literature to denote external sources only, and is adopted for both categories (internal, external) in this thesis principally for reasons of convenience.

the distribution of sources featured in BBC and AJE coverage, in terms of their number of appearances.

	BBC	AJE	
Israeli officials	21	22	Israeli Officials
Palestinian officials	8	23	Palestinian Officials
Israeli voices	5	9	Israeli Voices
Palestinian voices	15	71	Palestinian Voices
UN/NGO officials	7	26	UN/NGO officials
Protesters	5	5	Protesters
Quartet/EU/US officials	4	11	Quartet/EU/US officials
Host Gov (UK/Qatar)	2	6	Host Gov (UK/Qatar)
Arab leaders	3	10	Arab leaders
Experts	0	5	Experts
Other	0	4	Other
BBC reporters	48	100	AJE reporters
TOTAL	119	292	TOTAL

Table 8. 2 AJE vs BBC's Use of Sources by Appearances

A comparative analysis of BBC/AJE's use of sources for each of three categorisations is presented below.

8.2.1 Internal vs Outside sources

The results of the comparative analysis of the BBC and AJE's use of internal vs outside sources are presented in Figure 8.1 below. Whilst both AJE and BBC newscasters accounted for a fifth (20%) of total lines in their respective coverage, the BBC featured a significantly larger proportion of lines by its own reporters than AJE did. Lines of coverage attributed to the BBC's own reporters and correspondents accounted for two-thirds (66%) of all BBC OCL coverage under examination, whereas internal sources represented 53% of AJE's lines total. A corollary finding is that the BBC's use of outside sources was proportionally significantly lower than AJE's. Lines by outside sources represented only 14% of the BBC's overall OCL coverage, which is approximately half the proportion (27%) allocated to them in AJE's output.

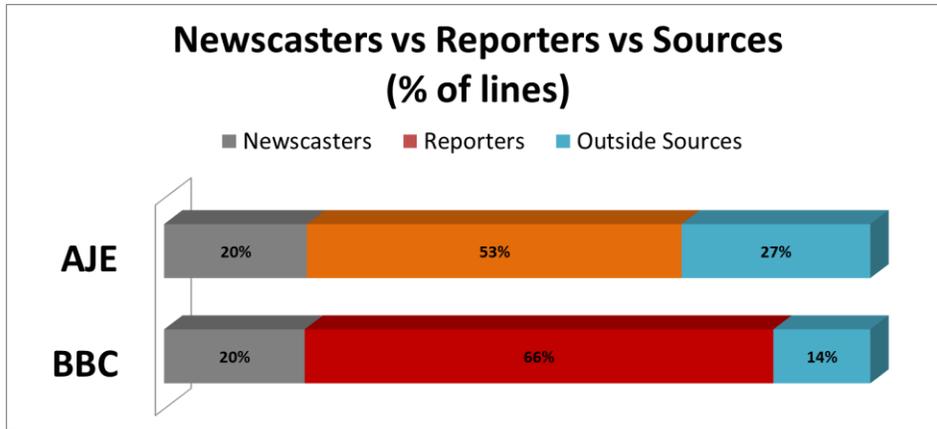


Figure 8. 1 AJE/BBC use of Newscasters vs Reporters vs Outside Sources

Figure 8.2 below illustrates the relative proportion of coverage (in terms of percentage of lines of text) allocated by AJE/BBC to different categories of outside sources⁴³. As the figure shows, Israeli officials were the most represented outside source category in the BBC’s coverage, accounting for more than a third (34.1%) of the outside source total. UN/NGO officials were the top ‘outside source’ category on AJE, with almost a fifth (19.6%) of the outside source total, and represented the third highest category in the BBC’s coverage. Official Israeli and non-official Palestinian sources were the joint-second most represented categories on AJE, with 17.6% each.

⁴³ This refers both to live and recorded interviews, as well as to clips or footage of public statements.

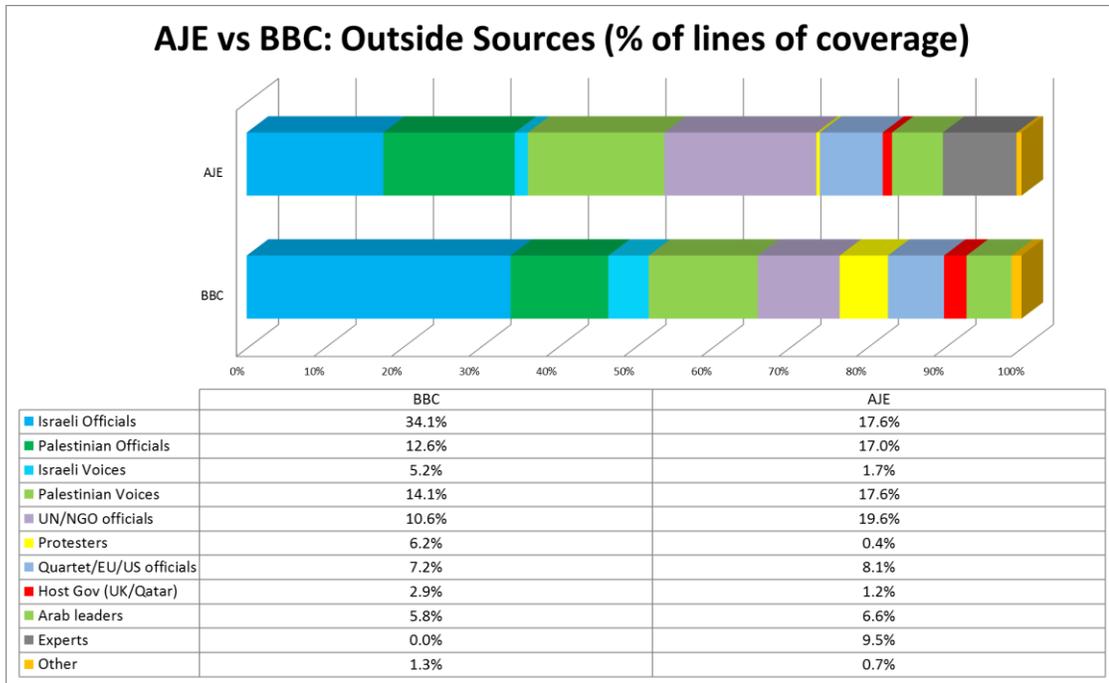


Figure 8. 2 AJE vs BBC: Use of Outside Sources (in % of lines of coverage)

8.2.2 Israeli vs Palestinian sources

As can be seen from the results presented in Table 8.2 and Figure 8.2 above, the BBC TV coverage under examination featured significantly more lines by Israel officials than Palestinian ones. In fact, Israeli official sources accounted for almost three times as many lines as their Palestinian counterparts, with 34.1% (58.8 lines) and 12.6% (21.75 lines) of the BBC outside source lines total, respectively. The same ratio was noted in terms of the number of appearances, with Israeli officials being featured in the BBC's coverage almost three times more often than their Palestinian counterparts, with 21 and 8 appearances, respectively. When official and non-official sources are combined, Israeli sources accounted for 40% of the BBC's outside coverage total, whereas Palestinian ones represented 27%.

On AJE, statements by Israeli and Palestinian officials each received an almost identical proportion of the coverage, with 17.6 and 17% of the outside source lines total, respectively. The number of appearances was also almost identical, with 22 and 23 appearances by Israeli and Palestinian officials, respectively. However, non-official Palestinian sources accounted for significantly more lines of AJE coverage than non-official Israeli ones, with 17.1% and 1.7% of the outside source lines total, respectively. This disparity can also be seen in the number of appearances, with non-official Palestinian voices appearing 71 times in AJE's coverage,

against 9 appearances by Israeli voices. Taking the Israeli and Palestinian sources (official and non-official) as a whole, the number of lines by Palestinian sources (448.5 lines, 35%) in AJE’s coverage represented almost double the Israeli equivalent (250.75 lines, 19%).

8.2.3 Governmental vs non-Governmental sources

Another finding revealed by the sourcing analysis is that relative to AJE, the BBC’s OCL coverage was markedly more reliant on official governmental sources than non-governmental ones. As shown in Figure 8.3 below, statements made by government officials or national leaders accounted for almost two thirds (63%) of the BBC’s outside source lines total, compared to 37% for statements by non-official sources. In contrast, AJE’s coverage was exactly evenly balanced between governmental and non-governmental sources, with each receiving 50% of the outside source lines total. Israeli officials were the top governmental source in the BBC’s coverage, accounting for more than half (54%) of all lines by governmental sources, compared to a fifth (20%) for Palestinian officials. On AJE, Israeli and Palestinian government officials accounted for a third each (35% and 34% approximately) of lines by governmental sources.

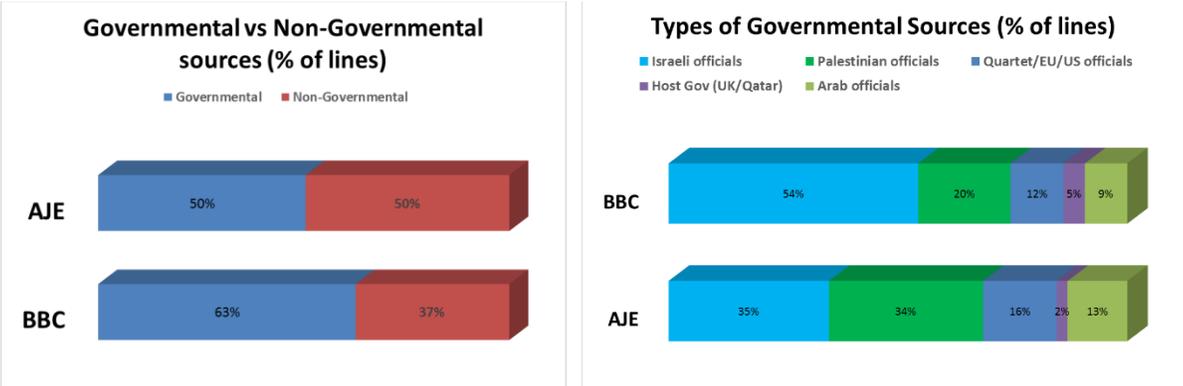


Figure 8. 3 AJE/BBC use of governmental sources (% lines of text)

8.2.4 The use of interviews

The content analysis findings also show that BBC *News at Ten* bulletins frequently featured recorded clips of officials, but never carried interviews⁴⁴ with either Israeli or Palestinian officials

⁴⁴ A one-question/answer recorded exchange between Jeremy Bowen and Israeli Government Spokesperson Mark Regev was broadcast on Jan 8 (reproduced below). However, the researcher deemed this too short to qualify as an interview:
 Jeremy Bowen: What if Israeli soldiers did break international humanitarian law, would they be punished?
 Mark Regev: First of all, we don’t know that for a fact; we need to look into things.
 (BBC, 8 January 2009)

for the entire 22-day coverage of OCL. BBC coverage did include four interview segments, conducted by one of its local producers, with non-official voices in Gaza: Three of them were with Gazan civilians, while the fourth was with Dr Mads Gilbert, a Norwegian physician working for NORWAC (a Norwegian NGO operating in Gaza). The BBC also broadcast an interview conducted by its Middle East Editor, Jeremy Bowen, with Bashar Al-Assad, the President of Syria. For its part, AJE’s Newshour featured a total of 80 interviews in the course of its 22-day coverage of OCL, including 22 interviews with Israeli officials, 22 interviews with Palestinian officials, 16 interviews with Palestinian civilians, 15 interviews with NGO and UN staff, and 8 interviews with political or military analysts.

8.3 Thematic Analysis Findings

In this section, the main findings of the thematic analysis will be presented. The next sub-section (8.3.1) presents a comparative overview of the BBC and AJE’s thematic areas of coverage. Sub-sections 8.3.2 to 8.3.6 then examine each thematic area of coverage in further detail using close comparative textual analysis of samples.

8.3.1 Thematic areas of coverage: A comparative overview

The proportion of BBC and AJE coverage dedicated to each of the main thematic areas, and per source category, is shown below in Tables 8.3 and 8.4, respectively:

BBC NEWS									
27 Dec 2008 - 17 Jan 2009	Total Lines	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives	Historical & Political Context	Israeli Casualties & Impact	Palestinian Casualties & Impact	Legality & International Law	World Reaction & Protests	Military & Ceasefire Updates
Source	1255.75	266.5	76.75	110	25.25	186.25	21.5	213.75	355.75
BBC Newscasters	250	46.25	7.5	2.75	5.75	38	7.75	50	92
BBC reporters	833.25	152.5	43.75	107.25	19.5	127.25	7.25	112	263.75
Israeli officials	58.75	58.75	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Palestinian officials	21.75	0	19.25	0	0	0	2.5	0	0
Israeli voices	9	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Palestinian voices	24.25	0	5	0	0	19.25	0	0	0
US officials	12.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	12.5	0
UK Prime Minister	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	0
Protesters	10.75	0	0	0	0	0	0.75	10	0
Arab leaders	10	0	1.25	0	0	0	0	8.75	0
UN & NGO officials	18.25	0	0	0	0	1.75	3.25	13.25	0
Other	2.25	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.25	0
TOTAL	1255.75	266.5	76.75	110	25.25	186.25	21.5	213.75	355.75

Table 8. 3 BBC thematic areas of coverage (in lines of text)

Al-Jazeera English									
27 Dec 2008 - 17 Jan 2009	Total Lines	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives	Historical & Political Context	Israeli Casualties & Impact	Palestinian Casualties & Impact	Legality & International Law	World Reaction & Protests	Military & Ceasefire Updates
Source	4852.25	435.5	503.5	833	48.5	966.5	203	637.75	1224.5
AJE newscasters	981.25	60.25	47.5	91.25	6.75	251.5	58	192.25	273.75
AJE reporters	2573.5	139.25	129.75	452.75	37.25	649.25	51.5	194.75	919
Palestinian officials	220	0	114.75	81.5	0	7	5	11.75	0
Israeli officials	228.75	214.75	0	8.5	4.5	0	0	0	1
Arab leaders	85.25	0	0	38.5	0	0	0	46.75	0
US officials	92.5	0	0	44	0	0	0	48.5	0
Qatar Emir	15.5	0	0	0	0	0	0	15.5	0
Protesters	5.75	0	0	0	0	0	0	5.75	0
EU/Quartet officials	12.75	0	0	4.25	0	0	0	8.5	0
Experts	123.25	1.5	8.75	42	0	0	40.25	2.25	28.5
Palestinian voices	228.5	0	202.75	11.25	0	8.75	4.25	1.5	0
Israeli voices	22	19.75	0	0	0	0	0	0	2.25
US voices	8.5	0	0	5.75	0	0	2.75	0	0
UN/NGO Spox	254.75	0	0	53.25	0	50	41.25	110.25	0
TOTAL	4852.25	435.5	503.5	833	48.5	966.5	203	637.75	1224.5

Table 8. 4 AJE thematic areas of coverage (in lines of text)

Figures 8.4 and 8.5 below present the thematic breakdown of BBC and AJE coverage in proportional terms (% of lines of text):

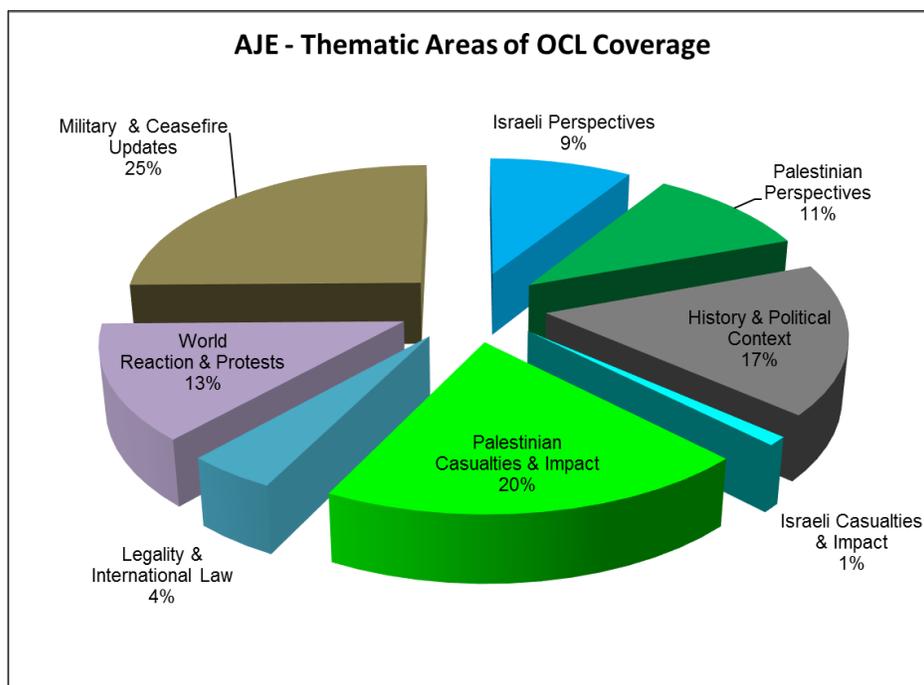


Figure 8. 4 AJE Thematic Distribution

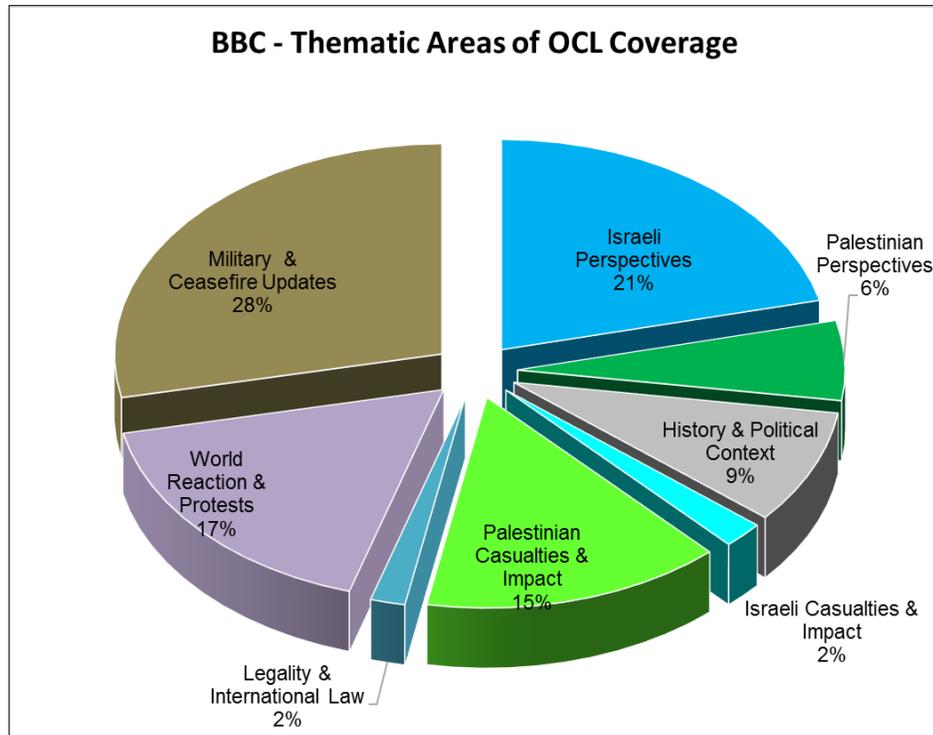


Figure 8. 5 BBC Thematic Distribution

Table 8.5 below presents a more condensed version of the BBC/AJE comparative thematic breakdown in absolute (i.e., lines of text) and relative terms (% of total coverage), respectively:

Thematic Area	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives	Historical & Political Context	Israeli casualties & Impact	Palestinian Casualties & Impact	Legality & International Law	World Reaction & Protests	Military & Ceasefire Updates
BBC	266.5	76.75	110	25.25	186.25	21.5	213.75	355.75
AJE	435.5	503.5	833	48.5	966.5	203	637.75	1224.5

Thematic Area	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives	Historical & Political Context	Israeli casualties & Impact	Palestinian Casualties & Impact	Legality & International Law	World Reaction & Protests	Military & Ceasefire Updates
BBC	21%	6%	9%	2%	15%	2%	17%	28%
AJE	9%	10%	17%	1%	20%	4%	13%	25%

Table 8. 5 Thematic distribution of BBC and AJE coverage of OCL

Examining the BBC’s thematic distribution findings reveals the following results:

- The most dominant area of coverage in BBC bulletins (355.75 lines) is that of Military and Ceasefire updates, which accounted for almost a third (28%) of total coverage.

- Israeli and Palestinian rationales and defences of action represented the second most represented area of BBC coverage, with 27% of the total number of lines. However, almost three and a half times as many lines were given to presenting Israeli perspectives (266.5 lines, 21%) than to Palestinian ones (76.75 lines, 6% of the total).
- The reporting of casualties and human impact was the joint third largest thematic area, with 17% of BBC coverage. However, BBC bulletins allocated significantly more coverage to the human impact on Palestinians (186.25 lines, 15%) than Israelis (25.5, 2%).
- World reaction and protests received 17% of the coverage, making it the third most represented thematic area.
- Historical and political context accounted for 9% (110 lines) of total BBC coverage. However, historical background on its own only represented 1% of the total coverage.

Examining the thematic distribution of AJE's coverage reveals the following findings:

- Military and ceasefire updates was the largest thematic area in AJE's coverage, accounting for 25% of the coverage (1224.5 lines).
- Reporting of casualties and other human impact of the conflict was the second largest thematic area, representing 21% of the total (1015 lines). However, the impact on Palestinians received significantly more coverage (20%, 966.5 lines) than that on Israelis (1%, 48.5 lines).
- Israeli and Palestinian perspectives represent the third largest thematic area of AJE coverage, with 19% of the total (939 lines). Palestinian and Israeli rationales and defences received a relatively identical proportion of AJE's coverage, with 9% (435.5 lines) and 10% (503.5 lines) of total lines, respectively.
- Historical and political context received 9% of coverage (833 lines), with historical background accounting for 3.2% of total AJE coverage.

A comparative representation of the proportional thematic distribution of BBC and AJE coverage (in % of lines) is provided in Figure 8.6 below.

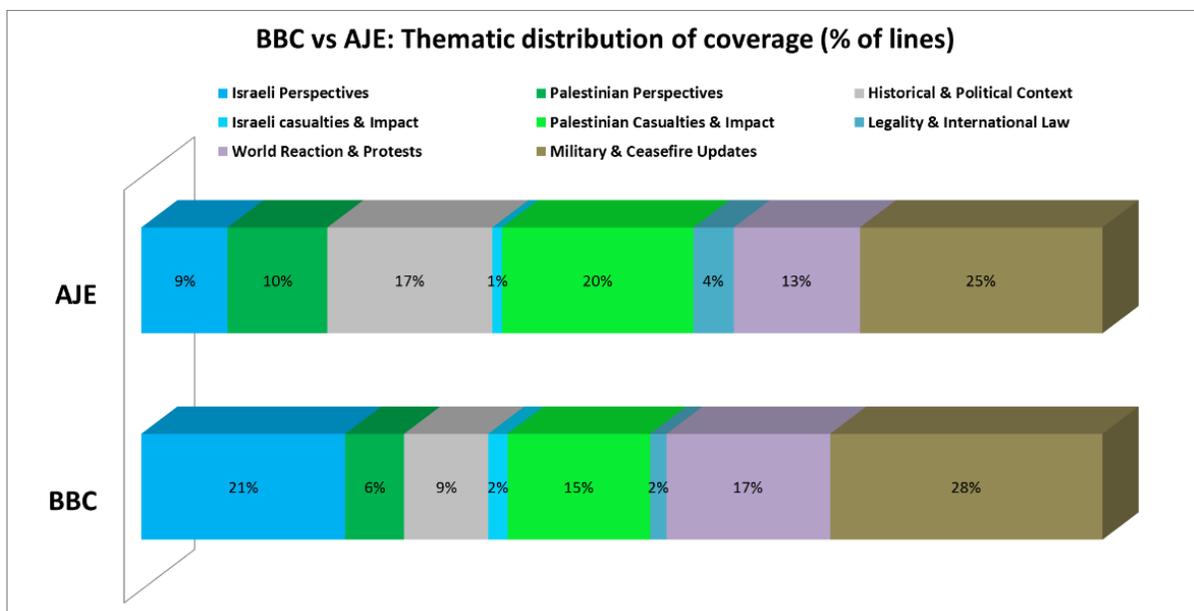


Figure 8. 6 BBC and AJE comparative thematic distribution

In the sub-sections below, each of the thematic areas of BBC/AJE’s 22-day broadcast coverage is examined in turn using thematic and textual analysis. As indicated at the start of the chapter, the analysis operates along two dimensions:

- Comparing how each broadcaster reported Palestinian versus Israeli perspectives.
- Comparing BBC and AJE’s respective approaches to key thematic aspects of coverage.

8.3.2 Thematic Area of Coverage: Israeli and Palestinian perspectives

The extent of coverage dedicated by BBC and AJE, respectively, to reporting key Israeli and Palestinian perspectives — explanatory themes, rationales and defences of action — is presented in Tables 8.6 to 8.9 below.

Al-Jazeera English		Israeli Perspectives		
27 Dec 2008 - 17 Jan 2009		Rationales for Action	Defences of Action	Other
AJE				
Source	AJE			
	435.5	171.25	203	61.25
AJE newscasters	61.25	26	27	7.25
AJE reporters	139.25	46	64.5	28.75
Israeli officials	214.75	88.5	106.5	19.75
Experts	1.5	1.5	0	0
Israeli voices	19.75	9.25	5	5.5
TOTAL	433.75	171.25	203	61.25

Table 8. 6 AJE coverage of Israeli perspectives (in lines of text)

BBC NEWS				
27 Dec 2008 - 17 Jan 2009		Israeli Perspectives		
BBC		Rationales for Action	Defences of Action	Other
Source	266.5	165.5	32.25	68.75
BBC newscasters	46.25	21.25	4.75	20.25
BBC reporters	152.5	94.25	20.25	38
Israeli official	58.75	46.5	7.25	5
Israeli voices	9	3.5	0	5.5
TOTAL	266.5	165.5	32.25	68.75

Table 8. 7 BBC coverage of Israeli perspectives (in lines of text)

Al-Jazeera English				
27 Dec 2008 - 17 Jan 2009		Palestinian Perspectives		
AJE		Rationales for Resistance	Countering Israeli Rationales & Defences	Declamatory
Source	1007	177.5	277.5	48.5
AJE newscasters	47.5	31.5	11	5
AJE reporters	129.75	75.75	50.75	3.25
Palestinian officials	114.75	58.25	16.25	40.25
Israeli officials	0	0	0	0
Experts	8.75	8.75	0	0
Palestinian voices	202.75	3.25	199.5	0
TOTAL	503.5	177.5	277.5	48.5

Table 8. 8 AJE coverage of Palestinian perspectives (in lines of text)

BBC NEWS				
27 Dec 2008 - 17 Jan 2009		Palestinian Perspectives		
BBC		Rationales for Resistance	Countering Israeli Rationales & Defences	Declamatory
Source	76.75	24.25	30.75	21.75
BBC Newscasters	7.5	2.25	1.75	3.5
BBC reporters	43.75	17.25	18.25	8.25
Palestinian officials	19.25	4.75	6.75	7.75
Palestinian voices	5	0	4	1
Arab spox	1.25	0	0	1.25
TOTAL	76.75	24.25	30.75	21.75

Table 8. 9 BBC coverage of Palestinian perspectives (in lines of text)

A summary version of these results is provided in Table 8.10 below:

	Total Lines	Israeli Perspectives			Palestinian Perspectives		
		Rationales for Action	Defences of Action	Other	Rationales for Resistance	Countering Israeli Rationales & Defences	Declamatory
AJE	939	171.25	203	61.25	177.5	277.5	48.5
BBC	343.25	165.5	32.25	68.75	24.25	30.75	21.75

Table 8. 10 AJE/BBC coverage of Israeli and Palestinian perspectives (in lines of text)

Figures 8.7 and 8.8 below shows the breakdown of BBC/AJE's respective coverage of Israeli and Palestinian perspectives in absolute and proportional terms.

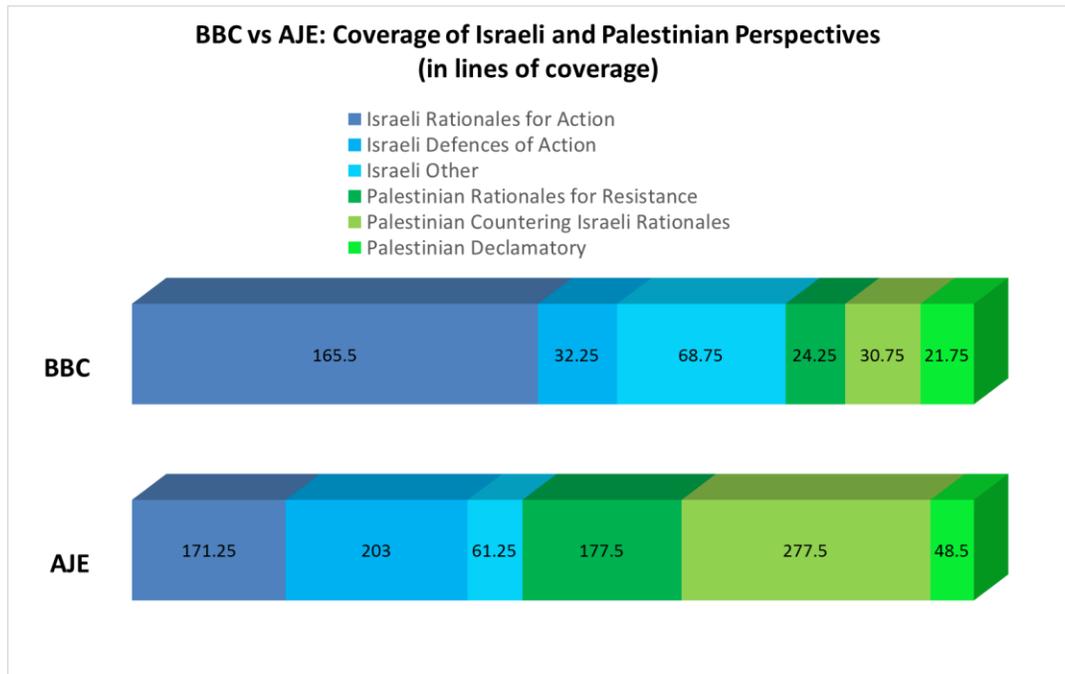


Figure 8. 7 BBC and AJE coverage of I/P perspectives (in lines of text)

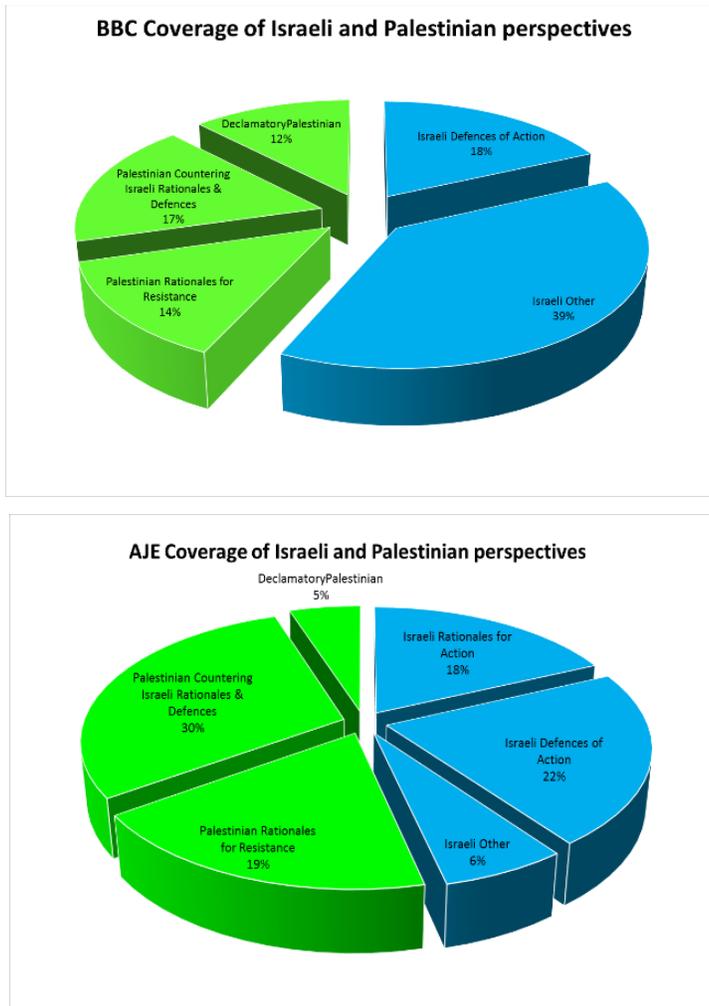


Figure 8. 8 BBC and AJE coverage of I/P perspectives in proportional terms

As the findings presented in the tables and figures above show, Israeli perspectives dominated BBC coverage of OCL, accounting for 21% of total lines, more than three times the coverage given to Palestinian perspectives (6%). This is to a large degree a reflection of the significant number of lines (152.5) BBC journalists/reporters allocated to presenting the Israeli perspective in their own reporting, which accounted for 57% of the total.

In BBC reporting of the causes of the conflict, which was one of the main contested areas of coverage, the Israeli rationales for action, which were usually presented by BBC reporters themselves, were especially dominant, representing 62% of coverage given to Israeli perspectives and receiving seven times the number of lines given to Palestinian rationales. Israeli explanatory themes such as “stopping Hamas rockets,” “keeping Israelis safe” and “fighting terror” accounted for a total of 165.5 lines, whereas Palestinian explanatory themes

such as “defending Gazans,” “ending the siege” and “resisting the occupation” received only 24.25 lines.

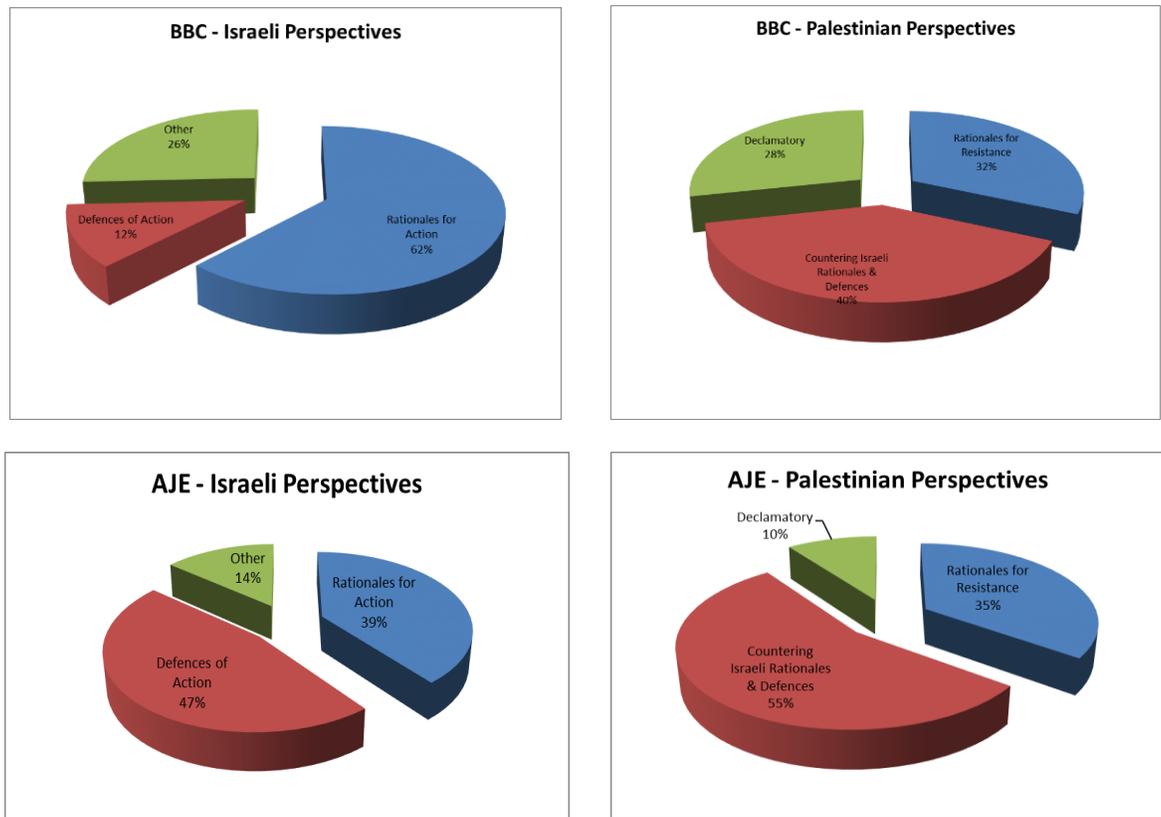


Figure 8. 9 Thematic breakdown of BBC/AJE coverage of Israeli/Palestinian perspectives

In contrast, AJE dedicated a relatively equal proportion of coverage to Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, with 9% (435.5 lines) and 10% (503.5 lines) of the total coverage, respectively.

As the Figures above show, a significant proportion of BBC and AJE’s coverage of Palestinian perspectives was dedicated to Palestinian explanatory themes countering Israeli rationales and defences of action — such as “there is nowhere safe in Gaza”, “Israel is targeting the whole of Gaza” and “civilians are bearing the brunt of Israeli strikes” — which accounted for 40% and 55% of all lines given to Palestinian perspectives on BBC and AJE, respectively. Finally, a third (28%) of the BBC’s coverage of Palestinian perspectives was in the form of declamatory statements, whereas these received only 10% of AJE’s coverage.

Textual Analysis

While it is not possible to analyse and discuss how the BBC and AJE covered every single argument put forth by Israeli and Palestinian voices throughout the conflict, it is useful to highlight how they reported some of the key Israeli and Palestinian explanatory themes and

perspectives that were at the heart of the media contest. Some of the major areas of contention between Israeli and Palestinian narratives⁴⁵ during OCL include the following four contested themes:

- 1) **Why Israel launched OCL** (Self-defence/retaliation vs collective punishment)
- 2) **Hamas's legitimacy** (A terror group vs democratically elected resistance movement)
- 3) **Israel's real target** (a War on Hamas vs a War on Gazans)
- 4) **Retaliation** (Israeli retaliation vs Israeli aggression)

How AJE and the BBC reported Israeli and Palestinian perspectives on each of these four contested themes is examined below.

Contested Theme 1: Why Israel launched OCL

As discussed in Chapter Three, a main point of dispute between the Israeli and Palestinian narratives during the 2008/2009 conflict was Israeli motivations and objectives in launching OCL. Israeli officials regularly stated that military action was an act of self-defence against Hamas rockets, and that the main reason for launching OCL was to protect Israeli citizens by stopping the rockets and destroying or degrading Hamas and what Israeli officials called its "infrastructure of terror".

For their part, Palestinian voices argued OCL was chiefly a deliberate act of collective punishment by Israel against Gaza's civilian population for voting for Hamas, and was ultimately intended to topple the Hamas government by turning Gazans against it⁴⁶. These two competing perspectives have been articulated through several explanatory themes, and the main ones are summarised in Table 8.11 below:

⁴⁵ The term 'Israeli narrative' in this chapter principally refers to the public statements made by Israeli leaders and official spokespeople during OCL. Since the Palestinian public information effort was far less homogenous and structured, the 'Palestinian narrative' refers to the broad body of official and non-official statements by Palestinian leaders, both from Hamas and the PA, as well as those of Palestinian commentators and civilians. (The disparity between the Israeli and Palestinian public information efforts is discussed in further detail in the next two chapters).

⁴⁶ As discussed in Chapter Three, this view was also expressed by international NGOs.

Why Israel launched Operation Cast Lead ⁴⁷	
Israeli Explanatory Themes	Palestinian Explanatory Themes
<p>OCL is an act of self-defence and retaliation.</p> <p>OCL aims to protect Israelis by stopping the threat of Hamas's rockets and tunnels.</p> <p>OCL aims to destroy and degrade Hamas and its "terror infrastructure".</p> <p>Hamas is to blame for OCL being launched.</p> <p>Hamas is to blame for OCL's impact on Gaza's civilians.</p>	<p>OCL is a deliberate, politically motivated act of collective punishment against Gaza's population for voting for Hamas.</p> <p>OCL is an attempt to turn Gazans against Hamas.</p> <p>OCL is an attempt to topple a legitimate government by using violence.</p>

Table 8. 11 'Why Israel Launched OCL' main explanatory themes

Analysis of AJE coverage shows that it frequently presented both the Israeli and Palestinian perspectives regarding why Israel launched OCL. The two perspectives were reported by AJE's own newscasters and correspondents, as well as articulated directly by Israeli and Palestinian voices, as illustrated by the following segments⁴⁸:

<p>AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Ghosh), Doha: Israeli Officials say <u>they are acting in self-defence</u>, and they will continue operations <u>until the ruling party Hamas is broken</u>. (AJE, 27 December 2008)</p> <p>AJE Reporter (Dorsa Al-Jabbari): <u>The stated aim</u> of Israel's so called 'Cast Lead' military operation <u>is to destroy the, quote, 'terror infrastructure' in the Gaza strip</u>. (AJE, 28 Dec 2008)</p>

⁴⁷ These explanatory themes are taken from the table of explanatory themes produced for this research, and presented in the methodology chapter, which is itself based on the AJE/BBC transcripts, literature surveys in Chapters 2-6, media coverage of OCL and official Israeli and Palestinian statements.

⁴⁸ Throughout this chapter, key passages in samples of the coverage are underlined by the researcher for emphasis. For reasons of space and readability, samples may be excerpted from longer segments.

AJE Newscaster: A Hamas Spokesman in Gaza says Palestinians are being punished for electing a government that leaders in the west refuse to deal with. (AJE, 3 January 2009)

Ehud Olmert (Israeli Prime Minister), Tel-Aviv: I have explained to the Gazans that we are not targeting them, nor do we have any intention to punish them collectively for Hamas activities. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

Heba – Gaza Refugee Camp Resident: ... with or without Hamas, Israel punishes us, it's the same story over and over again (AJE, 1 January 2009)

The BBC's coverage also included frequent references to the official Israeli rationales for launching OCL:

BBC Correspondent (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... Israel says it's acting in self-defence using force that is proportionate to the threat that its people face. (BBC, 29 December 2008)

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... Israel blames Hamas for any civilian deaths it inflicts. Hamas says it is defending Palestinian people. The Israelis' objective in doing all this is to try stop Hamas firing those rockets out. (BBC, 30 December 2008)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel Gaza border: ... Israel says it's acting in self-defence, protecting its vulnerable people [...] Israel's two stated objectives are stopping rocket fire from Hamas and stopping the movement of arms into Gaza from Egypt. (BBC, 12 January 2009)

However, in the BBC's coverage, the counterview offered by Palestinians and others – notably that OCL was a deliberate, politically motivated exercise in collective punishment — did not appear once. Even when the “turning Gazans against Hamas” theme was presented, it was mainly from an Israeli perspective, as in the following segment:

BBC Correspondent: Israel believes its attacks can separate the Hamas leadership from the great mass of the people in Gaza, by showing them the cost of what Hamas has done. But for Palestinians this feels like an attack on everyone. (BBC, 29 Dec 2008)

In the above segment, the “turning Gazans against Hamas” theme is presented without explicitly articulating that it entails inflicting a massive collective human and material toll on Gazans, which is precisely what the Palestinian explanatory theme is centred on. In addition, the impact of Israel’s military actions on Gazans is described as “the cost of what Hamas has done,” which echoes the Israeli theme of “Hamas is to blame for OCL’s impact on Gaza’s civilians”.

Both AJE and BBC coverage occasionally explored other purported rationales for Israel’s decision to launch OCL, such as Israel restoring its deterrent factor, undermining Hamas’s newfound democratic legitimacy (as argued by Finkelstein, 2010) or protecting its image of being the “only democracy in the Middle East” (as argued by Shlaim, 2009). As in the following segments:

BBC Correspondent (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: This war isn’t just about beating Hamas, for Israel it’s also to erase the black mark against the army’s competence that has been there since it was fought to a standstill by Lebanese Hezbollah in 2006. The Israelis call that restoring the army’s deterrent power. That means they want any would be enemies to be very scared about what they are prepared to do. (BBC, 29 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Alan Fisher), Israel Gaza border: ...They have also essentially restated that in the future if anyone decides to poke Israel into action, they will do so, and they will do so with great ferocity, so they have re-established essentially that bully element ... (AJE, 17 January 2009)

A breakdown of all mentions of additional rationales in AJE and BBC’s coverage is provided in Table 8.12 below.

Rationale for OCL	BBC	AJE
New US president	3 mentions	3 mentions

Israeli Electoral calculations	3	5
Restoring deterrence	8	2
Add to Palestinian disunity	3	6
Failed Diplomacy	4	8
OCL was planned for months	0	4
Arab-PA plot against Hamas	0	3

Table 8. 12 AJE and BBC coverage of additional rationales for OCL

Contested theme 2: Hamas's legitimacy

Another point of dispute between the Palestinian and Israeli narratives during OCL has been over the legitimacy, or otherwise, of Hamas as a political actor and elected government. According to its own officials and other voices (e.g., Shlaim, 2009), Hamas secured victory in free and fair elections in 2006, and this made it a legitimate government and entitled it to engage in defensive military action on behalf of a Palestinian population that was under occupation, under siege and under attack. For their part, Israeli officials regularly described Hamas as an undemocratic and illegitimate terrorist organisation dedicated to Israel's destruction and, as such, political engagement with it was impossible and military action was the only option. The two rival explanatory themes can be broadly formulated as follows in Table 8.13 below:

Hamas Legitimacy	
Israeli Explanatory Theme	Palestinian Explanatory Theme
Hamas is a terror organisation dedicated to the destruction of Israel.	Hamas is a resistance movement waging a liberation struggle against an occupying power.
Hamas is a morally and politically illegitimate political actor. Military action is the only option for dealing with it.	Hamas was democratically elected and is a legitimate political actor and a representative of the Palestinian people.
Hamas illegitimately maintains its control over Gaza through force since its June 2007 conflict with Fatah.	Hamas had been making significant steps towards political engagement with Israel in recent years.

	<p> Hamas is entitled to wage military action to defend the Palestinian people under occupation, under siege and under attack.</p>
--	--

Table 8. 13 ‘ Hamas buildings’ explanatory themes

Analysis of AJE’s reporting shows it frequently presented Israeli descriptions of Hamas as an illegitimate or ‘terrorist organisation’ but exclusively when quoting official Israeli sources rather than in AJE’s own commentary or analysis:

<p>Ehud Olmert (Israeli Prime Minister), Tel-Aviv: ... <u>We are targeting the terrorist organisation of Hamas</u> and other terrorist organisations that bring in catastrophe on you. Israel is not at war with the Palestinian people it has launched war against <u>Hamas which is determined to wipe out the state of Israel.</u> (AJE, 27 December 2008)</p> <p>Tzipi Livni (Israeli Foreign Minister), Tel Aviv: ...Unfortunately, <u>the Gaza strip is being controlled by a terrorist organisation</u> which targets the buildings, schools and the kindergartens, and this needs to be stopped by Israel and the International community because <u>they are not fighting for any legitimate cause</u> for the Palestinians. They control the Gaza strip. <u>This is an extreme Islamic Terrorist organisation</u> and Israel decided to change the situation that was here for years now and especially in the last few weeks. (AJE, 31 December 2008)</p>
--

For its part, BBC journalists did not adopt Israeli descriptions of Hamas as a “terror organisation”, and these also only appeared when reporting statements by Israeli officials:

<p>Tzipi Livni (Israeli Foreign Minister): ... a determined, united and effective effort by the international community against <u>terror groups such as Hamas</u> and this is what we are doing today. (BBC, 16 January 2009)</p> <p>BBC Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... <u>Israel says</u> the rocket attacks prove the UN resolution would not be respected by <u>what it called the Palestinian murder organization.</u> (BBC, 9 January 2009)</p>
--

AJE’s coverage included frequent references to the Palestinian perspective — namely that Hamas was a democratically elected government which came to power on the back of free and

fair elections, that Israel and the US have refused to recognise it as a legitimate political actor, and that this refusal is politically motivated:

AJE Newscaster: ... In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian elections but Israel and its allies refused to accept the victory. (AJE, 11 January 2009)

As shown in the segments below, the Palestinian explanatory themes that “Hamas is a legitimate representative of the Palestinian people” and “Hamas is a resistance movement” often appeared regularly in AJE’s coverage through reporting of statements by Palestinian leaders or spokespeople.

Osama Hamdan (Hamas representative in Lebanon): ... I believe that the Israelis violated the ceasefire, they dropped down all the chances to extend the ceasefire, so in Hamas we were ready to defend ourselves to defend our own people. No one can accept the situation which was there at the time. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE newscasters and reporters occasionally themselves adopted or repeated the Palestinian themes of “resistance” against “Israeli aggression”:

AJE Correspondent (Imran Khan), Gaza: ... The various Palestinian armed groups, traditionally politically divided, are united in the face of the Israeli aggression. The entire Palestinian people and the resistance are united fighting the occupation. They know that they have to be steadfast. (AJE, 4 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Roza Ibragimova), Doha: ... Fighters from the military wing of Islamic Jihad, one of the Palestinian resistance groups now fighting alongside Hamas in Israel’s war on Gaza, [are] seen here training to battle their common enemy. (AJE, 14 January 2009)

On occasion the “Hamas is a legitimate government” theme was presented by AJE journalists when challenging the Israeli perspective during interviews, as in this exchange:

Yuval Steinitz, Israeli Knesset Member: ... Hamas killed much more PLO Palestinians than Israelis two years ago when they took power in Gaza. It will be a great relief to Palestinians as well to Israelis if Gaza will not be controlled by fundamentalist terrorists controlled by Tehran.

AJE Newscaster (Imran Gavda), Doha: You were talking about protesting in the streets, what about respect for Palestinian democracy when they voted Hamas into power? (AJE, 4 January 2009)

In contrast, the BBC's coverage rarely reported the Palestinian explanatory theme of Hamas being a legitimate government or a resistance movement against Israeli aggression. When it did so, this view was, with one exception, always ascribed to Hamas or 'Hamas supporters' rather than to Palestinians in general:

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... The mayhem of the scene in Gaza's biggest refugee camp will have deepened the convictions of [the Hamas commander's] followers and many other Palestinians that they are defending their people against a cruel enemy. Nazir Rayyan was the most senior Hamas leader killed by Israel for some years, he was an important symbol of resistance for Hamas supporters. (BBC, 1 January 2009)

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... Hamas's answer to almost everything is to say that it will continue to resist... (BBC, 1 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Katya Adler), Jerusalem: ... Despite that, Hamas is keeping up its resistance in and outside Gaza... (BBC, 11 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster, London: ... Hamas responds by promising to continue what they call their resistance... (BBC, 17 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... Hamas has a strong ideology of resistance and martyrdom ... (BBC, 17 January 2009)

Contested Theme 3: Israel's target: 'War on Hamas' vs 'War on Gaza'

Another major point of contention between the Israeli and Palestinian narratives during OCL was Israel's intended target. Israeli officials regularly stated that OCL was a "war on Hamas"

and its “infrastructure of terror”, whereas Palestinians often argued OCL was targeting Gaza’s entire population and its civilian infrastructure. The two perspectives can be represented by the following explanatory themes in Table 8.14:

Israel’s Target	
Israeli Explanatory Theme	Palestinian Explanatory Theme
<p>OCL is an attack on Hamas and its infrastructure of terror.</p> <p>Israeli military actions are only aimed at legitimate Hamas targets.</p>	<p>OCL is an assault on Gaza’s entire population and civilian infrastructure.</p> <p>Many of what Israel claims are “Hamas targets” are in fact governmental or civilian targets.</p>

Table 8. 14 ‘Israel’s target’ explanatory themes

In total, the BBC referenced “Attacks/War on Hamas” nine times, against eight references to “Attacks/war on Gaza”. However, textual analysis shows that Israel’s highly contested theme – that its military operation was against “Hamas targets” – was often adopted or presented uncritically by BBC newscasters and reporters, as illustrated in the following segments:

BBC Newscaster: Israel says that the airstrikes were in response to missile attacks on its country and now is the time to fight. The targets were security compounds belonging to Hamas. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent: It is clear that this is an all-out assault on Hamas not the limited operation against smaller armed groups which Israeli officials have been talking about in recent days. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent: Israeli F-16 fighter bombers hit multiple targets. The wave of airstrikes was aimed at government buildings. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC Newscaster: ... The bombardment continues on Hamas targets as the United Nations warns of a humanitarian catastrophe. (BBC, 31 December 2008)

BBC Newscaster, London: Israeli ground forces enter Gaza in the second phase of their offensive against Hamas. (BBC, 3 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster, London: ... Israel has stepped up its aerial bombardment of Hamas targets in Gaza, launching at least 50 airstrikes. (BBC, 9 January 2009)

The following two segments are particularly worth noting:

BBC Newscaster, London: ... More than 400 people have now died in six days of attacks against Hamas targets. (BBC, 1 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster, London: ... Seven days after the start of the conflict, Israel has continued to bomb Hamas targets in Gaza. More than 400 Palestinians have been killed... (BBC, 2 January 2009)

In both segments, the “War on Hamas” Israeli theme is adopted in the same sentence reporting the latest Palestinian death toll of “more than 400 Palestinians,” even though the majority of these deaths are civilians according to the BBC’s own reporting in the same as well as previous bulletins. In contrast, the Palestinian explanatory theme that “Israel is attacking Gaza, not just Hamas” was never presented uncritically in the BBC’s coverage except in general terms, as seen in these two segments from the first week of the conflict:

BBC Newscaster, London: Israel launches a major attack on Gaza. More than 200 Palestinians were reported killed, many are injured. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel Gaza border: ... the sound of the ground attack on Gaza rumbled back across the border all night. It is another escalation in the crisis... The weight of a modern army with substantial air support is now bearing down on Hamas and on the people of Gaza. Israel says it seized open ground. But the evidence from Gaza's hospitals is that civilians are still being wounded and killed. (BBC, 4 January 2009)

On occasion, BBC reporting referenced the "Attack on Gaza" theme indirectly in conjunction with the Israeli theme of "our enemy is Hamas not the people", as in the segment below:

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel Gaza border: What is happening on the streets around them means that Gazans just do not believe Israel's claim that its enemy is Hamas not the people. (BBC, 8 January 2009)

For its part, AJE's approach was markedly different. From the outset, the channel's coverage strongly echoed the Palestinian explanatory theme of OCL being a "War on Gaza", even using that phrase on its on-screen banner for much of its coverage of the conflict. The "War on Gaza" formulation was used consistently throughout the coverage, and deployed every day of the 22-day duration of the coverage, whereas the "attack on Hamas" theme was never mentioned once.

AJE correspondent (Alan Fisher) reporting from Israel-Gaza border: ...The war on Gaza has entered a new phase. (AJE, 30 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Sherine Tadros) Gaza: Israeli ground forces have begun filing into the strip for the first time since the war on Gaza began more than a week ago. By air, sea and now land, Gaza is under fire. (AJE, 30 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster (Darren Jordan), Doha: ... Over the next 60 minutes we will be continuing our in-depth coverage on the war on Gaza. (AJE, 31 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha: The reality of the war on Gaza: the death toll edges closer to 900 and it seems clearer than ever civilians are paying a high price. At least 40% of the injured and killed are women and children. (AJE, 11 January 2009)

AJE regularly reported the Israeli perspective (“This is a war on Hamas”) but almost never uncritically, often presenting the Israeli theme alongside contrary evidence from its own reporting on the ground, showing the impact on civilians, as seen in the examples below:

AJE Newscaster: Throughout this war on Gaza, civilians have been caught in the fire. Israel maintains that it only targets Hamas fighters, but the latest figures show that more than 200 children have been killed, accounting for around a third of Palestinian deaths so far... (AJE, 7 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: ... Let’s look now at the key developments since the war on Gaza began on December 27, 2008. It was four days before the new year when the aerial bombardment on Gaza began. Israel called it a defensive operation against Hamas and not the Palestinian people... (AJE, 10 January 2009)

Contested theme 4: Retaliation

Another highly contested theme of Israeli-Palestinian coverage is that of ‘retaliation’ or ‘response’ — namely which side is initiating the violence, and which is ‘responding’ or ‘retaliating’ to aggression. In the context of OCL, this can be summarised in the following explanatory themes in Table 8.15 below:

Retaliation	
Israeli Explanatory Theme	Palestinian Explanatory Theme

<p>Israel's military action is in retaliation against Hamas/Palestinian violence, notably the firing of rockets into Israeli civilian areas over a period of years.</p>	<p>Palestinians are acting in retaliation against years of Israeli aggression, occupation, and blockade.</p> <p>Rockets had decreased significantly after the June 2008 Ceasefire, until Israel broke the truce with its November attack.</p>
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Table 8. 15 'Retaliation' explanatory themes

Analysis of BBC coverage shows that mentions of the “retaliation” theme were six times more likely to be from an Israeli perspective, as in following segments, than from a Palestinian one:

BBC Newscaster, London: ... At least 40 people died, many of them are believed to be children. The Israeli government said they were retaliating against militant Hamas fighters who had fired on them from inside one of the buildings... (BBC, 6 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster: Israel had warned in recent days it would retaliate because of renewed attacks on its border towns from within Gaza. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

The Palestinian perspective — that Hamas launched rockets in response to Israel's 18-month blockade, and that the rockets had decreased significantly after the June 2008 Ceasefire until Israel broke its terms — was not mentioned once throughout the BBC's 22-day coverage. In contrast, AJE's referred to the retaliation theme from an Israeli and Palestinian perspective an equal number of times (5).

AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Ghosh), Doha: What about Hamas's pledge of retaliation? What could that mean? (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Sherine Tadros), Gaza: In the past two days there has been much talk of what Israel will do to respond to the increased rocket fire by Palestinian fighters in Gaza... (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Ghosh), Doha: ... here we have Hamas promising retaliation, perhaps more attacks, perhaps attacks in Israel, certainly attacks taking place outside Gaza, which could arguably put Israeli citizens at more risk... (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Ghosh), Doha: ... by attacking Gaza Israel has invited criticism from around the world, and it's galvanised Hamas into promising retaliation. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent, (Alan fisher), Israel-Gaza border: Well, throughout today we have followed a similar pattern of previous days, where aircraft were in the sky picking out targets in Gaza, aiming their missiles, dropping their bombs and, in retaliation, we saw a number of missiles being launched from Gaza into southern Israel. (AJE, 30 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Alan Fisher), Israel Gaza Border: ... [the official Israeli line] is that Hamas is, in the words of an army captain we spoke to live on Al Jazeera, "playing a con game", essentially firing from inside the general areas of Gaza and then disappearing and then when the Israeli army takes its revenge or tries to retaliate, they immediately hold their hands up and say "look, you are breaking the rules of war by doing this"... (AJE, 6 January 2008)

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: ... rockets were fired from Lebanon in northern Israel, injuring 2 people and prompting an immediate Israeli retaliation. (AJE, 8 January 2009)

Presenting Israeli and Palestinian Explanatory Themes Together

A key difference between BBC and AJE coverage of Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, rationales and defences of actions was the extent to which each broadcaster presented the two perspectives together or on their own. Figure 8.10 below illustrates the findings of the analysis.

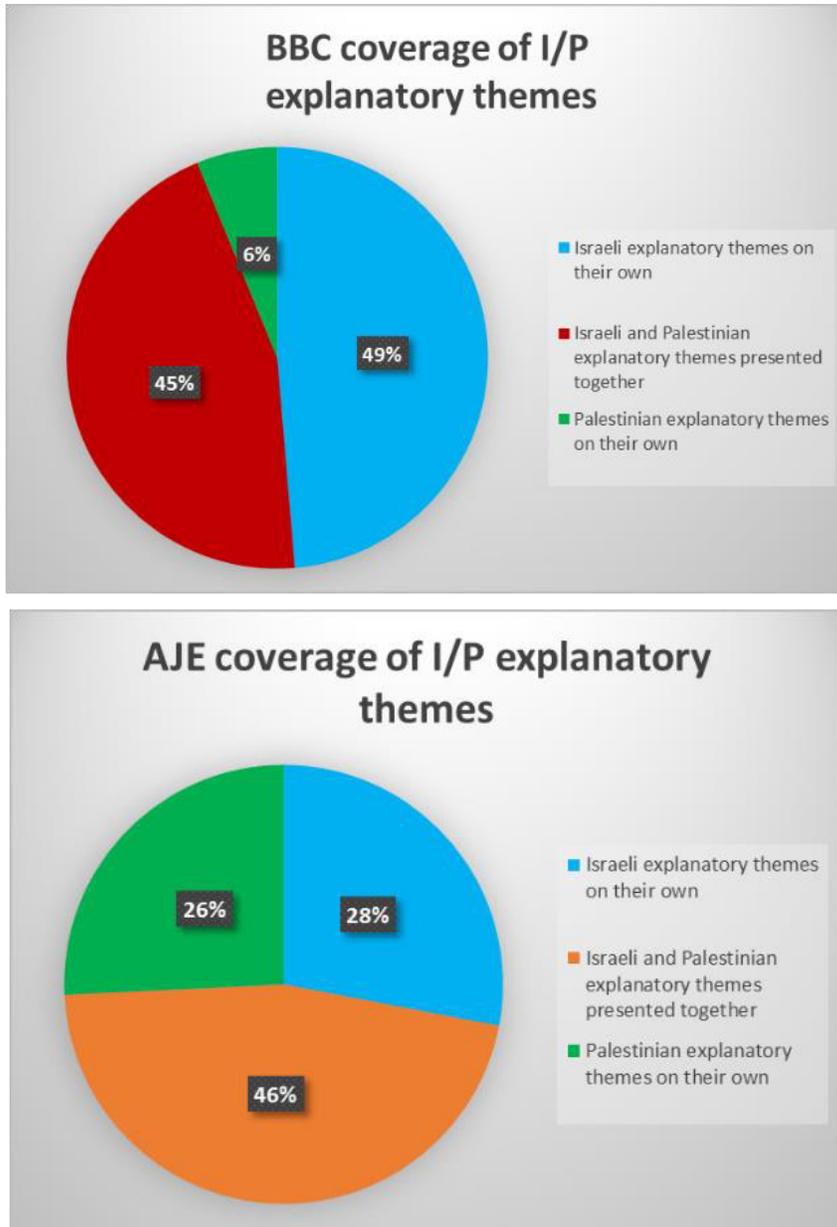


Figure 8. 10 AJE/BBC presenting I/P perspectives together vs on their own.

As Figure 8.10 above shows, both BBC and AJE presented Israeli and Palestinian perspectives together almost half the time (in 45% and 46% of cases, respectively). However, when BBC coverage reported Israeli perspectives, these were presented on their own almost half of the time (49%), whereas Palestinian perspectives were presented on their own only 6% of the time. In other words, Israeli perspectives were more than nine times more likely to be presented on their own than Palestinian ones. In contrast, AJE's coverage presented Israeli perspectives on their own as frequently as it did Palestinian ones, in 28% and 26% of cases, respectively. BBC

coverage frequently reported Israeli explanatory themes on their own even when they were highly disputed by Palestinians or international bodies, as in the following segment:

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... A humanitarian truce was rejected again by Israel's Foreign Minister. She says that there is no humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. (BBC, 1 January 2009)

As discussed in Chapter Three and elsewhere, the reality of a humanitarian crisis in Gaza before and during OCL was not only a key Palestinian explanatory theme, but also the official position of the UN and several human rights organisations, yet this crucial perspective was missing from this segment.

In/contested authority: Presenting the credibility of Israeli and Palestinian sources

One of the most notable findings of the textual analysis is a marked difference between how the BBC and AJE presented the credibility of statements made by Israeli and Palestinian officials. In the BBC's coverage, statements by official Israeli sources were regularly presented using language that suggested they were more credible or authoritative than statements made by official Palestinian sources. In the segment below, the use of the disclaimer "Health officials say" when presenting the Palestinian official casualty figures can be contrasted with the formulation "...a series of targets linked to Hamas..." used to report the Israeli claim regarding the nature of the targets hit by the IDF – a formulation which suggests the stated 'link' to Hamas is all but certain:

BBC Newscaster: Health officials in Gaza say that at least 120 people have been killed when Israeli aircraft attacked a series of targets linked to the Palestinian militant group Hamas. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

This pattern of using qualifying formulations when reporting statements by Palestinian officials or sources but not Israeli ones was regularly in evidence in the BBC coverage, and is highlighted in the following further examples, where the key uses of language are underlined:

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood, Jerusalem): Local people said that many civilians had been killed. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC Newscaster: The targets were security compounds belonging to Hamas. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC Newscaster, London: ... 660 people have now been killed in Gaza, according to Palestinian officials many were civilians. Israel has suffered four deaths from Hamas rockets during the conflict, while five soldiers have been killed. (BBC, 6 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster, London: ... More than a thousand people have now been killed in the Israeli assault according to Palestinian health officials. They say more than 300 that are dead are children. 13 Israelis have been killed in the conflict, 10 soldiers and 3 civilians. (BBC, 14 January 2009)

For its part, AJE's coverage generally made it clear when the presented views were those of Israeli or Palestinian officials rather than those of the reporters, as seen in the following segments:

AJE Correspondent (Jackie Rowland) Jerusalem: Now the Israelis say that this is an operation that they have been planning for months. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster: The Israelis are calling it 'Operation Cast Lead'. The Hamas leadership is calling it a massacre (AJE, 29 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster: The offensive's objective according to the Israeli government is to destroy all Hamas Government buildings. (AJE, 29 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster: So far Palestinian medical officials put the death toll at 345, with more than a thousand people injured. (AJE, 29 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Jacky Rowland), Jerusalem: ... it is this constant barrage of rockets that the Israeli Government is using as its justification for the attacks on Gaza. (AJE, 4 January 2009)

Overall, AJE's reporting showed no significant differences in the linguistic formulations used to report the claims of Palestinian or Israeli officials or sources. Both BBC and AJE's coverage

generally used qualifications when referencing contested Israeli or Palestinian terminological formulations:

AJE Reporter (Dorsa Al-Jabbari): ... The stated aim of Israel's so called 'Cast Lead' military operation is to destroy the, quote, 'terror infrastructure' in the Gaza strip. (AJE, 28 December 2008)

Paul Wood, BBC, Jerusalem: Israel said Hamas was to blame for launching what it calls 'terror attacks' from within civilian population centres. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

However, this was not always the case. BBC reporters often uncritically adopted terms like 'surgical strikes', as will be shown in detail later in this chapter, while AJE reporters occasionally used Palestinian terminology such as "resistance", as highlighted above, but generally did not do so for more religious terms like "martyrs".

Reporting declamatory statements

Another notable difference between AJE and BBC is in their reporting of declamatory statements – emotive declarations which do not articulate rationales or defences of action – in their coverage of I/P perspectives. As shown in the thematic analysis results earlier, declamatory statements accounted for almost a third (28%) of BBC's coverage of Palestinian perspectives, whereas they represented only 10% of AJE's coverage. The BBC's use of such statements, such as 'Gaza is a graveyard for Israel', 'seeking revenge', 'make Israel weep blood', 'Israel would pay a high price', is illustrated in the following segments:

BBC Correspondent: In response to this, all of Gaza's armed groups say they have mobilized their fighters for full revenge. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC Newscaster: Hamas has vowed to turn the Gaza's strip into a cemetery for the Israeli army. (BBC, 3 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent: Hamas promised to make Israel weep with tears of blood if it invaded. (BBC 3 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent: A Hamas spokesman said [Israel] would pay a high price for what they were doing and that they would never break the strength and will of the Palestinian people. (BBC, 4 January 2009)

In all of the above examples, the declamatory statement is presented without any further clarification as to the specific grievances or rationales motivating it. In contrast, AJE rarely presented declamatory statements, and when they were referenced, its journalists would often ask Palestinian spokespeople to explain and elaborate on the rationales behind them:

AJE Newscaster: The Leadership has vowed revenge, what exactly does that mean?

Osama Hamdan (Hamas representative): Well the people are asking for that. Hamas will act as any responsible leadership acting in war. We will act to defend our own people to react towards this occupation towards this violation against our own people. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

BBC reports rarely used Israeli declamatory statements to present the Israeli perspective, and when they did so it was generally alongside Israeli rationales rather than instead of them. The segment below illustrates this pattern. Although it reports both Israeli and Palestinian declamatory statements, the Palestinian ones are presented on their own, whereas the Israeli one (“now is the time to fight”) follows two Israeli rationales and defences of action (“in response to rocket attacks, to defend the country”):

BBC Newscaster: Israel said the airstrikes were in response to rocket attacks, to defend its country, and that now is the time to fight. The targets were security compounds belonging to Hamas. The militant group has accused Israel of carrying out a massacre and vowed revenge. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

In total, Israeli declamatory statements were used only twice in the entire BBC coverage, on day one of OCL, whereas Hamas declamatory statements were used ten times, and presented on their own in every occasion. In contrast, when declamatory statements appeared on AJE, this was generally alongside Palestinian rationales and defences of action.

8.3.3 Thematic Area of Coverage: Historical and Political Context

This section examines AJE and BBC coverage of historical and political background in their OCL reporting. A key element of conflict reporting, particularly in relation to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, is the extent to which important historical background and political context is provided to viewers. Several studies have shown how crucial knowledge of historical

background is to an audience's understanding of media coverage of the Israel-Palestinian conflict (Philo & Berry, 2004, 2011; Rotik, 2006) Figure 8.11 below presents the above sub-thematic breakdown in proportional terms.

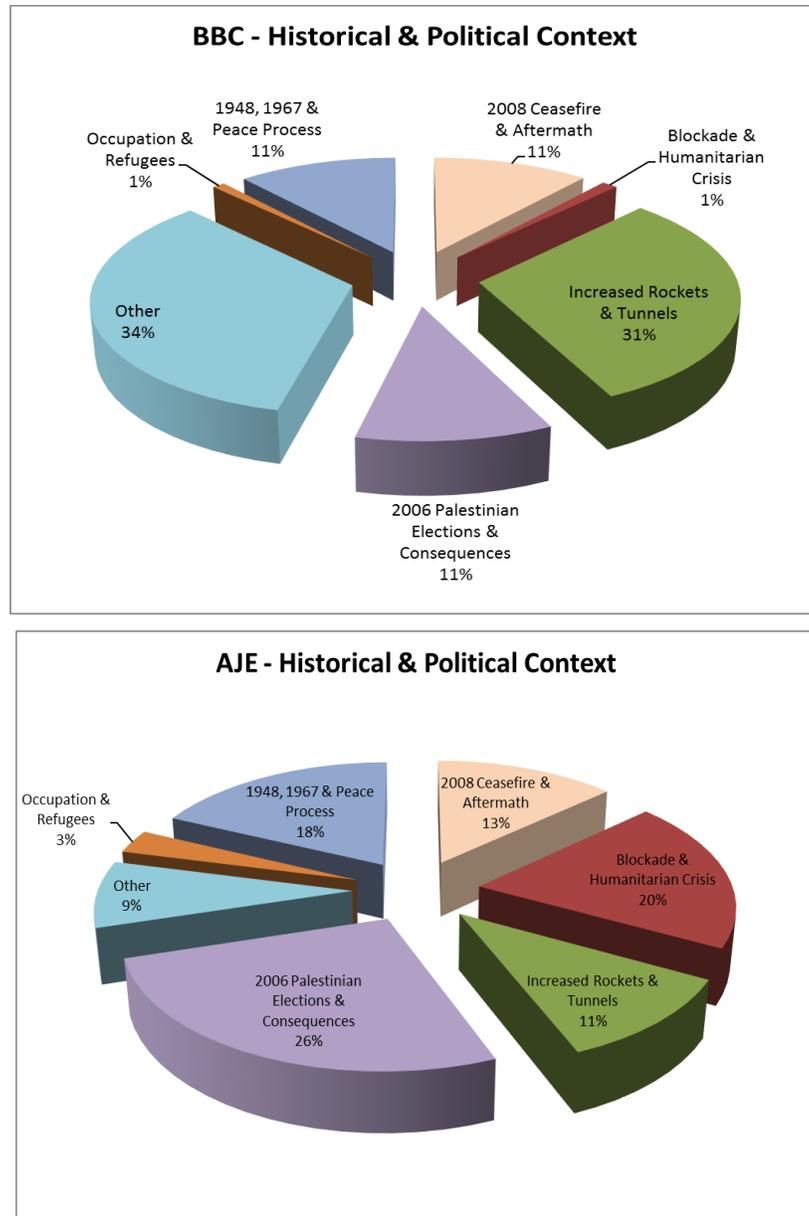


Figure 8. 11 BBC/AJE coverage of Historical & Political Context

The sub-thematic breakdown (in lines of text) of BBC/AJE's historical and political context coverage is shown in Table 8.16 below.

		Immediate context of OCL					Historical Background	
		2008 Ceasefire & Aftermath	Blockade & Humanitarian Crisis	Increased Rockets & Tunnels	2006 Palestinian Elections & Consequences	Other	Occupation & Refugees	1948, 1967 & Peace Process
AJE	833	110.75	163.25	92	219.75	71.5	25.5	150.25
BBC	110	12.25	1.25	33.75	11.75	37.5	1	12.5

Table 8. 16 AJE/BBC Coverage of the Historical background

The next sub-section 8.3.3.1 discusses the historical background findings, while sub-section 8.3.3.2 examines those for coverage of the immediate context leading up to OCL.

8.3.3.1 Historical Background: 1880s to 2005

As indicated in the methodology chapter, ‘historical background’ is used here to refer to the political history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict from the birth of modern political Zionism to Israel’s ‘disengagement’ from Gaza in 2005, as surveyed in Chapter Two. The thematic and textual analysis conducted here focuses on several key elements of I/P history deemed essential to an audience’s understanding of the events of OCL, including the 1948 war and the Palestinian refugee problem, the 1967 war and the Israeli occupation, and the Oslo peace process and two Intifadas.

The thematic analysis results show that historical background accounted for 3.2%⁴⁹ of AJE’s total coverage but only 1% of the BBC’s. Dominant sub-themes of AJE’s coverage of historical background included the wars of 1948 and 1967, the occupation, the refugees, the peace process and Hamas rockets in the 2001-2007 period. The BBC’s coverage referenced principally two historical sub-themes, the 1948/1967 wars and the occupation, albeit in a very limited fashion, as will be discussed below.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis shows key differences between how the BBC and AJE approached coverage of historical contextualisation. It is worth noting that AJE reporters often highlighted history as an important part of understanding the events of OCL, and explained the significance of key historical elements to recent developments and events. The following two segments illustrate this approach:

⁴⁹ It is worth noting that in the case of AJE’s Newshour, the figure of 3.2% is lower than that for the whole show, as segments with a more historical focus tended to be presented in the latter half of the bulletin (which was not included in the thematic analysis, as discussed in the methodology chapter).

AJE Correspondent (Kristen Salomey), United Nations: In 1947, an infant UN recommended dividing British-controlled Palestine into two states, roughly equal in size, one would be Arab, the other Jewish, but when the UN officially recognised the state of Israel in 1949, it was along much broader borders. The boundaries have been contested by both sides ever since, and despite wars, truces, and resolutions, the question of the Middle East remains one of the UN's most intractable issues. Jewish settlements continued to be built on Palestinian land despite Security Council resolution 446 which called for their end in 1976. Israel continues building a giant wall to cage in the West Bank, despite the 2004 ruling of the international court of justice which declared it illegal. (AJE, 4 January, 2009)

AJE Newscaster: The Gaza Strip, as we know, came into existence in 1948 when the state of Israel was established, tens of thousands of Palestinians were driven from their homes; many sought refuge in Gaza, which was then controlled by Egypt. In 1967, Israel invaded Egypt in the Arab-Israeli war and occupied Gaza. Israel built settlements over the next 25 years, totalling 20% of Gaza's territory. In 2005, Israel pulled out of Gaza but retained control of common borders and monitored the border with Egypt. Gaza was now controlled by the Fatah dominated Palestinian Authority. In 2006, Hamas won the Palestinian elections, but Israel and its allies refused to accept the victory. A year later, a civil war broke out between Hamas and its political rival, Fatah, and Hamas fighters took control of Gaza. Last year, Israel imposed a siege on Gaza (2008) cutting the flow of goods and people to a trickle. Hamas and Israel agreed to a ceasefire, but it was then broken in November, when Israel killed six Palestinians and, as we all know, on December the 27th Israel launched its offensive on the Gaza strip. (AJE, 11 January 2009)

In contrast, BBC coverage included relatively few references to historical context. Elements of the Palestinian narrative, such as territorial dispossession and occupation, as well as the building of settlements and human rights abuses, were largely absent.

There was also a notable difference between BBC and AJE in terms of how historical references were presented. While AJE's coverage generally accompanied historical references with explanatory detail, the BBC's coverage often did not. The following two segments are illustrative of this difference in approach:

BBC Correspondent, Jerusalem: ... Gaza has not suffered as badly in a single day since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War. There were two intense waves of airstrikes, more than 100 tons of bombs were dropped, Israel said, on dozens of targets. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent ... That death toll of 205 has now made today's airstrikes the single highest death toll since Israel occupied the Gaza strip and the West Bank in 1967, to give you a sense of just how devastating that death toll is for Palestinians. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

While the two segments above invoke the same historical analogy, only AJE's actually provides an essential element of context for understanding the relevance of the 1967 war to the events being reported, namely that it was the year Israel's occupation of Gaza (and the West Bank) began. Mentions of the occupation were virtually absent from the BBC's coverage, with the term itself only being used twice by BBC reporters in the entire 22-day period of coverage examined:

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... On the far side of the clouds of teargas, Palestinian security police stopped all but a few men from getting too close. On days like this, you can really feel the occupation and the strength of opposition to it ... (BBC, 2 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ...Palestinian fighters talk of struggle, resistance to occupation, and sacrifice. Civilian deaths are not seen as reasons to give in but reasons to go on. (BBC, 9 January 2009)

As can be seen, neither of the above segments includes any details that might help contextualise the occupation and how it relates to the key Palestinian themes of "resistance" and "liberation". Nor was the decades-long impact of the occupation on the human, social and political rights of Palestinians mentioned or explained once in any of the 22 BBC bulletins. As such, a crucial element of context underpinning a key Palestinian rationale was completely missing from the BBC coverage. The first segment does not make explicit who the 'occupier' is, and with the preceding sentence referring to "Palestinian security police", might even confuse viewers unfamiliar with the conflict. Another example of this lack of contextualisation is when the events of 1948, 1967 or the issue of refugees are presented using indirect or euphemistic language, such as the following segments:

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood), Israel Gaza border: The 1967 war gave Israel control of the West bank and Gaza. Hamas moderates could live within an Israel which reversed those gains. But Hamas will always really believe that land Israel took at its birth in 1948 is truly Palestinian. (BBC, 9 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel Gaza border: ... Inside Gaza thousands of people have been made homeless, others have been given warnings by Israel to get out of places that they might attack... This is not a new experience for many Gazan families who are refugees from the land that became Israel in 1948. Settling the wider Arab Israeli conflict is the only long-term answer to this, doing so has never been as urgent. (BBC, 12 January 2009)

The two segments above represent the only references to the pivotal events of 1948 in the BBC's 22-day period of coverage under examination. In the first segment, viewers are told that Israel "took land" without making it clear who this land was taken from and how, or the impact this had on Palestinians, including the many tens of thousands still living in refugee camps in Gaza as a result decades later. Similarly, viewers are told the 1967 conflict "gave Israel control" of the West Bank without explaining what this entailed, namely the decades-long occupation of Palestinian land (illegal according to the UN and other international bodies, as discussed in Chapter Two). The second segment offers the only reference in the 22 BBC bulletins to Palestinian refugees being driven out of their homes in 1948. Once again, there is only an indirect allusion to what, or who, drove them out. The reporter's claim that "settling the wider Arab Israeli conflict is the only long-term answer to this" hints at the crucial significance of history but does not offer any further detail or explanation. Overall, the thematic analysis shows serious gaps in reporting crucial historical background in the BBC's coverage of OCL, not only in quantitative terms but also in the choices of terminology and explanatory context.

For its part, as mentioned earlier, AJE's coverage generally framed key elements of the conflict within relevant historical explanatory context. One example of this is the following two segments, in which the prospect of Gaza residents becoming homeless as a result of Israel's military actions during OCL is placed within the historical context that clarifies its significance for viewers:

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: ... the United Nations now plans on converting some of the schools that they have in the Northern part of Gaza into makeshift camps because they are fearing that in the coming hours, in the coming days, a lot of people will evacuate their homes. A lot of people will once again become refugees. It's important to keep in mind 70% of the population of Gaza are already refugees from other parts of historic Palestine... (AJE, 30 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha: Many of the people in Gaza today were either refugees or descendants of refugees who lost their homes in what is today Israel in 1948... to once again have their houses destroyed in refugee camps in Gaza, and become again a refugee, must be an enormously psychologically taxing situation to live through. (AJE, 12 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: ... that sense of comfort or security does not exist among the Palestinian people we have spoken to at these refugee shelters. They all immediately tell you the stories of how their parents were made refugees, perhaps in 1967, and even their grandparents were refugees in 1948, and they see this as the continued struggle of the Palestinian people who have continually been displaced from their homeland, and this has been one of the darkest chapters in their struggle for independence... (AJE, 12 January 2009)

References to the occupation in AJE's coverage were often articulated by Palestinian voices during interviews, but also by AJE's own journalists in their reporting:

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: ... at the end of the day Israel is still stuck with the Palestinian question, what will Israel do with the issue of Gaza and the West Bank and the 41-year-old occupation that continues? And this is the point that Palestinians continuously say when you speak to them time and time again, there is no military solution to their struggle... (AJE, 17 January 2009)

Overall, AJE's coverage of historical background was more extensive, and more contextualised, than the BBC's. It is important, however, to note that the textual analysis did not find evidence of systemic or consistently partisan interpretation of the historical narrative in either BBC or AJE coverage. Nevertheless, in highlighting long-running grievances such as the occupation and the refugee question, the thematic emphasis of AJE's coverage could be said to have been generally, though not markedly, aligned with the Palestinian narrative. The BBC's

coverage, by lacking references to key historical elements, including several that are crucial to the Palestinian narrative, largely echoed the official Israeli framing of OCL, according to which historical references such as 1948/1967 did not feature in its explanations for the causes and the issues at the root of the conflict.

8.3.3.2 Immediate Context of OCL: From the 2006 Palestinian elections to OCL

The thematic analysis reveals that AJE dedicated 13.5% of its overall coverage to the immediate context of OCL, while the figure for the BBC was 7.5%. As the survey conducted in Chapter Three shows, there are arguably four key elements of immediate context that are crucial to understanding the causes of Operation Cast Lead from both Israeli and Palestinian perspectives. These include:

- 1) Israel's siege/blockade of Gaza since 2007, and the ensuing humanitarian crisis.
- 2) Hamas launching rockets into Israel over the same period.
- 3) The expansion of tunnel networks under the Egypt-Gaza border.
- 4) The June 2008 Ceasefire and its aftermath.

Figure 8.12 below presents the sub-thematic breakdown of AJE and BBC's immediate context coverage in proportional terms (% of coverage).

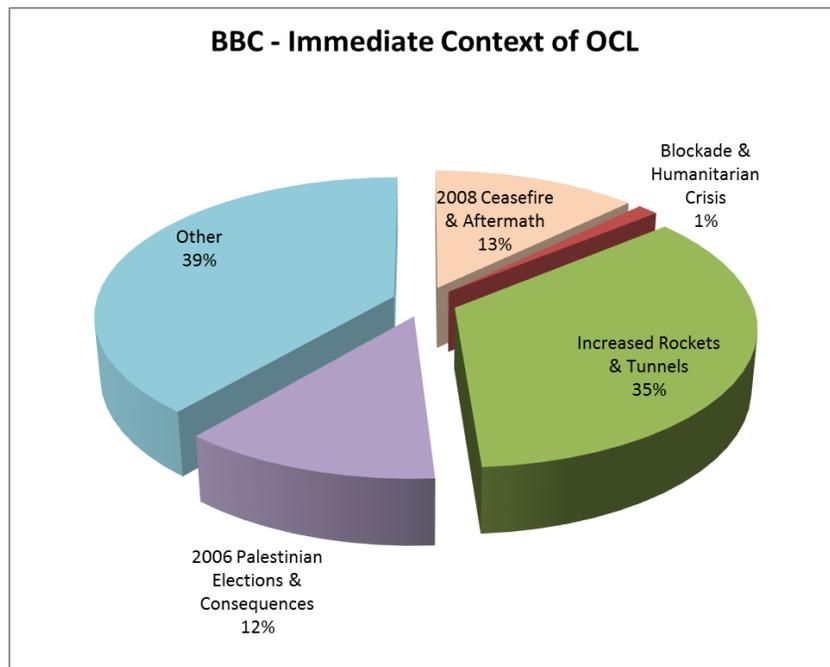
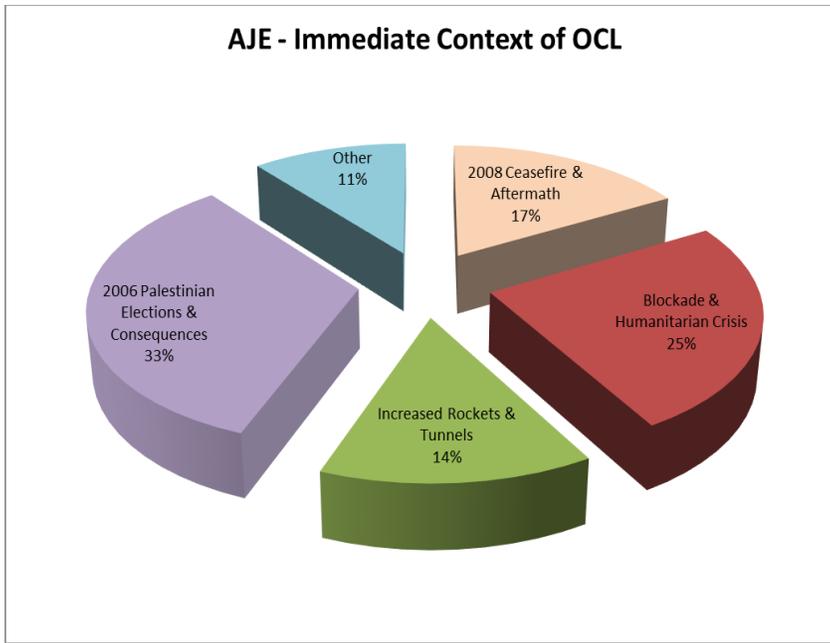


Figure 8. 12 AJE/BBC coverage of immediate context to OCL

As highlighted in Table 8.16 and Figure 8.12 above, the analysis also reveals some key differences between the two broadcasters' coverage in terms of *which* aspects of the immediate context received greater prominence. The BBC's largest area of immediate context coverage was the threat of rockets and tunnels, which accounted for more than a third (35%) of the total. In contrast, the 18-month Israeli blockade and ensuing humanitarian crisis received only 1% of the BBC total. For its part, AJE's emphasis was on the aftermath of the 2006 Palestinian

elections (including inter-Palestinian divisions and the breakdown of the peace process) which received 33% of its total coverage. A second key area of coverage was the blockade and humanitarian crisis, which received 25% of its immediate context coverage, and the June 2008 ceasefire, and the circumstances of its collapse, which received 17% of the total.

A summary of some of the main Israeli and Palestinian explanatory themes around these key elements of immediate context is provided in Table 8.17 below:

	Immediate Context of OCL	
Contextual element	Israeli perspectives	Palestinian perspectives
Israel's Siege/Blockade of Gaza and the humanitarian crisis	<p>The Israeli blockade is a security measure to stop weapons smuggling.</p> <p>There was no humanitarian crisis in Gaza prior to or during OCL.</p> <p>Israeli has been allowing sufficient food and basic goods into Gaza.</p>	<p>The Israeli blockade is a politically motivated act of collective punishment.</p> <p>Israel's blockade of Gaza is a serious obstacle to peace.</p> <p>The blockade has produced a grave humanitarian crisis in Gaza.</p> <p>OCL has made the grave humanitarian situation in Gaza.</p>
Rockets	<p>Hamas has been launching rockets into Israel for years.</p> <p>Rockets are a serious threat to the Israeli population and require a military response.</p>	<p>The rockets are in response to Israel's siege of Gaza, and Hamas offered to stop them if the siege is lifted.</p> <p>There was a 90% reduction of rockets since the June 2008 Ceasefire.</p>
Tunnels	<p>Tunnels are almost entirely used for weapons smuggling and for launching attacks on Israeli communities.</p>	<p>Tunnels are primarily a lifeline supplying food and essential goods to a Palestinian population under blockade.</p>

June 2008 Ceasefire	Hamas broke the Ceasefire by continuing to fire rockets into Israel.	Israel broke the Ceasefire by not lifting the siege as per the agreement, and by continuing attacks on Gaza, including the attack on Hamas fighters inside Gaza in Nov, 2008.
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Table 8. 17 Main explanatory themes around the immediate context to OCL

AJE/BBC coverage of each of the four key elements of immediate context listed above will be examined in turn in the next sub-sections. Coverage of further, secondary factors — such as the election of a new US Administration, the upcoming Israeli elections, and inter-Palestinian tensions — will also be briefly examined.

The June 2008 Ceasefire

As discussed in Chapter Three, a key theme of contention between Israeli and Palestinian narratives at the start of OCL was in relation to the collapse of the 6-month June 2008 ceasefire. For Israel, Hamas broke the ceasefire by continuing to fire rockets and building tunnels. For the Palestinians, Israel broke the ceasefire by not honouring its pledge to lift or ease the blockade, despite a significant reduction in rocket fire by Palestinian factions, as well as continuing its military incursions into Gaza, notably in the Nov 4th attack which killed six of its members. AJE’s coverage, whilst regularly adopting the Palestinian theme that “Israel broke the ceasefire”, nevertheless reported both perspectives:

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: ... At the same time, though, as you have mentioned the six-month truce that was in place between Hamas and the Palestinian factions and Israel, was meant to alleviate some of the humanitarian suffering that has been taking place in Gaza. What was supposed to happen during that six-month period were crossings were supposed to open to allow an increase of goods an increase of humanitarian supplies to come into Gaza in return there would be a complete halt of rocket fire from Gaza towards Israel, that never materialised to the degree that both parties had hoped for, what ended up happening in the final weeks of the truce, Israel carried out a military incursion on November 4th. And that sent the situation here into a downward spiral with an increase of rocket fire and subsequent Israeli military activity. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Senior Political Analyst (Marwan Bishara), New York: ... Hamas insist that the ceasefire ended because Israel did not respect it. (AJE, 3 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: ... [the Palestinian factions] say if you look at the six months that we the Palestinian factions committed ourselves to a truce, since June of 2008 till December of 2008, they will say we reduced rocket fire drastically statistically almost by a huge amount and they pointed that as their commitment to a ceasefire but that was not met on the Israeli part with a significant increase in the number of days that the crossings were open, or an increase in the amount of goods, because those were at the time the pre-conditions of that six month truce... (AJE, 6 January 2009)

Osama Hamdan (Hamas representative in Lebanon): Well, I have to say initially that during the calm situation of the ceasefire, the Israelis violated the ceasefire several times, and they did that the last time at the 4th of November, and they continued closing Gaza, violating the situation till the 19th of December. That means that the Israelis broke down the ceasefire, not Hamas and Hamas's position was, with the other Palestinian factions, was a reaction towards the Israeli position. I believe that the Israelis violated the ceasefire, they dropped down all the chances to extend the ceasefire... (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster, (Darren Jordan), Doha: ... the White House has condemned Rocket fire aimed into Israel and clearly blamed Hamas for breaking the ceasefire. (AJE, 29 December 2008)

For its part, the BBC coverage only referred to the June 2008 ceasefire twice in the entire 22-day coverage, and the Palestinian perspective — that Israel broke the 2008 ceasefire — was only referenced once and indirectly:

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: Hamas believes that when it comes to ceasefires, Israel can't be trusted, according to its representative in Beirut. (BBC, 9 January 2009)

Osama Hamdan (Senior Hamas Member, Lebanon): We had already a ceasefire for 6 months the Israelis do not respect that they did not accept to play their terms, so they damaged that they did not give a new chance for the ceasefire. (BBC, 9 January 2009)

The above segment does not provide any further detail as to why Hamas does not trust Israel, nor any other elements of context — such as the reduction in rocket fire in the aftermath of the ceasefire, or the IDF attack of Nov 4th, 2008 — that could help viewers' understanding of the issues. On AJE, there were six mentions of the “Hamas is to blame/broke the ceasefire” theme against nine mentions of the “Israel is to blame/broke the ceasefire” theme.

The Israeli blockade and the humanitarian crisis:

As discussed in Chapter Three, Israel's imposition of a blockade in 2007 led to a severe humanitarian crisis in Gaza. This was a point UN representatives made repeatedly to the media, including the BBC and AJE, as illustrated in the statement below given by an UNRWA⁵⁰ spokesperson to AJE:

Christopher Gunness, Spokesperson for UNRWA: ... for months and months we have been unable to get sanitation materials into Gaza. And I have been saying on Al Jazeera and on the BBC and in other places that there is a crisis of public health. The blockade has strangled Gaza ... (AJE, 13 January 2009)

From the start of the conflict, AJE's coverage included extensive references to the Israeli blockade and its impact on the humanitarian situation in Gaza before OCL, often in the context of explaining the likely impact of Israel's military operation on the civilian population, as shown in the following segments:

⁵⁰ The United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East is a UN agency that supports the relief and human development of Palestinian refugees.

AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Ghosh), Doha: It doesn't look like it is going to end there, because Israel said that it will expand the assault against Hamas as necessary. What does that mean for the people of Gaza, who have already been suffering under a punishing blockade? (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Sherine Tadros), Gaza: In the past two days there has been much talk of what Israel will do to respond to the increased rocket fire by Palestinian fighters in Gaza. Here is the answer, a devastating attack on the already impoverished strip. The recent tightening of Israel's siege in the past two months has all but depleted medical supplies in Gaza. Essential drugs are at zero level. Many ambulances have been non-operational for a lack of fuel and electricity to power medical equipment inside. This is exactly what many here had been fearing. Now Palestinians will hold their breath ... (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: ... Medical officials have told Al Jazeera in the past weeks prior to today the situation was so bad that they were running low on many medicines, lifesaving medicines, critical surgical kits that they needed to perform basic operations here in Gaza. Those supplies were running extremely low. After today, that situation will only be exacerbated and their situation and the conditions of the medical facilities here will be pushed to the brink. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Imran Khan), Gaza: Gaza's hospitals have been under immense strain since Israel blockaded the strip when Hamas took over in 2007. Vital medical supplies have not been available for months, and this latest offensive has just shown how woefully underprepared Gaza's hospitals are. (AJE, 30 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: Because they have spent months under siege, they are struggling to get by as Israel has slowly squeezed the life out of Gaza. Now the airstrikes are destroying what little those Gazans had left. (AJE, 28 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Sherine Tadros), Gaza: For the past year and a half, people of Gaza have lived under an Israeli siege that starved them of the right to a decent and dignified life. Now Palestinians say the terror every single one of them here is experiencing is Israel's latest method of punishing them. (AJE, 3 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: The hospitals were dealing with an 18-month siege before this war began ... all of the indicators suggest a very dire humanitarian situation... (AJE, 13 January 2009)

As highlighted at the start of the section, the Israeli blockade and the ensuing humanitarian crisis in the lead-up to OCL were largely absent from the BBC's coverage of the causes of the conflict. A notable omission from the BBC's reporting was the fact the blockade had already

been in place for 18 months when OCL was launched, a fact referenced only once in the 22-day coverage. The words 'blockade', 'blockading' and 'siege' only appeared in BBC bulletins a total of 5 times in the entire 22-day coverage:

BBC reporter: Safeguarding places like this town is the reason why Israel has been blockading and is now attacking Gaza. (BBC, 31 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent (Jeremy Bowen), Sderot: The western diplomats and politicians who have been involved in the peace process over the last year or so have more or less ignored Gaza, they supported the Israeli blockade of Gaza and the international isolation of Hamas. (BBC, 31 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood), Jerusalem: Gaza's hospitals said they were running out of essential medicines, supplies were already short because of Israel's blockade. (BBC, 28 December 2008)

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Sderot: Recorded Report: ... The human suffering in Gaza and reports that Hamas is offering a ceasefire if Israel lifts its siege are increasing international pressure on the Israelis, which they continue to ignore. (BBC, 31 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent (Christian Frazer), Rafah: The tunnels we were shown were of varying depths and sizes, the most sophisticated, lined with concrete, were sometimes used to move people as well as weapons, they run up to 20 meters below the surface the shafts ventilated by air pipes, this one you can see a T-bar handle used to pull bags from below, most of the rockets are assembled within Gaza from material smuggled through the tunnels, this was footage taken by a BBC crew two years ago which shows how they are made but, besides weapons, they smuggle essentials, fuel, electricity, even livestock, for civilians, and after 18 months of siege, the Palestinians say these tunnels are their lifeline. (BBC, 7 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster: Well, Hamas, is demanding freedom of movement in and out of Gaza, but as we have heard the key Israeli demand, as we heard, is that Hamas stop all its rocket attacks. It says Hamas uses the only border crossing into Egypt at Rafah, which is riddled with tunnels, to smuggle in weapons. (BBC, 8 January 2009)

In all of the above segments, mentions of the blockade/siege are offered without any details as to what the siege entails and how it has impacted Gaza's population. In the first example, mention of Israel "blockading Gaza" is not only presented without any explanatory context but is also framed entirely around an Israeli rationale ("defending towns like these"). In the penultimate segment, the siege and its impact are presented as context to an extensive description of tunnels in which their primary use is described as weapons-smuggling and rocket production ("besides weapons"), thus echoing Israeli rationales. In the last segment, the Palestinian demand for "freedom of movement" is mentioned but instead of following it up with explanatory context of what this is in reference to (e.g., the blockade/siege), the BBC newscaster immediately refers to an Israeli explanatory theme ("rockets"), which ends up providing the overall framing for the segment.

Crucially, the fact that Israel's blockade long predated Operation Cast Lead (as discussed in Chapter Three), was a crucial element of context, which AJE reporting highlighted, yet it was largely absent from most of the BBC's reporting on the humanitarian situation during OCL. When there was mention of the shortage of essential medicines, for instance, this was framed as a temporary crisis caused by the fighting, rather than the result of an 18-month blockade as documented by international and humanitarian organisations.

Rockets

Both AJE and BBC coverage reported Hamas rockets as an important element of context to the causes of the conflict. Thematic analysis shows that every single AJE and BBC bulletin throughout the 22-day period of OCL included references to the issue of rockets. AJE's coverage regularly referred to the long-standing nature of the threat of rockets when reporting official Israeli rationales for launching OCL:

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: Israel's reaction, as we know Israel is bombing Gaza to stop the rockets being fired into Israeli cities. It says half a million Israelis live under the constant threat of rocket fire. One such town as am sure plenty of you know is called Sderot it is in the South, where support of this attack is not surprisingly quite strong. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Jacky Rowland), Sderot, Southern Israel: Sderot is only a couple of kilometres from the Gaza border and it has been in the firing line for several years. Today a rocket landed in this street blowing away a back wall of a house. The people living next door are Russian Jews who only moved to Israel three years ago. (AJE, 4 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Jacky Rowland), Southern Israel, Sderot: This is the Qassam rocket that landed on that house where we were a short while ago, just one rocket among the many thousands that have landed in and around Sderot over the last 7 years, and it is this constant barrage of rockets that the Israeli Government is using as its justification for the attacks on Gaza. (BBC, 4 January 2009)

Moreover, AJE reporting also questioned Hamas rationales for launching rockets, and whether this military tactic was supported by the Palestinian population at large, as shown in the following segments:

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: You could also, though, Ayman, talk about the stated aims of Hamas and their firing the rockets. Is there any questioning within society in Gaza, the people of Gaza, about the firing of rockets and what's that achieving? (AJE, 1 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: There is no doubt that people here have questioned [firing] rockets, they ask also about how effective they are because they see the consequences, the destruction that is brought on by Israel "and in exchange for what?" they ask all the time [...] some of them have said it's simply not worth the tactical significance of firing these rockets... (AJE 1, January 2009)

BBC's coverage of rockets was almost always presented alongside Israeli defences of action about the need to defend Israeli citizens, as illustrated in the following segments:

BBC Newscaster, London: The Israelis say the airstrikes are necessary to end rocket attacks by Hamas fighters. (BBC, 29 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent, Jeremy Bowen: Israel wants to keep on fighting until it has destroyed Hamas's capacity to hit its soldiers and civilians [...] Hamas rockets are still hitting Israel. Israel argues that any country in the world would do what it is doing to protect its people. The Israeli finance Minister was caught up in an alert. (BBC, 5 January 2009)

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Sderot: Safeguarding places like this town, is the reason why Israel has been blockading and is now attacking Gaza. (BBC, 31 December 2008)

The last segment is especially noteworthy in that it is a direct endorsement of the Israel argument — that the siege and the military attacks are about stopping rockets.

In the BBC segments below, Israeli rationales and defences are presented in reference to the rocket attacks but there is no clarification as to why Hamas is firing rockets into Israel, or any Palestinian perspectives or rationales in relation to them:

BBC Newscaster: Israel says the air strikes were in response to missile attacks on its country and that now is the time to fight. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent, Paul Wood: Gaza's armed groups used some of their new long-range rockets today. Israel says half a million people are now at risk. Israelis in the towns affected supported the military campaign. (BBC, 28 December 2008)

BBC Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen): ... The Israelis objective in doing all this is to try stop Hamas firing those rockets out. (BBC, 30 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent (Jeremy Bowen): Israel says it wants a permanent solution to stop rocket fire out of Gaza they have sent tanks in before and even though it killed a lot of people and caused a lot of damage they didn't stop the rocket fire, that is a big dilemma that the Israeli leaders face at the moment today. (BBC, 31 December 2008)

In fact, Palestinian defences or rationales for launching rockets, such as the 18-month siege or the occupation, never appeared in the BBC's coverage, with the single exception being the indirect mention in the segment below from Day 14 of the conflict, which refers to 'resistance' and 'occupation' but without any further explanation:

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen): Palestinian fighters talk of struggle, resistance to occupation and sacrifice. Civilian deaths are not seen as reasons to give in but reasons to go on. (BBC, 9 January 2009)

Overall, both AJE and BBC gave significant coverage to the issue of rockets as a crucial element of context to the causes of OCL. However, BBC's coverage generally presented them entirely within the context of Israeli rationales for action, whereas AJE, whilst featuring scepticism and questioning of Hamas's use of rockets, nevertheless always placed the rockets issue within the context of Palestinian rationales and grievances, most notably the 18-month blockade and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, as in the following segment:

AJE Correspondent (Sherine Tadros): In the past two days, there has been much talk of what Israel will do to respond to the increased rocket fire by Palestinian fighters in Gaza. Here is the answer, a devastating attack on the already impoverish strip. The recent tightening of Israel's siege in the past two months has all but depleted medical supplies in Gaza. Essential drugs are at zero level. Many ambulances have been non-operational for a lack of fuel and electricity to power medical equipment inside. This is exactly what many here had been fearing. Now Palestinians will hold their breath. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

Tunnels

One of the core themes of the Israeli official narrative during the conflict was that 'targeting tunnels to stop weapon-smuggling' was one of Israel's main objectives in launching Operation Cast Lead. Analysis of the coverage shows this theme was often uncritically presented in the BBC's coverage, with almost no context being provided regarding why these tunnels existed in the first place. In coverage of the tunnels, the BBC often uncritically repeated or reproduced Israeli rationales — notably that tunnels were chiefly used to smuggle weapons by Hamas — but not the key Palestinian perspective that tunnels represented a critical lifeline for a population under blockade:

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood), Jerusalem: ... The latest strikes were on tunnels used to smuggle arms into Gaza but there were other targets... (BBC, 28 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent (Jeremy Bowen): ... [Israel] says any ceasefire must include a way to stop Hamas rearming itself. That is the reason why Israel has also been bombing the tunnels that run between Egypt and Gaza. (BBC, 5 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster, London: Well, Hamas is demanding freedom of movement in and out of Gaza, but as we have heard the key Israeli demand as we hear is that Hamas stops all its rocket attacks. It says Hamas uses the only border crossing into Egypt at Rafah, which is riddled with tunnels, to smuggle in weapons. (BBC, 7 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Christian Frazer), Rafah: ... five minutes after the ceasefire had supposedly begun today, the town of Rafah was shaken by two enormous bombs, the Israeli targeting, once again, the tunnels through which Hamas smuggles its weapons. Rafah lies at the Southern edge of the Gaza strip divided by a border and a perimeter wall on the Palestinian side the entrances to these tunnels are hidden beneath plastic sheeted tents on the Egyptian side they surface beneath the undergrowth sometimes within the houses the Israelis say they destroyed 60% of the tunnels in the past week. Our Bedouin guide says plenty more has survived. (BBC, 7 January 2009)

The last segment is notable for the fact it offers detailed first-hand descriptions of the tunnels, yet does not report a single Palestinian perspective. The theme of tunnels being a “lifeline” for the besieged population, used in large part to smuggle basic needs such as medicines and food, was central to the Palestinian narrative, yet it was mentioned only twice throughout the 22-day BBC coverage under examination, in the following segments:

BBC Newscaster: ... because of the siege, besides weapons, they smuggle essentials: fuel, electricity, even livestock, for civilians, and after 18 months of siege the Palestinians say these tunnels are their lifeline. (BBC, 7 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Christian Fraser): ... The main target is this narrowest strip of land between Egypt and Gaza, beneath which Hamas had smuggled its weapons and the people had smuggled their food. (BBC, 17 January 2009)

However, while the “tunnels are a lifeline” theme is presented in the segments above, this is done within an Israeli framing. In the first segment, the phrase “besides weapons” suggests arms smuggling is the tunnels’ primary use, which is precisely the Israeli argument. Secondly, the role of the tunnels as a lifeline is presented as simply something “Palestinians say”, rather than a statement of fact, even though the reporter’s own description — “essentials: fuel, electricity, even livestock” — suggests it is the latter. In the second segment, the tunnels are mentioned primarily as legitimate targets of Israeli strikes (“ Hamas weapons”), rather than a lifeline for Gazans.

In contrast, AJE regularly emphasised the context of the 18-month siege and the humanitarian crisis in its reporting of the tunnels:

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: Israel has just as it said it would expand its bombardment of the Gaza strip, this time taking out the hidden lifelines of the besieged territory. Dozens of tunnels beneath the Egypt-Gaza border have been bombed in the last few hours. Tunnels, which under the Israeli siege provide Gazans with much needed food and supplies. (AJE, 28 December 2008)

Overall, the Israeli perspective on tunnels (smuggling weapons) appeared more than three times as often in the BBC’s coverage as the Palestinian perspective (tunnels as a lifeline). In contrast, AJE’s coverage referred to the Israeli and Palestinian perspectives on tunnels an equal number of times (8 each). Moreover, AJE’s coverage regularly presented the Israeli and Palestinian perspectives on the tunnels, both as weapon-smuggling routes and lifelines supplying a blockaded population with essential goods, alongside each other, as the following segments show:

AJE Newscaster: Israel has bombed a series of tunnels which link Gaza to Egypt. The tunnels have been used to get vital supplies into Gaza after Israel shut down the crossings, but Israel says weapons and explosives were taken through them. (AJE, 28 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha: One of the major conditions Israel has attached to any possible ceasefire in Gaza is shutting down the vast network of tunnels supplying the territory... it says they are openly being used to smuggle weapons from Egypt Sinai Peninsula. Palestinians say they are an essential economic supply route to circumvent crippling Israeli blockade of the strip. (AJE, 7 Jan 2009)

Other factors: Israeli elections, US elections

Both AJE and BBC coverage referenced other historical and political factors — besides the four discussed above — when discussing the causes of OCL. The BBC placed particular emphasis on US and Israeli elections when explaining the timing of the conflict:

BBC Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen, London): Now the ceasefire that they have with Hamas ended just now, that is one reason why it is happening now. Rocket fire increased, that is another reason, and there is an electoral calculation as well. Israel faces elections, these are Israeli leaders giving orders to the troops facing elections in February, that is another calculation. Plus, there is a new American administration coming in. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

It is worth noting that in the segment above, the ceasefire is said to have “ended” without clarifying why it ended and who ended it. The list of factors invoked as causes of OCL include the Israeli theme of “increased rocket fire”, as well as the US and Israeli domestic political context, but there is no mention of the blockade or the humanitarian crisis, which are at the heart of Palestinian grievances and represent crucial context for viewers seeking to understand the “increased rocket fire” and the “ceasefire ending” themes.

For its part, when AJE’s coverage included references to the US/Israeli electoral context, it generally did so when reporting views of analysts and pundits:

AJE Newscaster (Anand Naidoo), Washington DC: ... Some analysts say that part of this campaign in Gaza, this attack on Gaza, stems from the Israeli election that's coming up in just a few weeks' time, that the main candidates Tzipi Livni among of them, Ehud Barak is one of them, are trying to bolster their positions ahead of that election... (AJE, 16 January 2009)

AJE generally did not present the US elections as a key dimension of its OCL coverage, but it did feature it in discussions of other factors, such as the conflict's implications for Palestinian unity and the long-term prospects of the peace process:

AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Ghosh), Doha: ... Is there any feeling that [Barack Obama's] administration might take a different position on developments of this sort in future? (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Tom Ackerman), Washington: I don't think, short term, there will be. But what they probably are most concerned about is the effect on the long-term prospects for keeping the peace process moving and whether this will actually strengthen or weaken the Fatah faction which controls the Palestinian Authority, and of course, President Mahmoud Abbas, and whether – and this remains to be seen – whether Abbas will come out strengthened by this or whether this will fuel another attempt at a Palestinian unity front which of course would make the situation for the United States as a broker much more difficult. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

Overall, the BBC's coverage of immediate context was mostly framed around a narrative of Israel's struggle against the twin threats of rockets and the smuggling of weapons through tunnels, whilst AJE presented the Israeli blockade and humanitarian crisis as the central element of context for understanding OCL's causes.

8.3.4 Thematic Area of Coverage: Humanitarian Impact and Legality

This section examines AJE and BBC's coverage of two key dimensions of conflict reporting: The humanitarian impact of OCL on Palestinian and Israeli civilians, on the one hand, and the legal dimension and implications of military actions, especially when they involve civilian casualties, on the other. These will be examined in turn.

8.3.4.1 Humanitarian Impact

Important aspects of this thematic area of coverage include the reporting of civilian casualties, the material destruction to residential areas and to civilian infrastructure, and the aggravating effects of military actions on the humanitarian situation. As discussed earlier in the chapter, the thematic analysis findings show that the humanitarian impact of OCL on Israelis and Palestinians was a significant thematic area of coverage for both the BBC and AJE, accounting for approximately a fifth of all lines of coverage (17% for the BBC, 21% for AJE). Humanitarian impact was the second most represented thematic area of coverage on AJE and the joint-third highest on the BBC. The sub-thematic distribution of AJE/BBC coverage of the humanitarian impact in absolute (lines of text) and relative (% of coverage) is shown in Table 8.18 and Figure 8.13 below, respectively:

	Casualties and Humanitarian Impact						
	Israeli Casualties	Israeli Suffering	Other Israeli Impact	Palestinian Casualties	Palestinian Suffering & Humanitarian Crisis	Other Palestinian Impact	
AJE	1015	8.5	36.25	3.75	142.75	561.25	262.5
BBC	211.5	10.5	12	2.75	93.5	59.75	33

Table 8. 18 AJE & BBC Coverage of Human Impact of OCL (in lines of text)

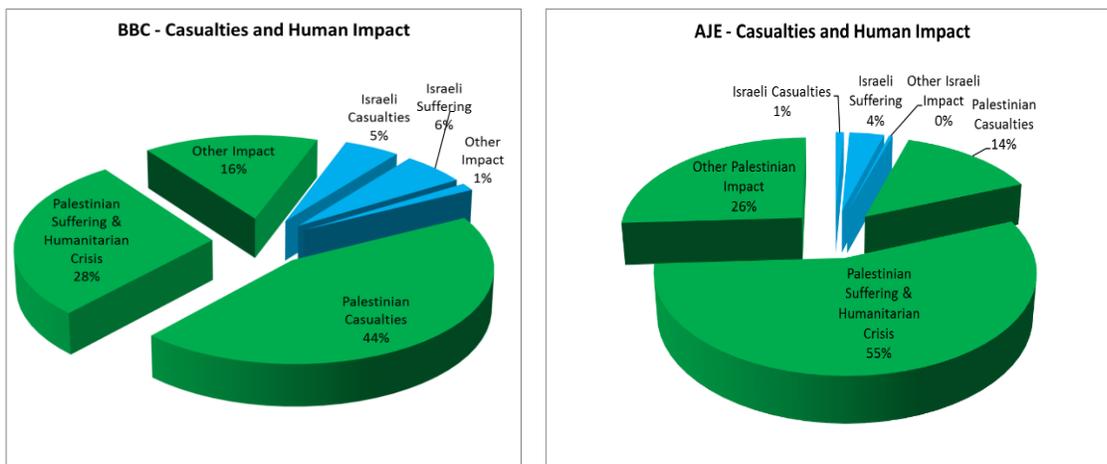


Figure 8. 13 AJE & BBC Coverage of Human Impact of OCL (in % of coverage)

As discussed in Chapter Three, by the time a ceasefire came into effect on 18 January 2009, the conflict had claimed the lives of more than 1,400 Palestinians and 13 Israelis, representing a casualty ratio of more than a hundred-to-one both for deaths and injuries. Throughout their OCL coverage, both the BBC and AJE regularly reported the latest Palestinian and Israeli

casualty figures, which revealed the significant disparity in the human toll. As shown in Figure 8.13 above, the thematic analysis results show that AJE's coverage dedicated 95% of its human impact coverage to Palestinians, as compared to 5% for the impact on Israelis, whilst the equivalent BBC figures were 88% and 12%, respectively.

Half of the BBC's coverage of the conflict's impact on Palestinians was dedicated to reporting casualties, with a third (32%) dedicated to reporting Palestinian suffering. AJE's coverage of the human impact on Palestinians dedicated 42% and 16% to reporting Palestinian casualties and suffering, respectively. Palestinian casualties received 14 and 9 times more lines than Israeli ones in AJE's and BBC's coverage of humanitarian impact, respectively. Israeli casualties accounted for 5% of BBC's coverage of human impact, and 1% of AJE's. Other impacts, such as the material and financial cost of military operations for Palestinians, received 37% and 16% of AJE and BBC's coverage of the Palestinian human impact, respectively.

These figures largely reflect AJE's extensive coverage of the humanitarian crisis, which went beyond the daily reporting of casualties and examined the secondary or indirect consequences of the conflict on the Palestinian population, such as restricted access to food, medical supplies, power and clean water. The following segment illustrates AJE's framing of OCL's impact as extending beyond the casualty toll:

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: Six days after the offensive began, we look at how things stand. Casualties, first of all, 412 Palestinians dead, 2070 injured, 4 Israelis also killed in the conflict. Infrastructure, you've seen the pictures, 400 buildings have been destroyed in the Gaza strip, and we are talking about things like police stations, offices, universities, government buildings, the homes around them also destroyed, severe power cuts, power lines are down, and remember there was already the fuel shortage in the Gaza strip that's been compounded by this. And the tunnels beneath the borders which smuggled a lot of goods and supplies, and that are a vital lifeline for the Gaza strip, those have been destroyed as well... (AJE, 1 January 2009)

In the next section, textual analysis of AJE and BBC's coverage of the human impact dimension is presented.

Textual Analysis

Throughout OCL, the humanitarian impact of military actions, and the disparity in casualties, was a highly contested theme between the Israeli and Palestinian narratives. Notable points of contention included official Israeli claims that the IDF seeks to avoid civilian casualties, that it engages only in “surgical strikes” and that it warns civilians ahead of attacks, all of which were highly disputed by Palestinian representatives and others. A key dimension of the analysis undertaken in this section is thus focused on how the main Israeli and Palestinian perspectives were reflected in the coverage. An overview of some of the principal explanatory themes used by the two sides is presented in Table 8.19 below.

The Humanitarian Impact of OCL	
Israeli Explanatory Themes	Palestinian Explanatory Themes
Israeli strikes are surgical, they only hit very carefully selected legitimate military targets.	Israeli military strikes regularly hit civilian targets.
The high Palestinian toll is not Israel’s intention and should be blamed on unfortunate mistakes or other factors and actors.	The high Palestinian toll is a consequence of a deliberate Israeli political and military policy of using OCL as an exercise in collective punishment, and its aim to minimise Israeli military casualties. The disparity in casualties also reflects the asymmetrical nature of the conflict itself: A regional superpower unleashing its modern army – equipped with the latest tanks, fighter jets and battleships – against a besieged and largely defenceless civilian population.
Hamas rockets are a serious threat to Israeli civilians. Israeli casualties are	Hamas rockets are very crude and rarely cause significant human or material damage.

relatively low because Israel has an effective anti-rocket defence system.	
Hamas's decision to operate from urban areas is the major factor behind the high Palestinian toll. Hamas is to blame for civilian casualties.	Most of Gaza is densely populated civilian areas.
Hamas uses Gazan civilians as human shields.	Israel uses Palestinians as human shields.
Israeli military actions comply with international law. Hamas is committing war crimes.	Israeli military actions contravene international law. Israel is committing war crimes.
Israel has taken extraordinary measures to minimise the impact on Palestinian civilians, including warning calls, text messages, leaflets.	Gaza is a densely populated area with closed borders. Civilians have nowhere safe to hide or run to.
Official Palestinian casualty figures are inaccurate and cannot to be trusted, they vastly under-report Hamas military casualties and exaggerate Palestinian civilian ones.	Israeli claims about hitting ' Hamas targets ' cannot be trusted.
There is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Israel fulfilled its humanitarian obligations during the conflict, notably by agreeing to short temporary lulls.	Gaza is experiencing a humanitarian crisis largely as a result of an 18-month Israeli siege, which was aggravated by OCL. Israel failed to meet its humanitarian obligations during the conflict.

Table 8. 19 Humanitarian Impact: Key Israeli and Palestinian explanatory themes

Close textual analysis reveals important similarities as well as differences in how the two broadcasters approached the humanitarian impact of the conflict, especially the contested themes listed above. The sub-sections below examine BBC/AJE coverage of the impact on Palestinians and Israelis in turn.

The impact on Palestinians

Contested Theme 1: The humanitarian crisis and the impact of the blockade

The Humanitarian Crisis	
Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives
<p>There is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza.</p> <p>Israel fulfilled its humanitarian obligations during the conflict, notably by agreeing to short temporary lulls.</p>	<p>Gaza is experiencing a humanitarian crisis largely as a result of an 18-month Israeli siege, which was aggravated by OCL.</p> <p>Israel failed to meet its humanitarian obligations during the conflict.</p>

As shown in the thematic analysis overview, both AJE and BBC reported on the humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the ways in which it impacted the population. A notable difference between the two, however, was the extent to which the crisis was placed within the context of the 18-month blockade and its impact. As discussed in the previous section, AJE reporters regularly highlighted to viewers the significance of the blockade as a crucial element of context for understanding not just the genesis of the conflict but the implications of military actions on the humanitarian front. The depletion and degradation of Gaza’s infrastructure by the blockade was a regular theme highlighted by AJE correspondents:

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin) Gaza: ... The infrastructure here is completely destroyed and devastated not just by the past eight days, but by the past 18 months’ siege. (AJE, 30 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: Gaza’s Human suffering has been compounded by the Israeli siege that has crippled every facet of life here. Life has become unbearable. (AJE, 12 January 2009)

In contrast, while the BBC regularly reported on the humanitarian crisis and its impact on Gazans during OCL, this was always presented in relation to immediate day-to-day developments, and was never explicitly linked to the 18-month blockade, as can be seen in the following segments:

BBC Newscaster, London: No truce. Israel rejects international calls for a ceasefire in Gaza. The bombardment continues on Hamas targets as the United Nations warns of a humanitarian catastrophe. (BBC, 31 December 2008)

BBC Newscaster, London: ... Israel says it won't stop till the job is done. Hamas vows to fight in every street and every alley. International reporters are banned from Gaza, but we have an eyewitness account of the humanitarian crisis from a BBC producer. (BBC, 5 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel Gaza border: ... In the three hours of quiet, Israel opened the gates of Gaza to relief convoys. The UN said they needed all 24 hours to deal with the humanitarian crisis... (BBC, 7 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel Gaza border: ... Israel has allowed in more food convoys during the 3-hour pause, but the main UN aid agency in Gaza has suspended its operations after Israeli tank fire killed one of its drivers. Food is coming in but distributing it is costing lives. All of Gaza is in the grip of a humanitarian crisis ... (BBC, 8 January 2009)

The result of this omission of the siege as the key factor behind the humanitarian crisis was that the latter was presented as if it were a recent development produced by the conflict itself, rather than a long-running issue that preceded it and contributed to its genesis.

Throughout OCL, as reported in Chapter Three, Israeli officials regularly stated that “there was no humanitarian crisis in Gaza”. Both AJE and BBC reported this claim, but generally alongside counter-perspectives, whether in the form of UN or Palestinian statements, or by presenting evidence of the humanitarian situation on the ground:

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: The desperate scramble through what was a residential block in Gaza, this is what Israel calls “not targeting the Palestinian people”. And if they managed to avoid death by airstrike, there's the struggle just to feed the family. But Israel's foreign minister Tzipi Livni says there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza and the war will go on. (AJE, 1 January 2009)

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: Israel says there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza. The UN says there is, and that it is serious. 80% of people live on food aid, running water and power are barely functioning... (BBC, 2 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Imran Gavda), Doha: The Israeli government says there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza, but the medical doctors disagree. Speaking to my colleagues Mick Clarke a little earlier, John Ging from the United Nations Relief Work Agency says that the situation in Gaza is catastrophic. (AJE, 4 January 2009)

Contested Theme 2: 'Surgical Strikes' vs 'densely populated area'

'Surgical Strikes' vs 'densely populated areas'	
Israeli Explanatory Themes	Palestinian Explanatory Themes
<p>Israeli strikes are surgical, they only hit very carefully selected legitimate military targets.</p>	<p>Israeli military strikes regularly hit civilian targets.</p> <p>A 'surgical strike' is not possible in a densely populated civilian area. Strikes on such areas will always lead to significant civilian casualties.</p>

One of the most contested themes in the reporting of the humanitarian impact of OCL was Israeli claims that the IDF only engaged in 'surgical' or 'precision' strikes that were very precise, solely targeted at Hamas positions, and minimised civilian casualties. Palestinian and other voices argued that it is impossible for strikes on densely populated civilian areas to be 'surgical', and that such strikes always lead to significant civilian casualties. While both AJE and BBC reported the Israeli claims around 'surgical strikes', textual analysis shows only AJE consistently presented the counter-theme that such 'surgical strikes' are impossible in densely populated areas like Gaza, as in the following segment:

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin) Gaza: ... that is what organisations on the ground, human rights activists and others, who have been following the past 8 days very closely, have been saying: that there is no way that Israel can carry out surgical strikes without affecting and devastating the civilian population in Gaza ... The point in this entire operation that people have been saying over and over again, is as much as Israel wants to be surgical in its strikes the only thing that it is striking is the civilian population... (AJE, 30 December 2008)

Furthermore, AJE generally presented the “precision” and ‘surgical’ terminology as part of a contested “official Israeli line,” and explicitly highlighted its public relations dimension to viewers. In contrast, BBC reporters at times uncritically adopted the ‘surgical strike’ term, even when reporting evidence of its unsuitability (as will be discussed later in this section). The difference in approach can be seen in the following segments:

AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Ghosh), Doha: And it was interesting, Jackie, that Olmert specifically made a point of saying that civilian casualties would be avoided because they have precision weapons etc. Clearly that is designed to appease the international community who are extremely critical of any kind of operation that could involve mass casualties. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Jackie Rowland), Jerusalem: ... obviously making this kind of statement about “avoiding civilian targets” is always politically correct and does appeal to an international audience, which have already been quite critical. I have to say of the extent of the Israeli operations in Gaza today, I think as you saw those assurances do ring hollow to an extent, because we have already seen civilian casualties today... (AJE, 27 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent (Christian Frazer), Rafah: This was a surgical strike on a corner where militant fighters were standing, but over here, you can see there are a number of houses that have been badly damaged, and over here to my right a children’s playground. (BBC, 17 January 2009)

The discrepancy between Israeli official rhetoric around “avoiding civilian casualties”, on the one hand, and the high Palestinian civilian toll, on the other, was noted in both AJE and BBC reporting. AJE’s coverage regularly presented Israel’s “surgical strikes” claims against what its reporters were witnessing on the ground which, as the reporters often pointed out, undermined and contradicted the Israeli line:

AJE Newscaster (Darren Jordan), Doha: ... Ayman, so eleven people possibly killed in this mosque attack. This is clearly at odds with Israeli statements saying they are only using surgical strikes. (AJE, 30 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Sherine Tadros), Gaza: ... as Israel continues to say that it is not targeting civilians, and that these are ‘surgical strikes’, what we are seeing is civilians are bearing the brunt of the airstrikes. (AJE, 7 January 2021)

Unlike their AJE counterparts, however, BBC reporters generally did not explicitly state that the high civilian toll of Israeli attacks undermined or contradicted Israel’s “surgical” claims:

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel-Gaza border: ... The message from Israel is that it is interested in a ceasefire, but not yet. That means no rest for Gaza’s civilians. Israel says it tries not to hurt them. It says all this is the fault of Hamas. Try telling that to the people in Gaza’s overwhelmed hospitals. This is what happens when a modern army uses heavy weapons in a place packed with young families. (BBC, 5 January 2008)

In the segment above, for instance, the Palestinian theme that “Israeli military strikes regularly hit civilian targets” is not stated explicitly but instead alluded to indirectly (“Gaza’s overwhelmed hospitals”).

Contested theme 3: ‘Dropping leaflets’ vs ‘Nowhere is safe’

‘Dropping leaflets’ vs ‘Nowhere is safe’	
Israeli perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives

<p>Israel deployed a range of measures to avoid civilian casualties, such as leaflet drops and warning messages to give civilians the opportunity to flee to safety.</p>	<p>Gaza's densely populated landscape and closed borders mean there is nowhere safe for civilians to escape to.</p> <p>Israel's warning messages are part of its psychological warfare against Gazans.</p>
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Throughout OCL, Israeli officials repeatedly highlighted a series of IDF measures which, they argued, showed Israel's commitment to avoiding Palestinian casualties, such as dropping leaflets to warn civilians to evacuate areas targeted for attack. An example of the Israeli perspective is the following statement by an Israeli spokesperson, reported by AJE early in the conflict:

Israeli Foreign Ministry Spokesperson (Ofir Gendelman), Tel Aviv: We are making every effort to avoid civilian casualties; I can say the following: 80% of the energy, of the efforts of our forces, is dedicated to avoid civilian casualties, if we know for sure there are civilians inside a specific place that is connected with Hamas, whether it is a weapon storage facility, whether it is a headquarters of any authority, it is being aborted. And on top of that we are letting everyone know, to warn people in the Gaza strip to leave their homes if they are living close to Hamas objectives, in order to allow them enough time to flee so they will not get hurt. (AJE, 30 Dec 2008)

Many Palestinian and international voices, however, pointed out that Israel's leaflets and warnings were of little help to civilians in the context of Gaza's small, densely populated urban landscape and closed borders, which meant that "nowhere is safe" for Gazans to escape to anywhere in the territory. This stance was also articulated by UN representatives, including the head of UNRWA in this interview segment with AJE:

John Ging, Director of UNRWA, Gaza: ... there is a conflict going on in a very heavily and densely populated area, where people have absolutely nowhere to flee to, nowhere is safe, and it has to stop, we need a ceasefire and we need it now... (AJE, 6 January 2009)

Both the BBC and AJE reported Israeli officials' claims about IDF measures to minimise civilian casualties, such as warning messages and leaflet drops, but there were notable differences in how this reporting was framed. AJE reporters almost always accompanied Israeli claims about leaflet drops with the "nowhere in Gaza is safe" counter-perspective:

AJE Correspondent (Sherine Tadros), Gaza: ... And Israel warns there is more to come, littering Gaza's sky with leaflets warning people anyone within range of rocket launching areas will be hit. But while Israel tells people to flee, it's keeping borders out of Gaza closed preventing just that. The trapped people moving from home to home, are aware that nowhere is safe from what's going on here ... (AJE, 30 December 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Sherine Tadros), Gaza: ... we are also told that thousands of leaflets have been dropped from the sky, those leaflets warning people in that area to evacuate, so we are expecting that tens of thousands of people will be evacuating that area but, as we have been reporting, there is no safe place for people to go ... (AJE, 7 January 2009)

When reporting on the leaflet drops and similar measures, the BBC coverage only referenced the theme of "nowhere is safe" on a single occasion, shown in the segment below, when reporting the views of foreign passport-holding civilians leaving Gaza. As can be seen, the "nowhere is safe" theme is presented without any further context or explanation:

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... [Israel has] been dropping leaflets warning Gazans to leave areas that might be attacked. The civilians with foreign passports allowed by Israel to leave Gaza said that nowhere was safe. (BBC, 2 January 2009)

BBC bulletins reported Israel's dropping of warning leaflets on four other occasions, but did not include the Palestine counter-perspective ("nowhere is safe") in any of them.

Furthermore, the BBC's reporting of Israeli measures generally echoed Israeli rationales, for instance by uncritically using formulations such as "buildings used by Hamas" and descriptions of the IDF's "determined effort" in its "hunt for Hamas" or, as noted above, in its general failure to provide the "nowhere is safe" counter-perspective, as in the following examples:

BBC Correspondent (Christian Frazer), Rafah Crossing: ... What did resume tonight was the shelling, as we left Rafah the Israelis were dropping hundreds of leaflets warning residents to leave their houses ... (BBC, 7 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster, London: ... Israel looks set to intensify its offensive in Gaza. On another day of heavy fighting, a leaflet drop on the region warns residents to stay away from buildings used by Hamas ... (BBC, 10 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Katya Adler), Israel-Gaza Border: Week three of Israel's Gaza campaign, its military looks, sounds, and acts more determined than ever; Israel's air force dropped these leaflets across Gaza today, warning that the hunt for Hamas will intensify. (BBC, 10 January 2009)

In addition to consistently reporting the "nowhere in Gaza is safe" perspective highlighted by Palestinian and international voices, AJE reporters also challenged Israel's portrayal of its warnings to civilians as being humanitarian in nature, pointing out the serious psychological impact they had on Gaza residents, context that was missing from the BBC's coverage. The following segment illustrates AJE's reporting in this regard, where IDF warnings are presented as being part of the war effort rather than the humanitarian gesture described by Israeli officials:

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: ... What we have been seeing is that throughout the course of the day, Israel has been engaged in a very aggressive psychological campaign, dropping leaflets warning people to evacuate their homes in fear of a possible strike. They have been calling people, telling them that “you must leave your homes” on television stations, the end result is that fear has gripped the people of Gaza, not knowing where to go because Gaza is ultimately sealed off, they simply can’t move anywhere because, at the end of the day, the entire Gaza strip is under aerial bombardment and now artillery and naval bombardment ... if they want to flee they simply don’t have anywhere to flee or to go to ... (AJE, 30 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Imran Khan), Khan Younis: ... the Israelis are also fighting a propaganda war, dropping leaflets into Gaza telling residents to take responsibility for those who fire rockets into its territory (AJE, 2 January 2009)

Overall, AJE’s coverage was much more explicitly sceptical than the BBC’s towards Israel’s claims that it avoided civilian casualties. As noted above, AJE reporters often explicitly articulated the view that official Israeli claims about ‘surgical strikes’ were largely part of its public relations effort and targeted at international audiences, and also that they were directly contradicted or undermined by on-the-ground reporting of the civilian toll of Israeli military actions.

The Impact on Israelis:

As shown in the thematic analysis overview presented earlier, the impact of Hamas rockets on Israeli civilians was regularly featured on both AJE and BBC coverage of OCL. There were similarities as well as differences in their framings, however. The BBC’s reporting generally echoed the Israeli rationales of presenting Hamas rockets as a significant and daily threat to the Israeli population and Israel’s security, featuring on-the-ground reporting on the threat of rockets to Israelis in border towns such as Sderot. Such reports often referenced sirens, the use of bomb shelters and bunkers, and the feelings this elicited amongst Israelis. Such reports often involved dramatic narration and language, even when there were no casualties or material damage to report, as in the following segments:

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood, Southern Israel): The Israeli Deputy Prime Minister is forced to take cover. “Stay down!” his bodyguard shouts. “This is a bad feeling,” he says, running for the bomb shelter in the town of Sderot. This is routine now. Palestinian rockets are crude, but people are still terrified. A rocket fell on the building behind me just a couple of minutes ago. There is a cloud covering the whole area, and that means the rocket teams in Gaza can operate with far less fear of the Israeli air force. It is times like these that are the most dangerous for Jewish residents of the towns which border Gaza. And while this continues, Israel will not heed international calls for a ceasefire. (BBC, 30 December 2008)

BBC’s Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... Throughout the day, Hamas has been firing missiles into Israel. On the Israeli side of the border, while near the town of Sderot you can see the Palestinian rockets being fired. And you can hear them land. There, there, there, the rocket has just landed over there, about 100 yards away. (BBC, 30 December 2008)

As discussed in the previous section, AJE also reported on the threat of rockets, including the fact they are fired into civilian areas. Its coverage regularly featured reporting, including live broadcasts, from Israeli border towns like Sderot, and described the impact of rockets on Israeli civilians’ daily lives, often including Israeli rationales, as illustrated in the following segments:

AJE Correspondent (Jackie Rowland), Jerusalem: ... we have already seen civilian casualties today and it is inevitable that there will be more civilian casualties in Gaza but also of course in Israel too. Let’s not forget that those Hamas rockets do not differentiate between military and civilian targets in fact most of them are fired directly into civilian areas. So inevitably as always in these cases there will be civilian losses on both sides as this conflict continues. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Jacky Rowland), Sderot, Southern Israel: Sderot is only a couple of kilometres from the Gaza border and it has been in the firing line for several years. Today, a rocket landed in this street, blowing away a back wall of a house. The people living next door are Russian Jews who only moved to Israel three years ago. (AJE, 4 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Alan Fisher) Israel-Gaza border: We can tell you that rockets are still being fired out of Gaza and, in fact, in the last 30 minutes to 40 minutes or so, two rockets have landed in Ashdod with no injuries reported but it shows that despite being under the intense scrutiny of the Israeli military, people are still able to take these rockets and fire them into southern Israel and that shows why the Israelis are so keen in making sure that this operation is a success, so that communities in that area don't have to live with the fear every single day when the alarm goes that they have only 15 seconds to take cover before these rockets smash into their communities. (AJE, 30 December 2008)

The last segment is worth noting for featuring an implicit endorsement (“... and that shows why...”) of the key Israeli rationale for the war, the only such instance in AJE’s coverage under examination.

Also worth noting is that in their reporting of OCL’s impact on Israelis, both the BBC and AJE regularly highlighted the disparity in casualties between the Israeli and Palestinian sides:

BBC Correspondent (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: In the Israeli town of Sderot, they were under attack today, Hamas is still launching rockets. Being under fire is very frightening, and for Israelis close to Gaza this has happened many times before. An Israeli worker was killed close by Ashkelon. In general, though, the level of danger and death here is far below what Gaza faces. (BBC, 2 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Jacky Rowland), Jerusalem: ... the casualty figures in Sderot have been low compared to the number of people killed and injured in Gaza ... This is the Qassam rocket that landed on that house where we were a short while ago, just one rocket among the many thousands that have landed in and around Sderot over the last 7 years (AJE, 4 January 2009)

Overall, the BBC’s coverage of the human impact on Israelis often echoed the Israeli framing of presenting Hamas rockets as a significant threat that required, explained or justified Israeli military action. AJE’s coverage also presented Israeli rationales and defences of action when reporting on the issue of rockets but, in line with its “War on Gaza” framing highlighted earlier, consistently highlighted Gaza as the key site of the conflict and its humanitarian impact.

8.3.4.2 Legality and International Law

The legal merits and implications of military action under domestic and international laws is an important aspect of understanding conflict, especially when the impact of military actions on civilians is high, as was the case in OCL, as this usually elicits significant public interest. As Zelizer (1998:10) notes, “public discussions on appropriate and legitimate war practices are intensified when the atrocities are directed towards civilians.” This significance should thus arguably be reflected in media coverage. This is especially the case in asymmetrical confrontations between occupying states and non-state actors, such as OCL/Gaza War of 2008/9, where the civilian/military distinction, whether with regards to individuals, physical structures or organisations, was itself highly disputed.

As shown in the thematic analysis overview at the start of the chapter, there was a notable difference between AJE and BBC in the proportion of coverage dedicated to the theme of legality and International Law. Overall, AJE devoted 4% of its coverage⁵¹ to the legal dimensions of the conflict, double the figure for the BBC (2%). Table 8.20 and Figure 8.14 below show the sub-thematic distribution of AJE/BBC coverage of Legality/International Law in absolute and proportional terms, respectively.

		Legality and International Law		
		Legality of Military Actions	Claims of Hamas War Crimes	Claims of Israel War Crimes
AJE	203	175.75	5.25	22
BBC	0	15.25	2.25	4

Table 8. 20 AJE/BBC coverage of Legality and International Law (in lines of text)

⁵¹ It is, once again, important to highlight that international law was often featured in the second half of AJE bulletins, which is not included in the analysis, and thus the AJE figure of 4% is likely an under-representation.

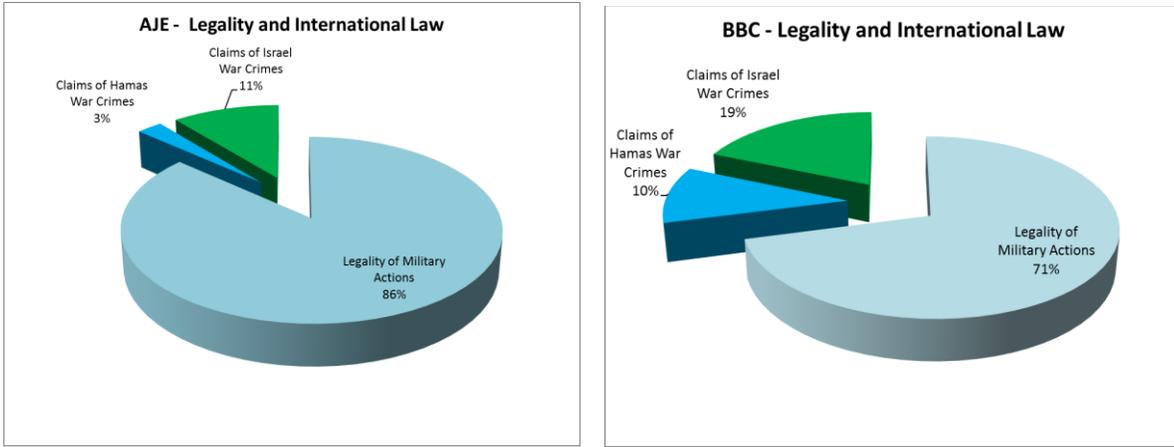


Figure 8. 14 AJE/BBC coverage of Legality and International Law (in %)

The biggest legality sub-theme in both BBC and AJE coverage was the reporting of the legal implications of military actions — such as the use of white phosphorus in urban areas or attacks on UN buildings — which accounted for 71% and 86% of the coverage of legality and International Law, respectively. Accusations that Israel and Hamas are committing war crimes received 11% and 3% of AJE’s legality coverage, and 19% and 10% of the BBC’s coverage, respectively.

Textual analysis

The textual analysis conducted in this section examines BBC/AJE coverage of the legal merits and implications of military actions, notably regarding several contested claims with a significant legal dimension, such as the use of human shields and white phosphorus, or Israeli attacks against police stations and UN buildings. Some of the key explanatory themes relating to the thematic area of legality are presented in Table 8.21 below.

<i>International Law</i>	
<i>Israeli perspectives</i>	<i>Palestinian perspectives</i>
<p>Israel has never broken international law. Israel conducts itself according to international law.</p> <p>Hamas is always breaking international law.</p>	<p>Israel has committed substantial breaches of International Law, both before and during OCL.</p>

<p> Hamas uses human shields.</p> <p> Israel does not use illegal weapons.</p>	<p> Israel uses human shields⁵².</p> <p> Israel uses illegal weapons like white phosphorus.</p>
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Table 8. 21 Legality and International Law explanatory themes

Legality as an important dimension of coverage

Textual analysis of AJE and BBC’s OCL coverage reveals a notable difference in their respective approaches to the issue of legality. Overall, the BBC’s coverage rarely featured explicit mentions of legality or international law. The legal dimension of military actions was not highlighted as a prominent aspect of understanding the conflict, or as a prerequisite for judging the merits of the rationales and defences of action put forth by the parties to the conflict and others. When BBC bulletins featured references to international law, this was almost always when reporting views or accusations made by outside sources (officials, international organisations, protestors or commentators) rather than as an element of the BBC journalists’ own analysis. This can be seen in the following examples:

BBC Newscaster, London: The Red Cross has accused Israel of breaking International Law in Gaza after four children were discovered starving next to the bodies of their dead mothers, and the UN has suspended some of its aid operations there claiming that one of its drivers was killed by an Israeli tank shell. (BBC, 8 January 2009)

BBC Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen): These were Israeli soldiers in Gaza 24 hours ago. Another group of soldiers was only 18 meters away from the house in Zaytoun where the families were stranded; the key accusation of the Red Cross, which rescued the civilians, is that Israeli troops broke International Humanitarian Law by failing to help them. (BBC, 8 January 2001)

⁵² As discussed in Chapter Three, this claim was notably articulated by Amnesty international in its 2009 report on OCL (Amnesty International, 2009:3).

Protestor (Tony Benn, Former Labour Cabinet Minister), London: ... What Israelis are doing in Gaza is a crime. It is a massacre of innocent people. (BBC, 29 December 2009)

Ken Livingstone, Former London Mayor: In international law, if a country is under attack, it should first exhaust the peaceful means of trying to reach a conclusion. Israel hasn't done that. Then its response, its armed response, should be proportionate. (BBC, 3 January 2001)

Tony Benn, President, Stop the War Coalition: ... Israel must conform to international law. (BBC, 3 January 2009)

When BBC reporting did broach the issue of legality, it often echoed Israeli framings, for instance by providing Israeli rationales or defences of action without presenting counter-perspectives offered by Palestinians or international voices, and only making explicit references to international law or war crime accusations in relation to Hamas actions but not Israel's. Moreover, BBC reports sometimes approached the question of legality indirectly, without explicitly mentioning International Law or specific legal claims or accusations. In the two segments below, Israel's bombing of UN buildings is presented alongside Israeli defences of action and the UN's general condemnation of the violence as "unacceptable", but there are no explicit mentions of International Law or specifics about the legal dimension of such actions, even though this was a significant element of the criticisms Israel received over these attacks:

BBC Newscaster, London: ~~The shooting in Gaza being used as an excuse by Palestinian fighters sheltering from the fighting being fired by the Israelis. It says that by firing 40 rockets, Hamas is not only attacking Israel but also targeting UN compounds. The UN says it's mounting a force against militant groups who have attacked UN compounds. However, from inside a UN compound, the UN says it's a response disproportionate, (BBC, 6 January 2009)~~ the schools, described the attacks as totally unacceptable. (BBC, 6 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent: Israel says militants used UN compounds as cover. But the UN Secretary General called the violence unacceptable. (BBC, 15 January 2009)

In the 22-day BBC bulletins under examination, International Law was featured only once as part of the BBC's own editorial commentary and only in the context of discussing Israeli claims that Hamas had committed war crimes: In the segment above, the reference to "the mounting civilian death toll in Gaza" is followed by the comment that it "has raised questions about the

level of force” without explaining what these questions are. As noted above, the accusation of ‘war crimes’ is only reported explicitly in relation to the actions of Hamas, while the legality of Israel’s own military conduct is only indirectly alluded to in the reference to International Law’s position on the use of “proportionate” force, which the segment presents as a “response” to Palestinian actions. Moreover, the question of legality in relation to Israel’s conduct is alluded to solely in terms of whether the “level of force” used in the “response” is “proportionate”, even though the legality of Israel’s launching of OCL, its blockade of Gaza, and its uses of certain military tactics and weaponry, have all been the subject of legal scrutiny and criticism too (as highlighted in Chapter Three).

In contrast, the legality dimension was a significant aspect of AJE’s coverage. This can be seen, for instance, in the way legality was often used to frame the reporting of military and humanitarian developments:

AJE Newscaster, (Darren Jordan), Doha: So, is the Israeli onslaught legal? Could Israel end up in court for their actions? ... (AJE, 29 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster: ... Burying the dead from the bloodiest day of the war on Gaza, but does Israel’s attack on a UN shelter amount to a war crime? (AJE, 7 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster: Throughout this war on Gaza, civilians have been caught in the fire. Israel maintains that it only targets Hamas fighters, but the latest figures show that more than 200 children have been killed, accounting for around a third of Palestinian deaths so far. Some people are now accusing Israel of violating International Law in its war on Gaza. (AJE, 7 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster: Well, the attack on the Samouni family that we have been talking about shows all the signs of a war crime according to the United Nations. And the Human Rights Council in Geneva has voted for yet another resolution condemning Israel’s actions. (AJE, 12 January 2009)

AJE reporters regularly made it clear to viewers that the issue of legality was an important dimension of understanding what was happening and evaluating the claims of either side. Moreover, AJE’s coverage of the issue of legality extended to multiple aspects of the conflict,

including the 18-month blockade, the decision to launch OCL, and the attacks on civilian and UN buildings. The following opening exchange in an interview with an international lawyer illustrates AJE's foregrounding of the question of legality:

AJE Newscaster, (Darren Jordan), Doha: So, is the Israeli onslaught legal? Could Israel end up in court for their actions? Well, Michel Abdel Massih is an International Lawyer based in London but is currently in Khartoum in Sudan. Michel, this is the third day of Israeli Strikes against Hamas. What are Israel's legal obligations as it takes the fight to Hamas in Gaza? (AJE, 29 January 2009)

Michel Abdel Messih, International Lawyer: Can I immediately say, speaking as an International Lawyer, this is one of the greatest breaches of International Law that one can see, and what is simply unbelievable is the audacity and the impunity of Israel in conducting this latest campaign against the Palestinians. It seems to me from an International Law point of view that Israel has committed some substantial breaches of International Law. It began not just now with the raids; but it began before with the blockade that resulted in people actually not getting their medicine, gas, fuel and so on.

Michel Abdel Messih, International Lawyer: So, the crimes that Israel are guilty of are two-fold: first before the raids and secondly, the raids. I was simply astonished that the Foreign Minister of Israel, Ms. Livni was just now saying, that she differentiates between her attacks and attacks of the Palestinians it seems to be simply unbelievable because of under international law if you target an institution, a building and that you know that there is a substantial risk of innocent civilians being targeted that is a major breach of International Law. And a growing body of public international lawyers are convinced that what Israelis are doing will result in criminal prosecutions, may I say not only against the people who are executing these attacks but also those who planned them. (AJE, 29 January 2009)

The exchange above is representative of the prominence given by AJE to international law in its coverage, but also indicative of some of the key arguments put forth by Palestinian and International voices with regards to the legal dimension of OCL and the question of legal

accountability. AJE journalists also discussed the issue of legality in the context of political and geopolitical considerations, often by way of highlighting the tension between the two:

AJE Senior Political Analyst (Marwan Bishara), Washington DC: ... There are two views to see what's going on in Gaza, one that is based on the actions that have been carried – and International Law does not see actors, they see actions – and the actions are seen by many International Lawyers now as war crimes against the people of Gaza, but here in Washington in geopolitical terms they don't see actions, they see actors, and in terms of actors in the "War on Terror", the Bush administration will continue to see Hamas as the guilty party and Israel as the victim... (AJE, 30 January 2009)

It is worth noting that the legality of Hamas's military actions, including accusations of war crimes made by Israeli spokespeople and others, were also regularly featured in AJE's interviews and reporting, as illustrated in the following segments:

Mark Regev, Israeli spokesperson for the Israeli Prime Minister: ... a Hamas squad is using that UN institution as a cover, unfortunately, using the people there as a human shield. This is a war crime and Hamas is directly responsible... (AJE, 6 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Gosh), Doha: But would there be a case of Hamas being guilty of war crimes? They fire rockets into Israel, they kill Israeli civilians? (AJE, 16 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Gosh), Doha: We understand that point, proportionality, you are quite right, is a big factor. I need to ask you this: Why is Israel killing Palestinians a war crime, but Palestinians killing Israelis is not? (AJE, 16 January 2009)

Michel Abdel Massih, International Criminal Lawyer, London: Nobody is saying that. We are saying that war crimes as defined must be great breaches, and it is a question of proportionality. If the independent tribunal was to say that the targeting by Hamas was a targeting of innocent civilians within Israel, clearly somebody will be answerable for that. (AJE, 16 January 2009)

Contested Theme 1: Human shields

One of the key Israeli defences of actions during OCL was the claim that Hamas was using civilians as "human shields" by launching attacks from civilian areas in contravention of International Law. Both AJE and BBC reported this Israeli theme:

Mark Regev, Israeli spokesperson for the Israeli Prime Minister: ... Hamas squad is using that UN institution as a cover, unfortunately, using the people there as a human shield.

This is a war crime and Hamas is directly responsible. (AJE, 6 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha: Doesn't that really make the case that there must be an Independent International investigation into this incident? Into attacks on UN schools? Into, as well, Israeli allegations claiming that Hamas is using people as human shields? (AJE, 12 January 2009)

Mark Regev Israeli Government Spokesperson [recorded interview]: Hamas has adopted tactics on the ground that have deliberately endangered the Palestinian civilian population in Gaza. I mean when you put bombs in schools, when you put rockets in private dwellings. When they fight out of the civilian population in Gaza as a human shield. (BBC, 14 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent, (Katya Adler), Jerusalem: Israel says militants used UN compounds as cover. (BBC, 15 January 2009)

However, AJE journalists were much more explicit than their BBC counterparts in challenging Israel's 'Human Shields' theme, notably by invoking UN statements that contradicted the Israeli defences of action in this regard. The following BBC and AJE segments, which refer to the same IDF attack on a UN school, are illustrative of this difference:

BBC Correspondent, Paul Wood: Israel insists it is not fighting the people of Gaza it accuses Hamas of using human shields, this was the town of Khan Younis this morning. The UN school was fired on, says Israel, because Hamas launched mortars from there. A two-man Hamas rocket team was also present, it claimed. The two sides bitterly accuse each other of lying [...] Whatever the truth, this is the biggest single loss of civilian life of Israel's campaign... (BBC, 6 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel Gaza border: Well, there is also controversy as well about the attack on that UN school. Israel is standing by its assertion that Hamas fighters were shooting mortars out of the grounds of the school, and that is why, it says, it has attacked it, killing so many people, The UN, though, is claiming that Israel is privately saying to foreign diplomats that, actually, that story isn't true, that there weren't militants shooting out of it, so that row continues. (BBC, 7 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha (interviewing Mark Regev): What happens when you are wrong? You said, time and time again, Hamas were operating, that they were using these civilians as human shields. In fact, according to Chris Gunness from UNRWA, he released a statement saying after preliminary investigation of yesterday's attack at the Fakhoura girls elementary school we are 99,9 percent sure no militants were at that school. (AJE, 7 January 2009)

The BBC segments above highlight another important aspect of its coverage, which is that it did not present statements by the UN and humanitarian or human rights organisations as having a special status of moral authority or credibility, and instead presented the UN's disputing of Israeli claims as the subject of "rows" and "controversies". This is in stark contrast to AJE's approach, which placed great significance on statements, assessments and demands made by the UN and international humanitarian and human rights organisations, with regards to the legal implications of military actions or specific incidents. In AJE's coverage, the UN was generally presented as having great moral authority and credibility and its statements were regularly used to frame news segments. This is highlighted in the deferential framing of

UNWRA head's comment in the above segment, and is also illustrated in the following segment relating to Israel's bombing of another UN school:

AJE Newscaster: This is the 3rd UN shelter to be hit, this time in Beit Lahia. This time it was sheltering hundreds of refugees, some of them had fled violence several times already, they came here seeking protection, protection that was supposed to be guaranteed under the Geneva Convention, the UN says it cannot trust Israel's army anymore. (AJE, 17 January 2009)

Contested Theme 2: White Phosphorus

One of the most significant accusations against the Israeli military during OCL, levelled by Palestinians as well as international human rights organisations, was Israel's suspected use of White Phosphorus munitions in its attacks on urban areas, in contravention of International Law. AJE's reporting gave great prominence to the claims of White Phosphorus use, referencing it on 20 occasions over 5 days of coverage — including by featuring eyewitness accounts by Gaza residents and doctors, as well as interviews with medical, legal and military experts about the human impact and legal implications of using White Phosphorus:

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha: ... Human rights groups are accusing Israel of using white Phosphorus in its war on Gaza, the use of the deadly chemical in wars are only legal in areas that are not densely populated by civilians... (AJE, 11 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: ... Burning bright above the skies of Gaza, Israeli munitions that human rights group say is white phosphorus, a deadly weapon illegal to use against civilians, now it appears landing on the people of Gaza. These pictures show what is believed to be white phosphorus in the heart of Gaza's neighbourhoods. (AJE, 11 January 2009)

AJE also conducted interviews with Israeli political and military spokespeople in which they were challenged about the accusations:

Avital Leibovich, Israeli Army Spokesperson: Well, we the IDF don't specify what sorts of munitions we are using, as well as we don't specify what kind of operations we are operating on. So, this is just our policy, and we will leave it at this. (AJE, 11 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha: ... Why are you unable to answer a simple question as to whether Israel is using white phosphorus on the civilian population? (AJE, 11 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha: We have seen pictures of what appeared to be white phosphorus clouds over Gaza city. Are you going to tell me those are not white clouds of phosphorus that were released over Gaza city today? (AJE, 11 January 2009)

Avital Leibovich, Israeli Army Spokesperson: The policy of the IDF is not to specify the types of munitions, we haven't done it before, and I don't intend on specifying it right now. (AJE, 11 January 2009)

In contrast, BBC's 22-day bulletins under examination contained only a single mention of Israel's suspected use of White Phosphorus munitions, shown in the first segment below, during which the Israeli rationale is presented. The coverage also featured a single indirect reference to "phosphorous burns", as shown in the second segment below, which did not include any details or context regarding what precisely caused the burns, the military use of White Phosphorus munitions, or their illegality in urban areas:

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood), Israel Gaza border: ... three of those shells according to witnesses containing the incendiary white phosphorus which human rights groups certainly say should not be used in built-up areas, within the past few minutes the Israeli defence minister has issued a statement saying he regrets any injuries to UN staff but he does not apologise for this because, in the Israelis' view, Hamas militants, if they are not in those buildings they are near them and are drawing fire. (BBC, 14 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Christian Fraser), Rafah: ... The local hospital here is full of civilian casualties; most are blast wounds, but today we met 20-year-old Ahmed Riyad, his body, said Doctors, is blistered by phosphorus burns which they are unable to control. (BBC, 15 January 2009)

Contested Theme 3: ' Hamas buildings '

Another highly contested theme between Israeli and Palestinian narratives is the question of what constitutes a 'legitimate' military target under International Law, as highlighted in the explanatory themes presented in Table 8.22 below:

' Hamas buildings '	
Israeli perspectives	Palestinian perspectives
Any buildings in Gaza that are linked to Hamas are legitimate military targets.	Gaza's Governmental institutions and infrastructure are not military targets.

Table 8. 22 ' Hamas buildings ' explanatory themes

Israeli officials repeatedly insisted that all Hamas-linked individuals, buildings or institutions are legitimate targets, as illustrated in the segment below:

Israeli Military Spokeswoman (Major Avital Leibovich), Tel Aviv: We are looking for any Hamas-affiliated targets, it can be a person, it can be a building, it can be a training camp, it can be a storage for weaponry, anyone who is marked 'terror' for us will be a legitimate target. (AJE, 5 January 2009).

AJE's coverage generally challenged the Israeli theme that anything linked to Hamas is a legitimate military target, and often highlighted the view that many of the buildings targeted by Israeli strikes were Governmental buildings that represented, and belonged to, the Palestinian state rather than a particular Palestinian party or faction. AJE reporters also cast doubt on the Israeli theme by pointing out the extensive range of structures targeted by Israeli strikes. The following segment illustrates this sceptical approach to Israel's "Hamas buildings" theme:

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: ... the question really begging is what is a "Hamas building"? You know the targets we have seen have varied from a parking lot of a hospital, we have seen mosques, we have seen factories, we have seen government buildings and the homes of individuals ... the way things are looking in the ground it seems every building in every definition is a "Hamas building"... (AJE, 5 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha: from New York we are now joined by Daniel Taub Senior Legal Advisor to Israeli government. Your response first of all to allegations that Israel is guilty of war crimes for deliberately targeting civilian institutions. (AJE, 7 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Mark Seddon), London: But now come claims that Israel is in breach of the Geneva Convention and accusation that its leaders are engaged in war crimes. (AJE, 7 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Mark Seddon), London: So, what constitutes a war crime, it means that criminal individuals can be held criminally responsible for the action of their country or soldiers. Before the 2nd world war it was accepted that the horrors of a war were part of the nature of the conflict. But following the Nuremberg trials of Nazi leaders were crimes have been defined by the Geneva Convention they include the murder ill treatment or deportation of civilian residents of an occupied territory and the extensive destruction or devastation of areas not justified by military necessity. And there are more recent precedents for holding leaders into account. Following the brutal civil war in the 1990's the UN set up a special war crimes court designed to trial military leaders accused of atrocities against civilians and former Serbian leader... have appeared in front of lawyers accused of war crimes at the international criminal court in the Hague. Israel denies it has committed war crimes and in past experiences need to go by it is unlikely to agree to any future possible legal moves by UN prosecutors. (AJE, 7 January 2009)

This can be contrasted with the following BBC segment, in which the governmental nature of the buildings being targeted by Israel is noted yet Israel's targeting of them is itself never raised as an issue:

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: In the early hours of the morning, one of the heaviest raids so far. Israel was destroying official buildings in Gaza, anything that gives Hamas the sense that it is a government seems to be on the target list. At daybreak, there wasn't much left. These were built with foreign aid money. The idea was to help Palestinians prepare for statehood. (BBC, 30 December 2008)

The contested nature of what constitutes a 'legitimate' target was most evident with regards to structures such as police buildings. The reporting of Israeli attacks on such buildings helps illustrate the differences between BBC and AJE in this regard. On the first day of OCL, Israeli strikes hit a graduation ceremony at a police station in Gaza, an attack in which dozens of police officers died. Israeli officials described the police station as a " Hamas military target". However, this was contested by Palestinians as well as human rights organisations. In a statement released after the attack, Human Rights Watch declared:

“Under the laws of war, police and police stations are presumptively civilian unless the police are Hamas fighters or taking a direct part in the hostilities, or police stations are being used for military purposes.” (Human Rights Watch, 30 December 2008)

AJE’s coverage never adopted the Israeli description of police stations as a military target, and often presented perspectives challenging it:

Mohamed Al Khatib (Police Officer): The police force is not political; it’s an institution for the people. (AJE, 29 December 2008)

Moshe Machover, Academic, Anti-Zionist Israeli: ... And it is significant that the whole strategy is directed at civilian power. I mean the first act of the war was the killing of 40 civilian policemen trainees, who according to International law are civilians. This is in order to make Hamas unable to administer Gaza, Hamas who in fact had been elected by democratic elections in 2006. (AJE, 9 January 2009)

In contrast, BBC reporters often endorsed the Israeli framing in their use of language, as can be seen in the following segments:

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood, Jerusalem): ... There were two intense waves of airstrikes, more than 100 tons of bombs were dropped, Israel said, on dozens of targets. This was one, a Gaza city police station. A badly injured man recites the Muslim prayer for those about to die. The Gaza police chief himself was also killed. There were many civilian casualties, too, including children. (BBC, 27 December 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Christian Frazer), Rafah: ... This is where the police station once stood ten meters from a UN warehouse. This might give you an understanding of why there have been so many civilian casualties in this conflict. (BBC, 16 January 2009)

In both BBC segments above, the reporters implicitly present police stations as military (or non-civilian) buildings by contrasting them with civilian ones (“civilian casualties, too”), thus echoing the Israeli framing of Gaza’s police stations as legitimate military targets. The perspective put forth by Palestinians and international human rights organisations regarding the civilian status of police stations and other governmental buildings was not mentioned once in any of the BBC’s 22 days of reporting under examination.

8.3.5 Thematic Area of Coverage: Global Reaction and Protests

As highlighted throughout this thesis, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is international in many of its dimensions. The conflict has featured prominently in the Middle East region’s politics for decades, especially in terms of the latter’s relationship with the West, most notably the United States. As such, media reporting of episodes like Gaza War of 2008/9/OCL must take into account this regional and international context, which can be essential to audiences’ understanding of the conflict. Important aspects of coverage considered in this section include:

- The reactions of world leaders and other officials to the conflict, such as statements of condemnations, declarations of support or calls for peace.
- Mass popular reactions elicited by the conflict, such as protests, marches and other forms of collective mobilisation.
- Diplomatic and mediation efforts, including key obstacles and breakthroughs.
- The significance of the US and, to a lesser extent, that of Arab governments, as important and influential players in the conflict.

Table 8.23 and Figure 8.15, below present an overview of the key results of the thematic analysis in absolute (lines of text) and proportional (% of coverage) terms, respectively.

	World Reaction							Protests	
	UN Diplomacy Progress	Criticism of Israel/Hamas	Criticism of International Community	Calls for Peace	Humanitarian Concerns	Other	Grievances & Demands	Incidents & Violence	
AJE	637.75	182	19	126.5	64	111.75	31.5	80.75	22.25
BBC	213.75	57	8	1	5.75	27.5	46	16.25	52.25

Table 8. 23 BBC/AJE Coverage of World Reaction & Protests (lines of text)

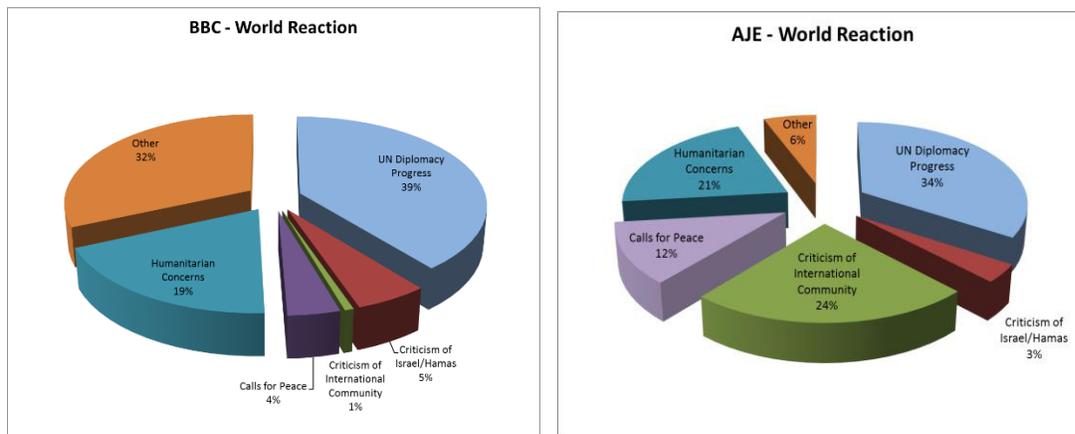


Figure 8. 15 BBC/AJE Coverage of World Reaction & Protests (% of lines)

As shown in the thematic analysis overview presented at the start of the chapter, reporting of world reaction and protests received 17% of the BBC's total coverage and 13% of AJE's⁵³. The sub-thematic breakdown shown in Figure 8.15 indicates that reporting the progress (or otherwise) of UN diplomatic efforts, such as negotiations over UN resolutions, was the most represented area of coverage on both BBC and AJE, with 39% and 34% respectively. Many official reactions during OCL expressed the concerns of governments over the conflict's impact on civilians, and this is reflected in the results of the analysis, with humanitarian concerns receiving 19% and 21% of BBC and AJE's world reaction coverage, respectively. A key point of difference between BBC and AJE is the amount dedicated to criticisms of the international community, which was the second largest theme on AJE, with 24%, but received only 1% of the BBC's world reaction coverage. As will be discussed in further detail later in the textual analysis section below, this gap largely reflects AJE's significant coverage, much of it critical, of the US Role and Arab governments' diplomatic activities. International criticisms of Israel, of Hamas or of both, accounted for 3% of the world reaction coverage in both AJE and BBC coverage.

Textual Analysis

Several aspects of AJE/BBC's coverage of international reactions to OCL are examined in the next sub-sections. The textual analysis shows similarities as well as significant divergences in approach. Three key aspects of world reaction to OCL in particular are examined below: UN diplomatic efforts to secure a ceasefire, the US role, and global protests.

8.3.5.1 Reporting UN Diplomacy and mediation efforts

As the two segments below show, both BBC and AJE coverage of world reactions to OCL highlighted the centrality of international pressure, mediation and diplomatic efforts to the prospects of a peaceful resolution to the conflict:

⁵³ It is important to highlight once more that the 13% figure for AJE is an underestimate because of the non-inclusion of the second half of Newshour bulletins in the thematic analysis, as discussed in the methodology chapter.

BBC Correspondent (Frank Gardner): Gaza under fire, with no immediate end in sight. So, what is the world doing to resolve the situation? Most international reaction has been to call for an immediate ceasefire, so far with no effect. Tony Blair, the International Envoy to the Middle East, has been one of the first to beat a path to Israel's door, seeking ways to stop the violence, while Britain has joined the calls for a ceasefire. (BBC, 4 January 2009)

AJE Senior Political Analyst (Marwan Bishara), New York: ... at the end of the day, Israel listens to the voice of influence, power, force, something like what we could expect from an American administration, from European pressure and certainly from a united Arab front, that could put to Israel an ultimatum of either to stop its offensive and its war on Gaza or face consequences in the future. (AJE, 15 January 2009)

One of the reasons international mediation was crucial to securing a ceasefire is that Israel and Hamas did not talk to each other officially. This fact was an important part of the context for viewers, and was reported in both BBC and AJE's coverage:

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Sderot: ... both sides, though, say they would consider a ceasefire, but their conditions for one are very different. International mediation, so far low key, would be needed to make one happen. Israel and Hamas do not talk to each other. (BBC, 31 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Allen Fisher) Gaza Israel border: ...but remember, Israel will only have discussions with Egypt, they will never entertain a discussion with Hamas... (AJE, 15 January 2009)

Both BBC and AJE coverage regularly reported on international calls for peaceful resolution to the conflict:

AJE Newscaster: Well, the United Nations Secretary General is urging an immediate end to the violence in Gaza, and is calling on Israel and Hamas to declare a ceasefire. (AJE, 29 December 2009)

BBC Newscaster, London studio: ... The International community strongly condemned both sides and called for a peaceful solution to the conflict. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

The progress of international mediation efforts and the UN diplomatic process, such as the efforts to pass a UN Security Council Resolution calling for a ceasefire, was a regular theme of both BBC and AJE's coverage throughout OCL:

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha: French President Nicolas Sarkozy has called for an immediate ceasefire in Gaza to allow aid into the strip. He is just one of several high-profile diplomats in the region trying to broker an end to the violence. (AJE, 5 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel Gaza border: There seems to be some movement now behind this French-Egyptian plan, some of the details are not so clear at the moment, but the Americans are saying it looks like the best thing on the table. (BBC, 7 January 2009)

One of the major early stumbling blocks facing international diplomatic efforts was Israel's rejection of a ceasefire. Both the BBC and AJE reported Israel's stance:

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Sderot: Recorded Report: The human suffering in Gaza, and reports that Hamas is offering a ceasefire if Israel lifts its siege, are increasing international pressure on the Israelis, which they continue to ignore. (BBC 31 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster (Darren Jordan), Doha: Earlier on, on Wednesday, the Israeli Cabinet rejected the international calls for ceasefire. Meanwhile diplomatic efforts to end the conflict moved up a gear. (AJE, 31 December 2008)

On several occasions, the BBC's coverage echoed Israeli framings by presenting the Israeli rejection of a ceasefire within Israeli rationales, as in the segment below, in which Israel's refusal to heed international demands is presented principally from an Israeli perspective of the imperative to defend endangered citizens by continuing "operations against Hamas". In contrast, there was no instance of this in AJE's coverage:

BBC Correspondent: ... It is times like these that are the most dangerous for Jewish residents of the towns which border Gaza. And while this continues, Israel will not heed international calls for a ceasefire. (BBC, 30 December 2008)

Both AJE and BBC reported on the slow pace of the international diplomatic effort, but AJE was much more explicitly critical of it. Overall, AJE's reporting of developments on the diplomatic front was consistently (rather than occasionally, as was the case in the BBC's coverage) framed within the context of the humanitarian toll of the ongoing military campaign, highlighting to viewers the cost of each passing day without a ceasefire:

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: Diplomacy as well, diplomats flying all over the world but really, they haven't achieved anything yet. The United Nations failed to agree on a resolution. The Arab league met in Cairo, but it's divided over what to do, and could only manage a statement calling for Palestinian unity. The Europeans they pushed for that truce, a 48-hour humanitarian ceasefire, that got rejected by Israel. Not a lot of progress there. (AJE, 1 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent, Jeremy Bowen: Foreign envoys, including President Sarkozy of France, are here looking for a ceasefire; their work will be slow until the Americans decide that Israel is as close as it can be to securing its objectives. (BBC, 5 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Ghida Fakhry), UN, New York: ... at least one Palestinian has been killed every hour since the [UN Security] council first began to even consider this situation, this is a process that certainly has seemed extremely painfully slow to those people waiting in Gaza for some kind of a ceasefire... (AJE, 7 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel Gaza border: ... the deaths of civilians has put more urgency into the push for a ceasefire resolution at the UN in New York... (BBC, 8 January 2009)

AJE's coverage regularly featured criticisms of Arab governments and leaders for their disunited approach and their lack of effectiveness in securing diplomatic progress towards a ceasefire. There was one instance of such criticism being reported in the BBC's coverage, presented below:

BBC, Middle East (Jeremy Bowen), Damascus: Some exiled Hamas leaders live in Damascus and Syria has criticised Israel far more strongly than its other Arab neighbours. The Jordanian Government is no friend of Hamas and it has a peace treaty with Israel just like Egypt. The Cairo government has been accused by its own people of failing to help Palestinians suffering just over the border in Gaza. ... (BBC, 14 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha: Talking about unity or disunity the same time people are scratching their heads and looking at the recent Arab League ministerial meeting in which there was plenty of discord amongst the Arab states themselves about how to deal with this crisis. We were wondering how on earth are the Arab states going to be able to convince allies of Israel to come on board a resolution when they amongst themselves are disagreeing. How much Arab unity is there really? (AJE, 5 January 2009)

AJE's critical reporting of Arab states' role was often presented within the context of wider Arab failures to support the Palestinians in recent years, including with regards to the peace process but also in relation to the humanitarian situation under the siege. This was notably the theme of the Qatari Prime Minister's intervention when he was interviewed on the channel:

Hamad Bin Jasim Al-Thani (Qatari Prime Minister), Doha: There were many promises about this peace process but unfortunately there is no progress in that, and now the Arabs they have to make their choice how they want to deal and how they want to help the people in Gaza at least from a human way. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Ghosh), Doha: But do you think that is achievable given that there seems to have been relatively little effort by Arab states to stand behind the Palestinians and to try and push the peace process forward. For example, why did Arab states not do more when the blockade was first imposed on Gaza? (AJE, 28 December 2008)

8.3.5.2 Reporting the US Role

As discussed in previous chapters, the United States has played a key role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past decades. As a global super-power with key geostrategic interests in the region, as well as being Israel's biggest political and military supporter, the US carries considerable influence over Israeli-Palestinian politics. The US strongly supported Israel's political, and military aims throughout OCL, and this support took the form of public statements, military aid and official support at the UN and other international forums. For much of the duration of OCL, US Government spokespeople repeatedly echoed Israeli rationales, such as blaming Hamas for the failure of the June 2008 ceasefire, and endorsed Israel's rejection of a ceasefire, as illustrated by the following statements by White House officials, made one and two weeks into OCL, respectively, as reported by AJE:

Gordon Johndroe, White House Deputy Press Secretary: We have got to get a commitment from Hamas that they would respect any ceasefire, and make it lasting and durable, and so until we can get that assurance, not the US, but until Israel can get that assurance from Hamas, then we are not going to have a ceasefire that is worth the paper that it's written on. (AJE, 3 January 2009)

Scott Stanzel, White House Deputy Press Secretary: The ceasefire will come when terrorists stop launching rockets for the desire to kill to advance their ideology, when Hamas attacks Israel they are not only hurting the Israeli people but, also, they are hurting the Palestinian people... (AJE, 9 January 2009)

Both BBC and AJE coverage reported on the significance of the US role during OCL as well as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more generally. However, whilst the BBC generally described US support for Israel in broad and sometimes indirect terms, AJE tended to provide contextual detail of what US influence and support meant in concrete terms, such as military aid and diplomatic support, as seen in the following segments:

BBC Correspondent (Frank Gardner): Israel's military power depends on United States backing and so far, Washington has resisted calls for a ceasefire that would allow Hamas to continue rocketing Israeli towns. (BBC, 4 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster: ... French President Nicholas Sarkozy is in the region, so too is a delegation from the EU, but so far there has been no initiative from America, the country of most influence over Israel. (BBC, 5 Jan 2009)

AJE Newscaster: ... Israel has been the largest recipient of direct American military aid for more than 30 years, and many of the weapons being used in the current operation are US made... (AJE, 3 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Anand Naidoo), Washington DC: Israel's war on Gaza has been fuelled in large part by U.S. supplied weapons paid for by US taxpayers. Israel Has 226 US supplied F16 fighter jets, over 700 M-60 Tanks 6000 armoured personnel carriers and schools of transports planes bombs and missiles of all kinds. In 2008 alone, the US offered Israel 22 billion dollars in arms sales. (AJE, 16 January 2009)

Overall, the BBC's coverage did not include a single explicit mention of US arms sales, with the single exception of the indirect reference in the second segment above. One notable aspect of US support over the past decades has been the repeated use of its veto power to block UN resolutions critical of Israel, which AJE coverage highlighted but was never mentioned in BBC coverage:

AJE Correspondent: ... the United States holds a veto in the Security Council and, since the 1970s, it has used it 42 times to stop resolutions critical of Israel. (AJE, 4 January 2009)

The textual analysis also reveals BBC coverage often framed US declarations of support for Israel during OCL within Israeli rationales. In the following segments, the US's opposition to a ceasefire that does not satisfy Israeli terms is presented alongside the Israeli rationales of the need to stop " Hamas rockets" and " Hamas attacks":

BBC Correspondent: Israel's military power depends on United States backing and, so far, Washington has resisted calls for a ceasefire that would allow Hamas to continue rocketing Israeli towns. (BBC, 4 Jan 2009)

BBC Editor: The George Bush administration's view is that if there is to be a ceasefire then there has to be an agreement from Hamas that it will stop any future planned attacks on Israel. Without that, the Bush administration is unwilling at this stage to put pressure on Israel. (BBC, 5 Jan 2009)

In contrast, AJE generally adopted a more explicitly critical framing of the US role, regularly highlighting the lack of urgency shown by US officials, which it presented as one of the obstacles hindering the prospects for a ceasefire:

AJE Newscaster: ... the Bush administration says it is vigorously engaged in trying to restore the ceasefire, but President Bush is spending the new year at his ranch in Texas and, according to the White House, has no plans to make any statements about the situation. Earlier, White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe has defended Israel's actions. (29/12/2007)

AJE Correspondent (Rob Reynolds), Washington DC: ... [the US and its spokespeople] are certainly not pushing for an immediate a ceasefire, again they say they would like to see the conditions established whereby any ceasefire would be of long duration, and that would require essentially a fundamental change in the power situation in Gaza. So there is a certain degree of disengagement here in US diplomatic circles from any sense of urgency, any sense that an immediate ceasefire needs to be imposed. (AJE, 5 January 2009)

A key element of context missing from the BBC's coverage of the US role was any explanatory context of the factors or reasons behind the US's significant and long-standing support for Israel, such as the rise of the US Christian Right or pro-Israel lobbying, which did not receive a single mention throughout the coverage. As a result, the rationales motivating the US position remained unclear throughout the BBC's coverage. In the segment below, the fact that the US and Israel enjoy a very close relationship is clearly conveyed, yet any explanations as to why this is are left unstated, as was the case throughout the coverage:

BBC Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: I think that if the US secretary of state Condoleezza Rice landed her plane at Ben-Gurion airport in Tel Aviv, walked down the steps and said "I want a ceasefire, the US wants a ceasefire, and I am here to get it", then there might be one. But short of that I think that there is going to have to be a lot more of diplomacy first, quite frankly. (BBC, 30 dec 2008)

For its part, AJE's coverage featured discussions of the reasons and factors behind US support for Israel, such as geopolitical alignments or pro-Israel lobbying. One of the notable questions explored by AJE journalists is the extent to which the American public was aware of Israel's use of US weaponry during OCL, or of US support for Israel more generally:

AJE Newscaster (Kimberly Hackett), Washington: ... Do you think that ordinary Americans are even aware that these laws are being broken and that the US does support Israel so much? Or is this something that is kept quiet? (AJE, 3 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Kimberly Hackett), Washington: Why is it that Israel continues to exercise its military might unabated? Why are there no checks in place to ensure that this aid is used properly and that it's rescinded if it is in violation of the conditions? (AJE, 3 January 2009)

Janet McMahon, Middle East Analyst, Washington: ... So, you have people who are looking out for Israel's best interest on Capitol Hill of their own accord. Then you have people who are getting money from the Israel lobby, from pro-Israel political action committees, who feel that it would be to their detriment to oppose, and so to stand out and say Israel is violating this. There are a few congressmen who do that, there are some like Dennis Kucinich who is excellent on this issue and speaks out when he sees an injustice being committed, but the majority of them are passive and so do not say this is in violation of our law and we are not going to give Israel any new money until it adheres to American law. (AJE, 3 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Kimberly Hackett), Washington: These people that are putting these laws in place are elected by American people. Do you think that ordinary Americans are even aware that these laws are being broken and that the US does support Israel so much? Or is this something that is kept quiet? (AJE, 3 January 2009)

Janet McMahon, Middle East Analyst, Washington: It is a complex issue because I think the whole situation is misrepresented. A lot of Americans don't know ... a voter who goes to see his or her congressman is getting money from would have no idea from that name that the Israel lobby is funding that representative. So, it's hard in this country to get that information. (AJE, 3 January 2009)

8.3.5.3 Reporting protests

The conflict in Gaza elicited a considerable level of public reaction internationally, which took the form of demonstrations, protests and gatherings in cities across the world. Both AJE and BBC featured coverage of public protests in their OCL reporting, but there were significant differences in their respective approaches. Figure 8.16 below shows the results of the thematic

analysis of AJE and BBC’s protest coverage. Reports of incidents of violence or public disorder at the protests themselves accounted for more than three quarters (76%, 52.25 lines) of the BBC’s protest coverage, with the remaining 24% (16.25 lines) devoted to protesters’ demands or rationales for taking part. In contrast, AJE’s coverage had almost the inverse proportion, with 78% (80.75 lines) of its protest coverage devoted to protesters’ rationales and demands, and the remaining 22% (22.25 lines) dedicated to reports of disorder or violence at the protests themselves.

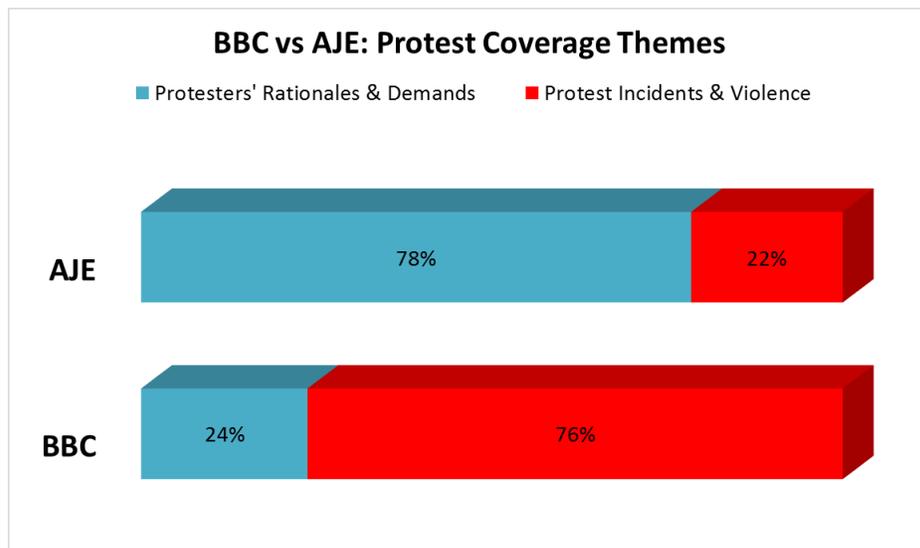


Figure 8. 16 AJE vs BBC: Thematic coverage of protests

AJE’s prime focus was protests in the Arab and Muslim world, although it extensively covered protests globally. The BBC’s protest coverage focused principally on protests in the UK and, to a lesser degree, in the Arab and Muslim world. BBC/AJE coverage of both UK and Arab/Muslim world protests is examined in further detail below. In line with the results of the thematic analysis presented above, textual analysis of BBC coverage of UK protests reveals it was focused almost entirely around the security and public order aspects of the protests themselves, with BBC journalists reporting the protests principally through the language of public disorder incidents, involving “angry clashes”, “public order offences”, “violence”, “confrontations” and “arrests,” as illustrated in the following segments:

BBC Newscaster (Victoria Holland), London: More now on the Israeli conflict, and in London 7 people were arrested during protests outside the Israeli embassy. Hundreds took to the streets of west London earlier forcing the closure of High Street Kensington. (BBC, 29 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent (Warren Nettleford), London: They came in their hundreds bringing placards, protest and noise to the streets of Kensington. More than 600 people, I believe, have converged on this part of west London from five o'clock this evening. And although confined by barriers they still blocked Kensington High Street. Bringing traffic in the surrounding area to a standstill. Their aim is to show their opposition to Israel's airstrikes against Gaza. (BBC, 29 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent (Warren Nettleford), London: Mirroring scenes yesterday there were several arrests, many for public order offenses following clashes with the police. Protestors, though, have vowed to return to this site of the embassy every evening until the strikes against Gaza come to an end. (29 December 2008)

BBC Newscaster, London: [Israel's] actions spark protests across Europe with angry demonstrations outside Israel's Embassy in London. (BBC, 3 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster, London: Well, there have been demonstration across Europe in protest at Israel's actions in Gaza. Around 2000 protested outside the Israeli Embassy in London, where some burned the Israeli flag and threw missiles at riot police. (BBC, 3 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Barney Chaudry), West London: Tonight, the violence that organisers so wanted to avoid happened. Hundreds of demonstrators venting their fury against Israel, burning its national flag. Earlier they hurled bottles cans and stones at the police. The police is still being pelted with missiles, so the police are going in and snatching what they believe to be the ring leaders and the mood tonight is certainly different from that of earlier today. Then it began as a peaceful march towards Trafalgar square, thousands listening to speakers that condemned Israel's actions. (BBC, 3 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Barney Chaudry), West London: Tonight, the remaining protesters are being removed on by the police, but these protesters say that they are determined to make sure their voice continues to be heard. Barney Chaudry, BBC News, West London. (BBC, 3 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster, London: Israel looks set to intensify its offensive in Gaza. On another day of heavy fighting a leaflet drop on the region warns residents to stay away from buildings used by Hamas. Here, angry clashes between protesters and police followed by a demonstration against Israel's actions. (BBC, 10 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster, London: Here, an estimated 20 thousand people marched through London to protest against the violence in Gaza. There was a number of protests taking place across Europe and the Middle East. The demonstration began peacefully in Hyde Park but when it reached the Israeli embassy in Kensington, in West London, some protesters clashed with police. (BBC, 10 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Rob Hall), West London: The organizers had appealed for restraint there were some who didn't listen. In the packed streets of West London, they smashed windows and turned their anger on police lines. A hail of missiles left fellow protestors injured and three police officers in hospital. It had started very differently, an event which set out to be inclusive, a rally which drew support from throughout the UK. (BBC, 10 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Rob Hall), West London: The Israeli embassy, protected by hundreds of police officers, was always going to be a focal point. Here against the barriers came the first confrontations. Frustrated in their attempt to reach the embassy some demonstrators attacked nearby shops prompting what policemen maintain was an appropriate response. Tonight, as further arrests were made the metropolitan police said the majority of those who had taken part in this protest had made their point passionately but peacefully. Once again said senior officers the actions of the many had been undermined by the behaviours of a few. (BBC, 10 January 2009)

As can be seen from the above segments, the BBC adopted the 'public disorder incident' framing in its protest coverage even when its own reports confirmed violent incidents were "the behaviours of a few" and not representative of the protests as a whole. The emphasis on the "angry" public disorder aspect of the protests was in sharp contrast to the relative absence of context explaining the reasons for the protesters' anger. As illustrated by the

segments above, the grievances and demands of the protesters were largely absent and unstated. Only on three occasions did the BBC coverage explicitly state that the protests were organised against Israel's military actions.

For its part, whilst AJE's coverage of the UK protests also featured the "public disorder" dimension, this was consistently presented as a detail rather than the focus of the reporting:

AJE Correspondent (Jonah Hull), Israeli Embassy in London: Some fairly tense scenes here, certainly several Israeli flags burnt, flares let off, anti-war protesters gathered outside the Israeli Embassy being faced off by riot police. There is a police Helicopter up in the sky. It is really all a culmination of an anti-war march through the streets of central London during the course of the day. Demonstrating public anger not just at Israel's aggression in the Gaza strip but also at perceived inactivity of the likes of the British Government in doing its bit to bring about an end to the violence. (AJE, 30 December 2008)

AJE Correspondent (Jonah Hull), London: A loud, often angry demonstration here in Trafalgar square, the thousands who have turned up in protests, representing a broad cross section of British public opinion and the consensus is certainly that the violence in the Gaza strip must stop but more particularly that Western governments have a major part to play in making that happen. (AJE, 30 December 2008)

8.3.5.4 Reporting the Arab/Muslim world's reaction: OCL in a global context

After the 9/11 attacks Israeli officials have consistently presented Israel as a Western, democratic nation fighting a 'War on Terror' against the radical Islamist violence of Hamas and other regional foes, such as Iran and Hezbollah. "You in America are in a war against terror" Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon told American journalists after a December 2001 visit to the White House, "We in Israel are in a war against terror - it's the same war" (quoted in Younge, *Guardian*, 5 January 2009). This 'war on terror' framing was especially dominant in the official Israeli narrative during OCL. The Israeli framing was articulated most explicitly by the Israeli foreign minister, Tzipi Livni, who at the launch of OCL declared that: "Israel is part of the free world and fights extremism and terrorism. Hamas is not. These are the days when every individual in the region and in the world has to choose a side" (quoted in McGreal, *The Observer*, 4 January 2009).

A notable difference in the BBC and AJE’s coverage of world reactions is in how they presented OCL, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, in the context of wider geopolitics. Thematic and textual analysis of AJE and BBC’s reporting of the reactions to OCL in the Arab/Muslim world, both in terms of official reactions and popular protests, reveals several findings in this regard. Although narratives on the question of OCL’s significance in a global context are far from being binary, several dominant explanatory themes can be identified, as shown in Table 8.24 below:

OCL in a regional/global context	
Israeli/Western themes	Palestinian/non-Western themes
<p>The I/P conflict is part of a global confrontation pitting the democratic West against illiberal, radical Islam.</p> <p>Like other Western nations, Israel is fighting a ‘War on Terror’ against radical Islamic enemies.</p> <p>Israel is surrounded by hostile forces — including Hamas, Iran and Hezbollah — and constantly faces an existential threat to its survival.</p> <p>Israel represents democratic Western values.</p> <p>Israeli violence is rational, justified and proportionate. It is a response to reasonable fears. Palestinian (and by extension Arab and Muslim) violence is driven primarily by irrational hatred, prejudice and ideology.</p> <p>OCL will increase Arab/Muslim anger and likely lead to a rise of extremism which threatens secular Arab regimes but also the security of the West.</p>	<p>The I/P conflict is principally a national liberation struggle by the Palestinian people against Israel’s decades-long colonial occupation and oppression.</p> <p>Israel is a regional superpower enjoying vast military superiority over the Palestinians and exerting military domination over the region.</p> <p>Israel is an agent and ally of Western colonialism, hegemony and domination over the Arab/Muslim world.</p> <p>Palestinian violence is primarily a response to, and driven by, legitimate grievances rooted in decades of occupation and dispossession.</p> <p>Israeli violence is often vindictive, disproportionate and intended to humiliate the Palestinian population and cow it into submission.</p>

Table 8. 24 ‘OCL in a global context’ explanatory themes

Contested Theme 1: ‘More extremism in the region’

Textual analysis of BBC coverage of protests in the Arab and Muslim world shows it was largely framed around the notion that OCL was exacerbating anger in the Arab world, and that this might lead to an escalation in radical extremism and violence across the region, with significant implications not just for the region's governments but for the security of Western nations too. Textual analysis reveals the "rise in radical Islamic extremism" theme was present throughout the BBC's coverage of protests in the Arab world, but also in its reporting of official reactions from Arab and Muslim leaders, as can be seen in the following segments:

BBC Correspondent (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... The Israelis call that restoring the army's deterrent power that means they want any would-be enemies to be very scared about what they are prepared to do. Some of their enemies were demonstrating against them in Beirut. This was organised by Hezbollah, there have been other protests across the Middle East and elsewhere. The anger on the streets feeds the radical forces that support Hamas, like Hezbollah and its backers in Iran. Pro-western leaders in Beirut and other Arab capitals and their allies look on all this with dismay. (BBC, 29 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood) Northern Israel: The Arab street is boiling with fury about what Israel is doing. This was a protest in Syria. Flames in Gaza could yet light fires around the region. (BBC, 8 January 2009)

A particularly illustrative example of this framing is a BBC report on 14 January 2009, shown in the segment below, featuring an interview with the Syrian President, Bashar Al-Assad, and almost exclusively centred on the risk of "Arab anger" at Israeli actions leading to a rise in "Islamist extremism" targeting not only secular Arab regimes but the West too. Especially notable is the prominence given in the report to a statement allegedly issued by al-Qaeda's leader, Osama Bin Laden, in response to Israeli actions in Gaza:

BBC Newscaster... Syria's president has told the BBC that the loss of life will provoke more extremism in the region. He spoke as an Islamist website broadcast a recording said to be made by Osama Bin Laden, calling for holy war for decades to come. (BBC, 14 January 2009)

BBC Editor (Jeremy Bowen): ... Arabs across the Middle East have been horrified and angered by Israel's actions... The secular regime in Syria fears that what Israel is doing in Gaza will encourage Al-Qaida. Osama Bin Laden is looking to convert Palestinians to his ideology. On a website a voice purporting to be Bin Laden's had a message for them. (BBC, 14 January 2009)

Osama Bin Laden [recording]: Our brothers in Palestine, we are with you and we will not let you down. Our fate is tied to yours in fighting until victory or martyrdom against the crusader Zionist coalition...

BBC Editor (Jeremy Bowen): ... and by that he means Israel and its western allies... (BBC, 14 January 2009)

On AJE, in contrast, the “rise in radicalism” theme was largely absent, and was never used to frame the reporting of the protests or the regional reactions to OCL. In fact, the purported intervention by Bin Laden did not elicit a single mention in AJE's entire coverage of OCL under examination.

Contested theme 2: 'The Arab world is enraged'

The references highlighted above in the BBC coverage to an Arab street “horrified and angered” and “boiling with fury” merit a closer look. A report on January 4th by the BBC's security correspondent, Frank Gardner, is worth highlighting in this regard, especially the following segment:

BBC Newscaster, London: Our security correspondent Frank Gardner has been looking at the global implications of this conflict. (BBC, 4 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Frank Gardner): ... the Arab world is enraged by what it sees as a disproportionate Israeli response. In Beirut, protesters marched on to the US Embassy to be driven back by security forces. Elsewhere, there were rallies in support of Gaza's population, fanned by satellite TV footage of Palestinian casualties. At one protest in Lebanon, fake missiles and symbolic death shrouds were a reminder that the militant group Hezbollah still has a formidable arsenal on Israel's Northern border. So, there is now a renewed risk of radicalisation. In Britain and Europe, pro-Palestinian demonstrations have been largely peaceful, but events in Gaza are undermining moderate mainstream Muslim efforts to stop radicalization ... (BBC, 4 January 2009)

In this segment, Gardner invokes a familiar motif of Western media representations of the Middle East, as highlighted in Chapter Five, namely that of 'Arab rage'. The only specific detail from the regional protests that Gardner notes is that some of the protesters waved "fake missiles and symbolic death shrouds," which, he tells viewers, is "a reminder that the militant group Hezbollah still has a formidable arsenal on Israel's Northern border." However, there is no mention of what the protesters themselves intended to convey through their use of props, nor any details of their grievances or demands. As discussed in Chapter Five, this representation of Arab protesters as 'enraged' masses driven by vague or unexplained motives is a familiar feature of Orientalist framings in western media representations, and was repeatedly highlighted by scholars, including Said (2003) himself:

In newsreels or news photos, the Arab is always shown in large numbers. No individuality, no personal characteristics or experiences. Most of the pictures represent mass rage and misery, or irrational (hence hopelessly eccentric) gestures. Lurking behind all of these images is the menace of *jihad*. Consequence: a fear that the Muslims (or Arabs) will take over the world. (Said, 2003:286-287)

Written almost exactly 40 years before OCL, Said's words could easily have been describing Gardner's description of the protests in Beirut and elsewhere. Gardner's report does not include any elements of context that can help viewers understand the causes of the protests, such as direct quotes or comments from the protesters themselves about their demands, or details of the human toll in Gaza that had prompted the protests in the first place. As discussed in Chapter Five, this framing of Arab or Palestinian 'rage' or violence as being motivated by irrational and unexplained factors is also a familiar theme of Western reporting of the Middle East.

A further example of Israeli framings being reproduced is Gardener's claim that Arab satellite TV channels were "fanning" popular anger and extremism in the region. As discussed in Chapter Six, this is an accusation that has been regularly levelled by successive Israeli governments against Arab satellite channels, most notably Al-Jazeera for its coverage of the Second Intifada.

Examination of AJE coverage of the protests in the Arab world reveals a very different approach. AJE reporters frequently included references to the emotional dimension of the protests, and the anger Israel's actions elicited across the Arab world. However, this was consistently reported within a framing that foregrounded the protesters' grievances and demands, and often highlighted Palestinian rationales and perspectives. Arab protesters' grievances against their own leaders and the latter's perceived failures to come to the aid of Palestinians was a major theme of AJE's reporting:

AJE Correspondent (Nadim Baba), London: ... This is one of many demonstrations in European capitals but in the Middle East itself people have taken to the streets to denounce not only the Israeli attacks but also the Arab Leaders' decision to put off its emergency meeting until Wednesday. (AJE, 28 December 2008)

AJE's coverage of the protests regularly featured references to the Israeli actions being protested, and generally mentioned the protesters' specific grievances or demands, as illustrated in the following segments:

AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Ghosh), Doha: Israeli air strikes on Gaza have killed more than 200 people and wounded hundreds more. The attacks are continuing into the night. ... the attacks have sparked anger and condemnation across the Arab World. Protests have been held in Jordan, Syria, Lebanon and in the West Bank city of Hebron. The Arab League has called an emergency summit. (AJE, 27 December 2008)

AJE Newscaster, (Darren Jordan), Doha: ... In the Indonesian capital Jakarta about a thousand students and members of Muslim organisations held demonstrations calling for an end to the attacks. There have also been protests organised by a major Islamic party in Pakistan. Protesters are accusing the United Nations of not doing enough to stop Israel's military operation in Gaza. (AJE, 29 December 2008)

Contested Theme 3: 'Israel is surrounded by enemies'

Gardner's reference to the "Hezbollah threat" in the segment examined above echoes another key theme of official Israeli statements during OCL. Israeli officials and spokespeople repeatedly invoked the "Hezbollah threat" as part of an "Israel is surrounded by enemies" narrative. Speaking on the first day of OCL, Tzipi Livni, the Israeli Foreign Minister, declared that "the International community understands that Hamas is an extreme Islamist organisation that spreads its hatred in the entire region, [and] is being supported by Iran." According to this narrative, the conflict in Gaza should be understood as part of the existential threat facing Israel from a nexus of radical regional foes: Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran. Textual analysis of BBC coverage shows its reporters uncritically presented or even endorsed this Israeli explanatory theme on several occasions, as can be seen in the following segments:

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood) Northern Israel: Israel is surrounded by enemies. It believes Hamas in Gaza threatens its very survival. It is joined by Lebanese Hezbollah, an implacable foe. All these groups are supported by Iran. (BBC, 8 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Jon Leyne) Tehran: Here in Tehran, they see support for the Palestinians as a matter of principle, but supporting Hamas and Hezbollah is also a way Iran can extend its power in the region. There is little attempt here to deny that Iran does provide them with arms and money. The big question tonight is whether Iran is trying to widen the conflict beyond Gaza. (BBC, 8 January 2009)

It is worth highlighting the last line of the second segment, where the reporter presents the Iranian role as a key element of the story, even though the report itself did not include any news or developments directly involving Iran. While there is certainly evidence that Iran has provided support to Hamas, the view that this a crucial or even primary lens through which to understand or report the conflict echoes a core Israeli perspective. In contrast, AJE's coverage, whilst presenting the Israeli perspective regarding the 'Iranian threat' to its viewers, took an explicitly sceptical approach to the "Israel is surrounded by enemies" claim, as illustrated in the exchange below:

AJE Newscaster (Sami Zeidan), Doha: Iran has staged some of the biggest protests against the current crisis in Gaza. It's also been accused of funding Hamas. A short time ago, we spoke to Saeed Jalili, Secretary of Iran's National Security Council... Iran has been accused of supplying weapons to Hamas is that true?

Saeed Jalili, Iranian National Security Secretary, Doha: No, this is something that has come up by those that have seen that there is no other option, and they think that by coming up with these theories and ideas, they can fool people of what is going on... (AJE, 14 January 2009)

Overall, the thematic and textual analyses results show that AJE did not present Iran or Hezbollah as significant elements of its OCL coverage. Instead, it generally adopted the Palestinian framing that OCL was primarily a national struggle for liberation pitting the Palestinians against Israeli aggression and occupation.

8.3.6 Thematic Area of Coverage: Military and Ceasefire Updates:

Military, operational and ceasefire updates are an important dimension of conflict reporting. This is a broad thematic category which encompasses a number of distinct themes relating to the operational and military aspects of the conflict, including:

- Military updates: Details of troop movements and military operations.
- Ceasefire updates: Reports of ceasefire prospects, including demands and conditions made by Israeli and Palestinian representatives.
- Operational and other updates: Discussions of strategic aims and objectives, discussions of operational success/failure, discussions of other aspects such as the media access ban.

As the thematic analysis overview at the start of the chapter shows, military, operational and ceasefire updates was the most dominant thematic area of coverage in both BBC and AJE's OCL reporting, accounting for 28% and 25% of their respective lines totals. Table 8.25 and Figure 8.17 below show the main sub-thematic areas of the BBC and AJE's military, operational and ceasefire coverage in absolute (lines of text) and proportional (% of coverage) terms, respectively.

		Military and Ceasefire Updates		
		Military Updates	Ceasefire Propsects	Operational & Other
AJE	1224.5	745.25	333.75	145.5
BBC	355.75	99	63.5	193.25

Table 8. 25 AJE/BBC Coverage of Military, Operational & Ceasefire updates

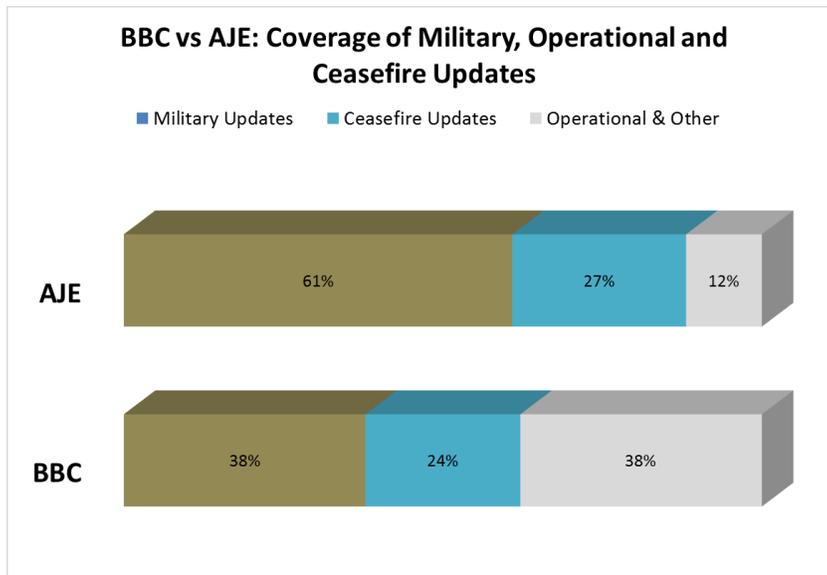


Figure 8. 17 AJE/BBC coverage of Military, Ceasefire & Operational Updates

Both the BBC and AJE dedicated a similar proportion of their military coverage (24% and 27%, respectively) to reporting ceasefire prospects and conditions. However, there was a marked difference between them in terms of the proportion of coverage each dedicated to military updates. AJE dedicated 61% (745.25 lines) to reporting military developments, whereas these accounted for 38% (99 lines) of the BBC's reporting. Operational updates, especially discussions of strategic aims and objectives and operational success or failure, received a significantly greater proportion of the BBC's coverage (38%) than in AJE's (12%). These results will be examined in further detail below.

Textual Analysis

Textual analysis of the BBC and AJE's coverage of military, ceasefire and operational updates reveals significant differences in their approach.

Reporting military developments:

Textual analysis shows that BBC coverage of military and operational updates was often presented within an Israeli framing that uncritically adopted Israeli rationales or repeated Israeli terminology and talking points, even when reporting claims that were highly contested by other parties, as seen in the following segments:

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood, Jerusalem): ...The wave of airstrikes was aimed at government buildings, police stations, security compounds. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood, Jerusalem): It is clear that this is an all-out assault on Hamas... (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood, Southern Israel): The Israeli air campaign is wearing Hamas down... (BBC, 30 December 2008)

BBC reporters often presented military and operational developments principally from the perspective of how Israel's political and military leadership saw them, but virtually never from that of Palestinian leaders:

BBC Correspondent (Jeremy Bowen), Sderot: ... they have sent tanks in before and even though they killed a lot of people and caused a lot of damage they didn't stop the rocket fire, that is a big dilemma that Israeli leaders face at the moment today... (BBC, 31 December 2008)

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... Army commanders want to send ground troops into Gaza. They believe that the air force alone cannot stop the rockets and that the army will restore its reputation at last... (BBC, 1 January 2009)

BBC journalist: ... Israel's strategy could be interrupted by a ceasefire ... (BBC, 6 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel Gaza-border: ... If diplomacy can't do it, Israeli reservists called up since this started are ready to go... (BBC, 12 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: For Israel, saying it is unilateral is very important because they feel if it is anything other than that they will somehow bestow legitimacy on Hamas by the back door (BBC, 17 January 2009)

AJE's reporting of military developments occasionally reported on Israeli or Palestinian motivations, intentions or rationales but without endorsing them, as the segments below show:

AJE Correspondent (Charles Stratford), New York: And as Israeli tanks and ground troops remain holed up in the Strip, there are reports that military officials are pushing for an urgent answer on how to proceed. The so-called Stage Three of Israel's offensive has not yet been ruled out. But as rockets continue to be fired from Gaza, there's considerable pressure in Israel for the offensive to go on. Hamas says nothing will change on the ground until international pressure forces Israel to stop the attacks. (AJE, 9 January 2009)

Contextualising military reporting: Human Costs vs Strategic Goals

An important difference revealed by the textual analysis relates to how AJE and BBC contextualised the significance of military developments for their viewers. Whereas the BBC coverage regularly presented military developments primarily in terms of their implications for Israeli political and strategic objectives, AJE was more likely to emphasise their humanitarian implications. The segments below are illustrative of this difference in approach:

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood), Jerusalem: Gaza's skyline lit up as artillery and helicopters prepared the way for the ground assault, the operation begun tonight would take many days, said the Israeli army. Tanks of armoured vehicles headed towards Gaza from several directions, this was the first wave, there are thousands of Israeli troops massed around Gaza, they'd be looking for stockpiles of rockets and the workshops making them, anything that the punishing 8-day Israeli air campaign missed. (BBC, 3 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: Ok, let's put it all on a map for you and show you how it has been playing out on Friday in Gaza. Intense bombardment and shelling right across Jabalia, which is in the North of the Strip, also in Beit Hanoun a little further East and North, and also in the Zaytoun neighbourhood that is in Gaza city itself. Head a bit south again, Israeli tank shells have injured several Palestinians there, that was in Khan Younis, and right at the bottom border, the Southern border, the Rafah crossing, several explosions have also been heard there. More on what we were telling you about the UN suspending operations on Thursday, saying Israel is making it too dangerous for it to do its job. Now the UN says it will resume humanitarian deliveries in Gaza as soon as possible. (AJE, 9 January 2009)

The difference between the two approaches could also be seen in the way AJE and BBC journalists explicitly highlighted for viewers the significance of certain questions or aspects of the coverage, as in the following segments:

BBC	AJE
<p>BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood, Jerusalem): ... <u>The question now is whether the airstrikes will be followed by a ground attack</u>. Israeli tanks are just outside Gaza. The Palestinians are bracing themselves. (BBC, 27 December 2008)</p>	<p>AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Ghosh, Doha): It doesn't look like it is going to end there, because Israel said that it will expand the assault against Hamas as necessary. <u>What does that mean for the people of Gaza, who have already been suffering under a punishing blockade?</u> (AJE, 27 December 2008)</p>
<p>BBC Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen): Safeguarding places like this town is the reason why Israel has been blockading and is now attacking Gaza. <u>The question tonight is which way this military campaign is going</u>. (BBC, 31 December 2009)</p>	<p>AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin, Gaza): <u>The question is how deep into Gaza are you going to push?</u> There is no doubt that, as you make your way into the more urban areas, <u>heavy casualties on both sides are expected</u> ... (AJE, 30 December 2008)</p>

<p>BBC Correspondent (Paul Woods), Jerusalem: Israel says its army will take control of some of the areas used to launch rockets, <u>does that mean reoccupying parts of Gaza? No one is saying</u> (BBC, 3 January 2009)</p>	<p>AJE Correspondent (Nour Odeh), Ramallah: ... <u>The question now is even if the troops go in, what will they achieve besides utter destruction?</u> (AJE, 3 January 2009)</p>
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In all of the above AJE segments, reports of military developments are framed primarily in terms of their humanitarian implications. In the BBC segments, in contrast, the prospect of Israeli military escalation is usually presented alongside an Israeli rationale for action and the questions it prompts are largely operational and military ones (whether the airstrikes will be followed by a ground attack, “does that mean reoccupying parts of Gaza?”, “which way this military campaign is going”). The humanitarian impact and cost of such an escalation is thus left for viewers to conclude for themselves. Overall, BBC reporting framed military developments in terms of Israeli objectives more than six times as often as it did in terms of humanitarian implications. In contrast, AJE’s coverage framed military developments in terms of their humanitarian implications twice as often as it did so in terms of their implications for Israeli political or strategic goals. It is important to note that while this pattern was seen throughout the BBC’s coverage, there were exceptions to it, as in the segment below:

<p>BBC Correspondent (Katya Adler), Israel-Gaza Border: ... There is a lot of talk, a sort of expectation, on both sides of the Israeli-Gaza border, that Israel is about to launch what it calls Stage Three of its campaign, <u>what does this mean? It means more troops, more tanks inside Gaza, more face-to-face fighting in the streets, and almost most certainly more bloodshed; in Gaza, people say they are terrified.</u> (BBC, 10 January 2009)</p>

Reporting operational matters: “... that will not be a quick job...”

Throughout OCL, Israeli officials continuously presented the conflict in ‘operational’ terms of aims, goals and objectives, generally portraying the military campaign less as a traditional confrontation and more as a mission or “job” that needed doing⁵⁴. The segments below illustrate this operational framing and perspective, in which the time element, and the need to “get the job done quickly”, was especially highlighted:

⁵⁴ This is in part related to official Israeli conceptions of recent military actions in counter-insurgency or counter-terrorism terms, as will be touched upon in the discussion chapter.

Israeli Foreign Ministry Spokesperson (Ofir Gendelman), Tel Aviv: ... Everything depends on the situation on the ground. If they are able to finish off Hamas's rocket launching ability, I think they will be out of there in a few days, but let's be cautious here, no one knows how long it will take but it's definitely clear that it will take quite a few days in order to get the job done. (AJE, 30 December 2008)

Israeli Foreign Ministry Spokesperson (Ofir Gendelman), Tel Aviv: ... there is always the possibility of us going back again into Gaza in order to get the job done. After all our first job is to provide security for the people of Israel and they have been living in bomb shelters for eight years. This is intolerable. No other country lives like this. So, we are in a situation in which we have to get the job done, as quickly as possible with fewer casualties as possible for the benefit of both peoples. (AJE, 30 December 2008)

This Israeli framing of OCL in terms of “getting the job done” was in stark contrast to the Palestinian perspective which saw OCL as a devastating attack on Gaza's population against which they were largely powerless and could only try to withstand as best, and as long, as they could, a theme frequently highlighted on AJE:

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: ... this is the fear that I was alluding earlier among the Palestinian people, that is, essentially, as we've seen in the past eight days, no inch of Gaza is spared, and so now the entire part of Gaza [...] will essentially be turned into this war zone at the mercy of the Israeli military (AJE, 30 December 2008)

As the segments below show, BBC coverage frequently adopted or presented uncritically Israel's operational framing of OCL, by portraying a state frantically trying to “get the job done” in difficult circumstances, whilst working against the “countdown” of international pressure and the “diplomatic clock”:

BBC Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen, London): The Israelis will be very, very, conscious they will have only a certain amount of time to do what they feel is necessary before they might face action, like in the form of the UN, to try and stop them. (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... Israel has released more video of its attacks but there are limits to what can be done from the air ... (BBC, 2 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Paul Wood, Jerusalem): I know from talking to defence officials myself that they believe the militants have stockpiled in the low thousands of rockets; that will not be a quick job for them to finish ... (BBC, 27 December 2008)

BBC Newscaster, London: This conflict is taking place now in one of the most densely populated places in the world, how difficult is it going to be? (BBC, 3 January 2009)

BBC Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel-Gaza border: ... So, at the moment, it is a question of the pressure internationally for a ceasefire increasing and Israel looking at that diplomatic clock and wondering if it can do it, if it can fulfil all its military plans before the ceasefire comes in... (BBC, 4 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Israel Gaza border: ... Israel wants to break Hamas's fighting force. Even if that is possible, it might take more time than Israel has left in this campaign and too many more lives. (BBC, 7 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Christian Fraser), Rafah: ... In this town, there is nowhere to hide. Israelis are rushing to finish the job and the countdown is on ... (BBC, 17 January 2009)

It is worth highlighting no such references to Hamas "getting the job done" were used when describing Palestinian goals or actions, even though Hamas had publicised its own stated aims and objectives, which were regularly reiterated throughout the conflict, as reported in the following AJE segment:

Khaled Meshaal, Hamas Political Leader: Our position is clear, we cannot give in, our resolve cannot be broken, nor can we bow to the terms of the enemy, who is willing to force our people to kneel, our demand is also clear, the war must be ended, the siege lifted, and the crossing points open without exception, we are aware of our capabilities, we are also aware that we don't have geographical depth, our military capabilities are limited and mediocre, but our resolve is steel, our belief is unshaken and we are ready for the challenge, it is a war of necessity not a war of choice. (AJE, 2 January 2009)

Another significant difference revealed by the textual analysis relates to how BBC and AJE framed the relationship between operational and humanitarian aspects of military actions. Whereas AJE's reporting of Israeli political and strategic decisions and goals was often framed in terms of their humanitarian cost and implications, BBC reporters regularly adopted the reverse framing: presenting the human cost to Palestinians of Israeli military actions in terms of its implications for the success or failure of Israeli political and strategic aims. The following segments illustrate the difference in approach:

AJE Newscaster (Shiulie Gosh), Doha: ... What about the presence of Israeli troops inside Gaza? Hamas have said that they will not stop fighting until Israeli troops leave Gaza, well, Israeli troops are not going to leave Gaza, so what does that mean for the people of Gaza? (AJE, 17 January 2009)

AJE Correspondent (Sherine Tadros), Gaza: ... Since the ground operation, the ground invasion, was launched last Saturday, we have been saying that the so-called Phase Two has concentrated the Israeli troops on the outskirts of the densely populated areas, so they haven't entered those areas yet, now that doesn't negate the fact that there are still many houses and there are still many people on those outskirts, and those really are the ones that are bearing the brunt of this ground operation. What we are hearing from witnesses, and what we are hearing from the Red Cross and the Red Crescent, is that the problem right now is that because the ground forces are operating, and we are hearing this intense fighting, they simply aren't able to go and rescue the people that are trapped inside their houses, and are being subjected to shelling and this is a constant criticism that the Red Cross are making of the Israeli army, that they are not allowing them access to these vital areas, to get people out that are trapped and injured, so this is the devastating effects of the on-going war here. (AJE, 12 January 2009)

BBC Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen): ... The question though is whether by using so much force, doing so much damage, killing so many Palestinians, Israel is storing up trouble for the future ... (BBC, 4 January 2009)

BBC, Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Jerusalem: ... Israel's strategy could be interrupted by a ceasefire. Pressure for one will grow because of the number of Palestinian civilians the Israelis are killing... (BBC, 6 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent, (Katya Adler), Jerusalem: Even as its tanks close in around Gaza, diplomatic pressure is building on Israel. This is decision time. Can Israel really achieve what it wants by fire power alone? And should it risk alienating allies by prolonging the bloodshed? (BBC, 15 January 2009)

In the above BBC segments, the prospect of a higher Palestinian civilian toll (“using so much force”, “killing so many Palestinians”, “the number of Palestinian civilians the Israelis are killing”, “prolonging the bloodshed”) is invoked primarily in terms of its implications for Israel’s political and strategic goals (“alienating allies”, “storing up trouble for the future”). In other words, it is not the impact of Israel’s strategic aims and actions on the Palestinian civilian toll that is effectively emphasised to viewers — which was consistently the case on AJE, as illustrated in the segments above — but the reverse.

Reporting Ceasefire updates:

A key part of the coverage of OCL was reporting the prospects for securing a ceasefire, including the conditions presented by Israel and Hamas for agreeing to a truce. The results of the thematic analysis show both AJE and BBC reported on the prospects and obstacles relating to a ceasefire or truce between Israel and Hamas. As discussed in the previous section, despite international calls for a ceasefire, and an offer to consider a truce by Hamas, Israeli leaders rejected the calls for most of the first two weeks of OCL. Both AJE and the BBC generally reported the two positions, as well as the humanitarian implications of the Israeli rejection:

AJE Newscaster (Darren Jordan), Doha: They've suffered bombardment for five days. Nearly 400 people are dead. But Israel is adamant, there won't be a truce in Gaza. In the past hour, a leading member of 'Hamas' has said it's willing to consider any initiative that will stop the aggression and end the siege. Well, Israeli tanks are still lined up along the border with Gaza and a meeting of the Security Cabinet ended with a rejection of calls for a truce, and a vow to continue military operations. (AJE, 31 December 2008).

BBC's Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen), Sderot: ... The human suffering in Gaza and reports that Hamas is offering a ceasefire if Israel lifts its siege are increasing international pressure on the Israelis, which they continue to ignore. (BBC, 31 December 2008)

A week into OCL, the official Israeli position began shifting from an outright rejection of a ceasefire to a tentative agreement to consider it. Both BBC and AJE coverage reflected the change and reported the demands and conditions made by the two sides:

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: Hamas's key demand is for the crossings to be reopened and Israel's siege to the strip to be lifted, Israel for its part wants an end to the rocket fire and to make sure there is no more weapons smuggled-in through the tunnels beneath the Gaza Egypt border... (AJE, 10 January 2009)

BBC Correspondent (Christian Fraser), Sabot Cross Site: Any ceasefire will need to take into account the conditions on both sides. Palestinians want to see the crossings open so a tonne of goods can be sent down while the damage is done and the border reinforced and better protected by the water and air ports solution (BBC 7 January 2009) of Gaza, they have sent tanks in before and even though they killed a lot of people and caused a lot of damage they didn't stop the rocket fire, that is a big dilemma that Israeli leaders face at the moment today... (BBC, 31 December 2008)

BBC Middle East Editor (Jeremy Bowen) Jerusalem: Israel wants to keep on fighting until it has destroyed Hamas's capacity to hit its soldiers and civilians, it says any ceasefire must include a way to stop Hamas rearming itself, that's the reason why Israel has also been bombing the tunnels that run between Egypt and Gaza. Hamas rockets are still hitting Israel. Israel argues that any country in the world would do what it is doing to protect its people. (BBC, 5 January 2009)

BBC journalist: ... Israel wants to keep on fighting until it has destroyed Hamas's capacity to hit its soldiers and civilians. It says any ceasefire must include a way to stop Hamas rearming itself... (BBC, 5 January 2009)

However, textual analysis results also show that the BBC coverage reported Israeli conditions more than it did Palestinian ones, whereas the reverse is true for AJE:

In AJE's coverage, Israeli and Palestinian conditions for a ceasefire were regularly presented together, usually within an explanatory context, as illustrated in the following segments:

AJE Correspondent (Ayman Mohyeldin), Gaza: ... In the end, Hamas say that any ceasefire that they will agree to will need two requirements: one, a complete cessation of violence or what they are describing as a military aggression on the Palestinian people. Two, a complete lifting of the Israeli siege that has been in place now for 18 months, which has crippled the Palestinian economy and really decimated so much of the infrastructure and every facet of Palestinian life. (AJE, 8 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: Hamas is demanding all crossings into Gaza be opened, and Israel lift its siege on the strip. Hamas also wants an immediate end to Israel's attacks, and then on the flip side Israel says any deal would rely on the rocket attacks stopping and an end to the smuggling of course through the tunnels on the Egypt Gaza-border. (AJE, 8 January 2009)

AJE Newscaster (Kamal Santamaria), Doha: Hamas's key demand is for the crossings to be reopened and Israel's siege to the strip to be lifted. Israel for its part wants an end for the rocket fire and to make sure there is no more weapons smuggled in through the tunnels beneath the Gaza-Egypt border. (AJE, 10 January 2009)

Table 8.26 below provides the number of mentions of ceasefire conditions on BBC and AJE:

	BBC	AJE
Israel conditions for a ceasefire	7	5
Hamas conditions for a ceasefire	5	8
Both Israel and Hamas conditions represented together	2	5

Table 8. 26 AJE/BBC coverage of Israeli and Hamas Ceasefire demands

Overall, the thematic and textual analysis shows that the BBC's reporting of military, operational and ceasefire developments adopted an operational framing of the conflict, generally echoing the official Israeli conception of the conflict as a 'task' or 'job' that needed completing. BBC

coverage also placed great emphasis on the strategic and political implications of military developments, chiefly as viewed by Israel’s political and military leadership. Similarly, key episodes such as Israel’s rejection of a ceasefire, its conditions for one and the prospects for military success, were often presented within Israeli rationales and defences of action, whereas Palestinian conditions, rationales and perspectives were largely missing. In contrast, AJE’s reporting placed significant emphasis on the humanitarian implications of military developments, and generally examined operational and military developments through that lens. Reporting on ceasefire prospects, AJE frequently highlighted the humanitarian costs of Israel’s rejection of a ceasefire and generally included both Palestinian and Israeli conditions and rationales, often within additional explanatory context.

8.3.7 The BBC’s online coverage of the Gaza War 2008-9

As indicated in the methodology chapter, the BBC’s online coverage of the Gaza War 2008-9 was examined using the same thematic analysis approach used for AJE/BBC’s broadcast coverage examined in this chapter⁵⁵. An overview of the findings is presented in Table 8.27 below.

BBC ONLINE & BBC TV NEWS OVERVIEW									
	Lines Coded	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives	History & Political Context	Israeli Casualties & Impact	Palestinian Casualties & Impact	Legality & International Law	World Reaction & Protests	Military & Ceasefire Updates
Online	3314.5	420.25	201	206.5	119.5	683	120.5	695.5	668.25
	%	13.5%	6.5%	6.6%	3.8%	21.9%	3.9%	22.3%	21.5%
TV	1255.75	266.5	76.75	110	25.25	186.25	21.5	213.75	355.75
News	%	21.2%	6.1%	8.8%	2.0%	14.8%	1.7%	17.0%	28.3%

Table 8. 27 Comparative overview of thematic distribution of BBC’s online and TV News coverage of OCL

The findings relating to each thematic area will be examined in turn in the rest of this section. The results will later be revisited in the discussion chapter (Chapter Ten).

⁵⁵ As explained in the methodology chapter, AJE’s online coverage is not included in this research (for reasons of scope and scale). As a result, the researcher opted against integrating the BBC’s online content analysis findings into those of the broadcast content analysis for reasons of methodological consistency.

8.3.7.1 Israeli and Palestinian perspectives

While the BBC's online coverage shows a smaller disparity between the proportion of coverage dedicated to Israeli and Palestinian perspectives than that in its broadcast bulletins, Israeli perspectives still accounted for double the proportion of BBC online coverage dedicated to Palestinian ones (13.5% and 6.5%, respectively). Moreover, as shown in Table 8.28 below, the BBC's online coverage included three times as many instances (219) in which the Israeli perspective was reported than the equivalent number (70) for the Palestinian perspective.

Perspectives reported	Total Occurrences
Israeli	219
Palestinian	70

Table 8. 28 BBC online reporting of I/P perspectives

An examination of how official Israeli and Palestinian sources were used in the BBC's online coverage is presented in Table 8.29 below and shows a similar disparity, with Israeli officials being cited or quoted on 102 occasions, more than twice as often as their Palestinian counterparts (43 times).

Sources cited	Total Occurrences
Israeli Officials	102
Palestinian Officials	43

Table 8. 29 BBC online citing of Israeli/Palestinian officials

Table 8.30 below presents an overview of the number of mentions in the BBC's online coverage of a selection of keywords which featured heavily in the Palestinian and Israeli narratives during OCL.

Keyword(s)	Total Mentions	Average Daily Frequency	Number of Articles
'Occupation', 'Occupied', 'Occupier', 'Re-occupation'	18	0.8	9
'Refugee', 'Refugee camp'	25	1.1	13
'1948'	2	0.1	1
'1967'	9	0.4	6
'Ceasefire', 'truce' (June 2008)	40	1.8	21
'Blockade', 'Blockading', 'Siege'	38	1.7	27
'Tunnel/s' (as lifeline, supplying fuel, food)	4	0.1	3
'Tunnel/s' (as arms smuggling route)	58	2.6	23
'Rocket/s'	240	10.9	70
'International Law', 'Legal', 'Legality' (Israeli perspective)	10	0.5	2
'International Law', 'Legal', 'Legality' (Palestinian perspective)	14	0.6	8

'Goal', 'Aim', 'Objective', 'Final Act, 'End Game'	27	1.2	18
'War crime' (accusation against Israel)	9	0.4	5
War crime' (accusation against Hamas)	2	0.1	2
'Humanitarian crisis' (pre-OCL)	8	0.4	7
'Humanitarian crisis' (during-OCL)	15	0.7	10
'Ceasefire', 'Truce' (prospects of)	206	9.4	60
'Terror', 'Terrorism', 'Terrorists' (Hamas)	16	0.7	12
'Iran', 'Iranian'	22	1	4
'Hezbollah'	10	0.5	5
'Surgical', 'Surgically', 'Pinpoint'	6	0.3	5
'Human Shield'	9	0.4	7

Table 8. 30 BBC Online coverage keyword analysis

While the coverage broadly presented statistics presented by official Israeli and Palestinian sources as being of equivalent authority or credibility, Israeli sources were on several occasions presented as more authoritative than Palestinian ones, as in the following passages:

The high numbers of casualties made Saturday the single deadliest day in the Gaza Strip since Israel's occupation of the territory in 1967, analysts said, although no independent confirmation is available of the numbers killed. **(BBC Online, Israeli jets target Gaza tunnels, 28 December 2008)**

Palestinian medical sources say the number of people killed in Gaza now stands at more than 500, with some 2,500 wounded. These figures cannot be independently verified. Five Israelis have been killed since the start of Israel's military operation, which is now in its 10th day. **(BBC Online, Israel vows no let-up over Gaza, 5 January 2009)**

At least 765 Palestinian lives are said by sources in Gaza to have been lost since the offensive began 13 days ago. Three more Israeli soldiers were killed on Thursday, bringing Israel's death toll to 11 military personnel and three civilians. **(BBC Online, UN suspends Gazan aid operation, 8 January 2009)**

A total of 1,083 people in Gaza have now been killed since the Israeli operation began, Gaza's Ministry of Health said on Thursday - 70 higher than the previous day's figure. Nearly a third of the dead are children, Gaza medics said. Thirteen Israelis - including three civilians - have died ... **(BBC Online, Key Hamas leader killed in Gaza, 15 January 2009)**

Examination of the BBC's online coverage shows that Palestinian declamatory statements, especially when reporting quotes by Palestinian officials, were often used to represent Palestinian perspectives, as in the following passages:

Hamas's military wing has vowed to open the gates of hell. The movement's exiled political leader, Khaled Meshaal, has called for a third and violent Palestinian uprising. **(BBC Online, Israel's mixed motives for strikes, 27 December 2008)**

The militant group's exiled political leader, Khaled Meshaal, earlier warned Israel against a ground offensive, saying that a "black destiny" awaited Israeli forces if they entered Gaza. **(BBC Online, Israeli troops enter Gaza Strip, 4 January 2009)**

The Hamas leader-in-exile, Khaled Meshaal, condemned the Israeli offensive as a "holocaust", in a speech broadcast to millions across the Arab world via al-Jazeera TV. **(BBC Online, Israel warns Gaza of escalation, 11 January 2009)**

Overall, of the 70 instances of Palestinian perspectives being presented across the entire 22-day coverage, more than half (37 instances) were of a declamatory nature that did not contain any specific references to Palestinian rationales or defences of action. Palestinian declamatory statements were occasionally presented alongside Israeli rationales or defences of actions, as in the following example:

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas has accused Israel of trying to "wipe out" his people. But Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said the military operation would continue in order to stop Hamas rockets being fired into Israel and to prevent arms smuggling into Gaza. **(BBC Online, UN head set for talks on Gaza, 14 January 2009)**

8.3.7.2 Historical and political context

A notable finding of the thematic analysis is that historical and political contextualisation received a smaller proportion of the BBC's online coverage than in the broadcast bulletins (6.6% and 8.8%, respectively).

As indicated throughout the thesis, key themes of historical background include the 1948 and 1967 wars and the refugee issue. Yet as Table 8.30 shows, of the 76 articles published on the BBC website over the course of the 22-day conflict, only one of them mentions the 1948 war, while the issue of the occupation — a core theme of the Palestinian narrative — appears in 9 articles only.

Moreover, when key elements of historical context, such as the 1948 and 1967 wars and subsequent Israeli occupation, are mentioned in the online coverage, they are generally presented without further explanation of their significance, as in the following passages:

It is the worst attack in Gaza since 1967 in terms of the number of Palestinian casualties, a senior analyst told the BBC in Jerusalem. **(BBC Online, Massive Israeli air raid on Gaza, 27 December 2008)**

The majority of Gaza's residents are from refugee families which fled or were expelled from the land that became Israel in 1948. Most Gazans live in eight refugee camps to which the United Nations delivers health, education and other humanitarian services. **(BBC Online, Gaza crisis: key maps and timeline, 6 January 2009)**

In both articles, no further details were provided regarding what happened in 1948 and 1967 and why these dates are so important to understanding the conflict and the Palestinian narrative around it.

As discussed earlier in the chapter, one of the principal thematic elements of the Palestinian narrative around the immediate context and causes of OCL was Israel's 18-month siege and blockade of Gaza in the lead-up to the conflict, while the Israeli narrative heavily featured the launching of rockets by Hamas and other Palestinian groups, and the threat the underground tunnels posed to the security of Israelis.

As Table 8.30 above shows, however, the word 'rocket/s' received six times (240) as many mentions in the BBC's 22-day online coverage as the combined total of the words 'siege', 'blockade' and 'blockading' (38). Moreover, more than 90% of all articles published during the 22-day conflict (70 of 76) mentioned the issue of rockets, whereas only a third (27 articles) carried any mentions of the words 'siege' or 'blockade'.

When the Israeli blockade of Gaza was mentioned in the BBC's online coverage, this rarely included key details or explanations, such as when the siege started or the scale of its impact on the civilian population, as documented by the UN and international aid agencies (as noted in Chapter Three). The following passages are illustrative in this regard:

Hamas spokesman Ayman Taha told AFP news agency that his group was open to any ceasefire propositions as long as they meant an end to the air strikes and a lifting of the Israeli blockade of Gaza. **(BBC Online, Israel rejects Gaza truce calls, 31 December 2008)**

Israel has been criticised by aid agencies who have warned of a mounting humanitarian crisis for the 1.5 million Palestinians in Gaza, who are unable to escape from the conflict because of Israel's blockade. **(BBC Online, Israel briefly halts Gaza attacks, 7 January 2009)**

A spokesman for Hamas, which controls Gaza, said any ceasefire agreement would have to entail a halt to Israeli attacks, a complete withdrawal of Israeli forces and the opening of border crossings to end the blockade of Gaza. **(BBC Online, Israel pursues its Gaza offensive, 14 January 2009)**

In the following examples, some of the humanitarian impacts of the blockade are presented but the word 'blockade' itself is not mentioned in the articles:

Even before the fighting, most Gazans lived a precarious existence, with half the population dependent on UN food aid and the economy at a virtual standstill. Israeli and international human rights groups also accuse Israel of using closures in the month before the assault to further drain supplies of food and fuel in Gaza. **(BBC Online, Gaza: Humanitarian situation, 30 December 2008)**

"In particular the hospitals have been depleted and stretched to the maximum because of the closure imposed," the Red Cross spokesman in Gaza, Iyad Nasr, told the BBC. **(BBC Online, Israel rejects Gaza truce calls, 31 December 2008)**

In several cases references to the blockade adopted an Israeli framing, as in the following examples, which uncritically present the Israeli theme — contested by Palestinians — of "the aim of the blockade is to stop Hamas rockets":

Israel tightened its blockade of the Hamas-controlled territory in November after rocket attacks by militants. **(BBC Online, Gaza: Humanitarian situation -, 30 December 2008)**

Israel has for many years restricted entry to and exit from Gaza, but it intensified its blockade of Gaza in June 2007, when Hamas took over. The aim has been to isolate Hamas and to pressure it to stop militant rocket fire. **(BBC Online, Gaza crisis: key maps and timeline, 6 January 2009)**

In September 2007, the Israeli government declared the Strip a “hostile entity” in response to continued rocket attacks on southern Israel, and said it would start cutting fuel imports. **(BBC Online, Gaza crisis: key maps and timeline, 6 January 2009)**

There were some rare exceptions such as in the following passage, which quoted UN official descriptions of the blockade rather than in the BBC journalist’s own words:

Andrew Whitley of the UN relief agency Unrwa told the BBC that any relief in the conditions of the people of Gaza could only be a good thing. "People have been weakened by 18 months of blockade and siege. They've been getting very little food, electricity or heat for a long time, and so they are in a very weakened condition," he said. **(BBC Online, Pressure grows for Gaza ceasefire, 7 January 2009)**

Another notable example of the disparity in the prominence given to Israeli and Palestinian perspectives in the BBC’s online coverage is in the reference to tunnels. Whereas the word ‘tunnel/s’ appeared only 4 times in the context of their role as a ‘lifeline’ supplying food and other essentials to the Gazan population, there were 15 times as many mentions of the same word (58) in the context of tunnels being used to smuggle arms, a core theme of the Israeli official narrative during OCL.

Overall, 23 articles mentioned tunnels as a means through which weapons were smuggled into Gaza, but only 3 articles of the total of 76 mentioned their role as a vital lifeline for the civilian population.

The June 2008 ceasefire received significantly greater mention in the BBC’s online coverage than in the TV bulletins, being mentioned in 21 articles (and a total of 40 separate mentions)

across the 22-day online coverage. The coverage mentioned both Palestinian and Israeli perspectives around who broke the ceasefire, as in the following passage:

Hamas blamed Israel for the end of the ceasefire, saying it had not respected its terms, including the lifting of the blockade under which little more than humanitarian aid has been allowed into Gaza. Israel said it initially began a staged easing of the blockade, but this was halted when Hamas failed to fulfil what Israel says were agreed conditions, including ending all rocket fire and halting weapons smuggling. **(BBC Online, Massive Israeli air raid on Gaza, 27 December 2008)**

8.3.7.3 Humanitarian Impact

Reporting of the humanitarian impact of the conflict accounted for a larger proportion of the BBC's online coverage than it did in the broadcast bulletins, with 26% and 17% of total lines, respectively.

A key part of the Palestinian narrative was that of the "humanitarian crisis" in Gaza, both in the lead-up to OCL and during the conflict itself. Overall, only 7 articles of the total 76 referred to the humanitarian crisis in the lead-up to OCL, while the humanitarian crisis during the conflict itself was mentioned in 10 articles. The term "humanitarian crisis" itself was mentioned a total of 23 times across the entire 22-day online coverage.

BBC online coverage of the humanitarian impact of the conflict was dominated by a "Palestinian impact-Israeli rationale" template, whereby reporting of Palestinian impact or casualties was generally presented alongside Israeli rationales or defences of action, as in the following passages:

As dawn broke on Monday, witnesses said a powerful explosion struck the interior ministry. Earlier, a raid destroyed a science building at the Islamic University in Gaza. Israel has claimed that facilities in the building have been used for weapons production. **(BBC Online, Israel strikes key Hamas offices, 29 December 2008)**

In another strike, at least one person was killed as large parts of the American International School in Beit Lahiya were destroyed. The Israeli military said the school had been used to launch rockets. **(BBC Online, Israel steps up offensive on Gaza, 3 January 2009)**

The UN has warned of a worsening humanitarian crisis, and believes 25% of more than 400 Palestinians killed by Israel so far were civilians. Israel says about 80% of those killed were Hamas militants. **(BBC Online, Israeli troops enter Gaza Strip, 4 January 2009)**

At least 40 people were killed and 55 injured when Israeli artillery shells landed outside a United Nations-run school in Gaza, UN officials have said... Israel said its soldiers had come under fire from militants inside the school. **(BBC Online, Strike at Gaza school 'kills 40', 7 January 2009)**

Palestinian medics said many of the casualties were suffering from burns and gas inhalations - symptoms they said indicate exposure to white phosphorus. But Israel's military categorically denied the claims, saying all weapons used by Israel were legal. **(BBC Online, Gaza hit by new Israeli strikes, 11 January 2009)**

The BBC's Christian Fraser, allowed over the Egypt-Gaza border for the first time, says conditions for Palestinian families seeking refuge from the Israeli bombardment of Rafah in a UN-run school are very difficult. There are hundreds of children there, he says, but food supplies are limited, electricity is available for only eight hours a day and there is no running water. Our correspondent says that from the damage he has been allowed to see in Rafah, homes and a playground were right next to one Israeli strike on what it said were Hamas militants. Israel has been bombing heavily along the border area, our correspondent says, with the aim of destroying tunnels running between Egypt and Gaza. **(BBC Online, Urgent drive for Gaza ceasefire, 16 January 2009)**

Coverage of the human impact was rarely accompanied by Palestinian rationales or defences of actions. When Palestinian perspectives were included they often were of a declamatory nature, as in the following example:

"We will not rest until we destroy the Zionist entity," senior Hamas figure Fathi Hammad said at the funeral for the 20 people who died in that attack. **(BBC Online, West Bank anger over Gaza raids, 2 January 2009)**

In contrast, coverage of the human impact on Israelis always included Israeli defences and rationales, and almost never included Palestinian defences of actions or used Palestinian declamatory statements:

Israel says it has been forced to act to stop the constant rocket and mortar shell from Gaza, aimed at Israeli towns just over the border. Palestinians describe Israel's actions as disproportionate. One Israeli civilian was killed by rocket fire on Saturday while medical sources in Gaza say they expect the death toll there to reach 250. Israel argues that, while most Gaza rockets are not deadly, they are designed to be. The quarter of a million Israelis who live close to the Gaza border say they live in fear, never far from a bomb shelter. Many are delighted their government is finally taking concerted action but they are scared, too, of Hamas reprisals. Hamas's military wing has vowed to open the gates of hell. The movement's exiled political leader, Khaled Meshaal, has called for a third and violent Palestinian uprising. **(BBC Online, Israel's mixed motives for strikes, 27 December 2008)**

Stunned residents spilled onto the street and twisted metal window frames dangled from the building, witnesses say. There were no reports of fatalities. Israel says its air campaign - part of a multilayered effort to stop rocket attacks - has been going to plan. **(BBC Online, West Bank anger over Gaza raid, 2 January 2009)**

Israel says its intentions are to suppress Palestinian militant rocket attacks, which have killed five Israelis since the start of the campaign. **(BBC Online, Envoys race to halt Gaza violence, 5 January 2009)**

When both Israeli and Palestinian impact and casualties were reported, Israeli rationales and defences of action were always included but not Palestinian ones:

Five Palestinians, including three children, have been killed in the latest Israeli air attacks on Gaza. More than 400 people are believed to have died in a week of raids on Gaza. Four Israelis have died in the rocket attacks Israel is trying to prevent. **(BBC Online, West Bank anger over Gaza raid, 2 January 2009)**

Overall, the BBC online's coverage of the humanitarian impact on Palestinians was often presented within an Israeli framing. It is worth highlighting here an article published on the second day of the conflict, titled 'Grief and fear in Gaza', which includes eyewitness accounts of civilians killed or injured by Israeli attacks. The introductory paragraph of the article reads:

BBC journalist and Gaza resident Hamada Abu Qammar describes the impact of the current wave of Israeli airstrikes against Hamas targets. **(BBC Online, Grief and fear in Gaza, 28 December 2008)**

In other words, even in an article describing Palestinian testimonies of the impact of Israel's attacks on civilians, the overall BBC framing presented to readers still largely echoes a key official Israeli perspective, namely that "this is an attack on Hamas targets", while the Palestinian counter-perspective — that "this is an attack on the Gazan population" — is absent.

8.3.7.4 Legality and International Law

Another notable result of the analysis is that the BBC's online reporting dedicated double the proportion of coverage to international law and legality than that it received in the broadcast coverage (3.9% and 2% respectively). The BBC's online coverage included explicit examinations of international law and legality in the context of conflict. One of the articles was a piece published on 5 January 2009, titled 'Gaza Conflict: Who is a civilian?', which includes the following passage:

As the death toll mounts in Gaza, the thorny question is arising of who and what can be considered a legitimate military target in a territory effectively governed by a group that many in the international community consider a terrorist organisation. This is also the group that won the Palestinian legislative elections in January 2006 and a year later consolidated its control by force. **(BBC Online, Gaza conflict: Who is a civilian? 5 January 2009)**

Terms such as “surgical” or “pinpoint” (strikes), which were regularly used in Israeli official messaging during OCL, did not feature heavily in the BBC’s online coverage, with only 6 total mentions across the 76 articles. However, of the nine instances in which the term “human shields” — another core Israeli theme — appeared in the online coverage, the vast majority (77%) were in reference to Israeli accusations against Hamas, while two referred to UN or NGO accusations against both Hamas and Israel.

Furthermore, the BBC online reporting of accusations concerning the humanitarian/legal aspects of Israeli military actions was always accompanied by Israeli rationales or defences of action, as in the following passages:

Norwegian doctor Mads Gilbert, one of two foreign doctors working at Gaza's biggest hospital, al-Shifa, said they had received a "new wave" of very serious injuries on Monday... "People are dying now because of lack of supplies... This is a complete disaster". Israel has insisted that it is not targeting civilians and accuses Hamas of using civilians as human shields by operating in populated areas. **(BBC Online, Casualties rise in Gaza Offensive, 6 January 2009)**

Katarina Ritz, the ICRC's head of mission in Jerusalem, said experienced Palestinian emergency workers wept at the scenes they were confronted with. She said Israeli troops were within about 100m of the houses in question, and that the ICRC believes the soldiers "must have been aware" of the presence of the wounded people, because of repeated requests from aid agencies for access. Under international law, she said, even if there are security concerns meaning the injured cannot be evacuated, "the minimum is to treat these people, to feed these people, give them water, and keep them in a safe place". The Israeli military said it was investigating the case. It said it is "engaged in a battle with the Hamas terrorist organisation that has deliberately used Palestinian civilians as human shields". And it stressed it works in "close co-operation with international aid organisations during the fighting, so that civilians can be provided with assistance". **(BBC Online, Gaza survivors' four days without water, 9 January 2009)**

Medics in Gaza say latest casualties include at least 60 people affected by suspected phosphorus shells fired illegally near civilian areas. An Israeli army spokeswoman strongly denied the report, saying all its munitions complied with the law. An Israeli spokesman also denied Human Rights Watch allegations of multiple use of white phosphorus in the bombing. **(BBC Online, Israel denies banned weapons use, 11 January 2009)**

Last week the ICRC accused Israel of failing to fulfill its duty to help wounded civilians in Gaza, and said it was a "full-blown humanitarian crisis". Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said the military operation would continue in order to stop Hamas rockets being fired into Israel and to prevent arms smuggling into Gaza. **(BBC Online, Israelis strike 60 Gaza targets, 13 January 2009)** The UN's relief agency, Unrwa, says part of its HQ in Gaza caught fire after being hit by Israeli shells. UN chief Ban Ki-moon expressed outrage. Israeli PM Ehud Olmert apologised but said troops returned fire after coming under attack from the UN's compound. **(BBC Online, Gaza pounded amid push for truce, 15 January 2009)**

The head of the UN aid agency in Gaza has accused the Israeli military of firing what was believed to be white phosphorus shells at its compound. John Ging told the BBC that in spite of discussions with the Israeli liaison, "three rounds that emitted phosphorus" hit a corner of the Gaza City facility. Israel's military said all weapons it used complied with international law. **(BBC Online, UN accuses Israel over phosphorus, 15 January 2009)**

Overall, “international law” or “legality” were mentioned in a tenth of total BBC online articles (8 of the total 76) during the 22-day coverage.

8.3.7.5 World Reaction and protests

Reporting of world reactions and protests accounted for a higher but comparable proportion of the BBC’s online coverage (22.3%) relative to that in its broadcast coverage (17%), and was the top thematic area in the BBC’s online coverage.

As with the TV coverage, reports of protests highlighted the public disorder dimension:

Richard Kuper, from Jews For Justice for Palestine, joined the protest for a third day. "I'm outraged by what is going on in Gaza and I think it is important Jewish voices speak out against bombing," he said. "I think it was the scale of the bombardment which is greatly disproportionate that has angered people." There were 10 arrests for public order offences at a protest at the embassy on Sunday and another seven on Monday. **(BBC Online, Gaza rockets hit deep into Israel, 31 December 2008)**

However, the online coverage included the protesters’ grievances and demands to a greater extent than in the TV bulletins, and often noted the relatively small scale of public disorder incidents, as in the following passages:

Thousands of demonstrators have marched through London to call for an immediate ceasefire in the conflict in Gaza. The protest started peacefully but there were confrontations as police tried to move demonstrators away from the gates of the Israeli embassy. The window of a Starbucks was smashed and three police officers were injured as a minority of people threw missiles. **(BBC Online, UK protesters call for Gaza peace, 10 January 2009)**

BBC correspondent Robert Hall said given the number of people involved, the protest had been peaceful. "But as darkness fell a small number of people, several hundred, have begun confronting police and missiles have been thrown," he said. "Although these are ugly and unwelcome scenes, they do not represent what has happened for most of the afternoon."

(BBC Online, UK protesters call for Gaza peace, 10 January 2009)

As with the TV bulletins, the BBC's online coverage of world reactions highlighted international diplomatic efforts and statements. The role of the US as Israel's principal backer, and the implications of this for the conflict, were frequently noted:

The US, Israel's strongest ally on the council, said the onus was on Hamas to stop rocket fire first and commit itself to a truce. **(BBC Online, Israel strikes key Hamas offices, 29 December 2008)**

But for now Israel is still executing its plan. It is trying to control events. And it is getting protection from the Bush administration, still riding diplomatic shotgun in its final month, saying that a ceasefire is desirable, but only when Hamas stops firing. **(BBC Online, Battle plans in Gaza conflict, 30 December 2008)**

The BBC's online coverage featured several examples of a "war on terror" framing in which the Gaza conflict was presented as having a particular significance in the context of a wider global conflict between the forces of radical Islam and the west:

In wars like this the weak side knows it has no chance of defeating the strong one in a stand-up, knock-down fight. So, it uses what it can to magnify the power that it has, and to concentrate it on what it perceives to be a soft spot. The most extreme example of that is the devastating blow delivered by the small group of hijackers who flew airliners into the World Trade Center in New York on 11 September, 2001. Hamas will want to hit Israel as hard as possible, and has threatened to use suicide bombers as well as rockets. **(BBC Online, Battle plans in Gaza conflict, 30 December 2008)**

A newly-released audiotape said to feature the voice of al-Qaeda leader Osama bin Laden has called for a holy war to stop the Israeli offensive in Gaza. **(BBC Online, Israel pursues its Gaza offensive, 14 January 2009)**

President Bashar al-Assad of Syria has called for an end to Israel's military operation in Gaza, warning that the campaign would fuel extremism and terrorism in the Arab and Muslim world. **(BBC Online, Israel pursues its Gaza offensive, 14 January 2009)**

It is worth highlighting that the BBC online coverage included an analysis piece dedicated specifically to examining the Iranian and Hezbollah dimension of the Gaza War 2008-9, which presented the conflict in Gaza as part of a wider regional battle, in terms that strongly echoed the Israeli official framing, as shown in the following extracts:

Israel already sees its battle with Hamas as a proxy battle against Iran. The question now is whether the confrontation between Israel and Iran moves centre stage, to become an all-out battle for supremacy in the Middle East. **(BBC Online, Iran takes advantage of Gaza crisis, 8 January 2009)**

Iran is one of the strongest supporters of Hamas. It is regularly accused by Israel of providing the group with arms, training, and money, something Tehran never admits to, but makes little effort to deny. But until now there has been little evidence of pressure from Tehran on its Lebanese allies, Hezbollah, to break the ceasefire on Israel's northern border. So there is intense interest in whether the rockets fired from southern Lebanon early on Thursday came from Hezbollah. If Hezbollah was responsible, the finger will quickly be pointed back to Tehran. There is certainly a logic to Iran stepping up the pressure on Israel now. The Iranian government does not want to see any deal in Gaza that restricts Iran's ability to send weapons and money to Hamas. That would undermine a key plank of its regional strategy. There are already plenty of signs that Iran is working with its allies to prevent a ceasefire on such terms. **(BBC Online, Iran takes advantage of Gaza crisis, 8 January 2009)**

Overall, Iran and the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah received a combined total of 32 mentions across 5 articles.

8.3.7.5 Military, Operational, Ceasefire updates

Military and operational updates accounted for a significant proportion of the BBC's online coverage, albeit a smaller one than that seen in the broadcast bulletins (21.5% and 28%, respectively). Explicit references to Israeli goals and objectives appeared in 18 articles out of the total 76, with terms like 'goal', 'aim', 'end game' and 'objective' appearing 27 times.

Overall, the coverage of operational developments often centred or uncritically adopted the viewpoint of Israeli officials:

Israeli generals always assume that they have a limited time to achieve their goals. They will have expected the critical statements that were issued by the UN Secretary General and others within hours of the first raids **(BBC Online, Israelis look for knockout blow, 28 December 2008)**

A ground offensive would be very risky. There would be high casualties on both sides. But Israel appears determined to continue - until its war aims are achieved. **(BBC Online, Taking cover on Sderot front line, 30 December 2008)**

BBC Middle East Editor Jeremy Bowen says that because a week of aerial bombardment has not been able to stop militant rocket attacks, the Israeli military now has to decide whether to send in its ground troops. **(BBC Online, Israel steps up offensive on Gaza, 3 January 2009)**

Israel's main objective in Operation Cast Lead is to end Gaza militants' ability to fire rockets at Israel and stop them smuggling through tunnels from Egypt. **(BBC Online, Gaza strikes ahead of truce vote, 17 January 2009)**

References to the prospects of a ceasefire, including reporting of conditions by both sides, received significant coverage in the BBC's online reporting, with the topic being mentioned in 60 articles (out of 76) and receiving a total of 206 mentions, making this one of the most dominant thematic areas of the online coverage.

8.4 Conclusion

This chapter presented the findings of the content analysis of AJE and BBC coverage of OCL. The findings broadly fall into three main categories – sourcing, thematic and textual/framing — and reveal significant differences in the way the BBC and AJE approached and conducted their coverage of OCL/Gaza War of 2008/9.

8.4.1 Sourcing findings

The sourcing analysis shows that whereas Israeli and Palestinian sources received a similar number of appearances and lines in AJE's coverage, BBC coverage featured almost three times as many appearances (and lines of coverage) by Israeli sources as Palestinian ones. BBC coverage was significantly more reliant on internal sources over outside sources than AJE was, and also featured significantly more governmental sources than non-governmental ones, whereas these received an equal amount of coverage on AJE. Textual analysis reveals important differences in how the BBC and AJE presented the credibility of different categories of sources. BBC coverage regularly featured language that presented Israeli sources as being more authoritative or trustworthy than Palestinian ones, whereas AJE generally used critical distancing language that presented Israeli and Palestinian sources as equally authoritative. AJE journalists regularly challenged Israeli claims across thematic areas of coverage, but this was generally done explicitly rather than through implied use of language.

8.4.2 Thematic and textual findings

The results of the thematic analysis show that reporting of military and ceasefire updates was the most represented thematic area of coverage on both the BBC and AJE. Historical and political context received significantly more coverage on AJE (17%) than on the BBC (9%). Reporting of Palestinian casualties and suffering received nine and fifteen times the number of lines as Israeli ones in the BBC and AJE's coverage, respectively. Legality and international law received double the proportion of coverage on AJE (4%) than the BBC (2%).

Reporting I/P rationales and defences of action

BBC coverage devoted three times as many lines (266.5) to Israeli rationales and defences of action than to Palestinian ones (76.75). On AJE, Israeli and Palestinian rationales and defences of action were equally represented, with 9% (435.5 lines) and 10% (503.5 lines) of the coverage, respectively. The thematic analysis shows Israeli rationales were seven times more likely to be presented on their own than Palestinian ones in the BBC's coverage, whereas AJE presented both perspectives on their own in 25% of the cases.

Historical and Political Contextualisation

BBC reporting of immediate context rarely mentioned the 2008 Ceasefire and was largely focused on the threats posed by rockets and tunnels, which were often presented within a framing of Israeli rationales for action. BBC reports did not devote significant coverage to the Israeli blockade or the pre-OCL humanitarian crisis in Gaza as a significant element of the causes of conflict, even though they were at the centre of the Palestinian perspective regarding the causes of OCL. Overall, the thematic analysis shows serious gaps in reporting crucial historical background in the BBC's coverage of OCL, not only in quantitative terms but also in the choices of terminology and explanatory context. In contrast, AJE's coverage, whilst regularly reporting on the Israeli themes of the threat of tunnels and rockets, emphasised the role of tunnels as lifelines and Israel's breach of the June 2008 Ceasefire. Most crucially, AJE reporting presented the Israeli blockade of Gaza and the ensuing humanitarian crisis as *the* principal element of context when it came to understanding the causes of the conflict.

Humanitarian impact:

The thematic and textual analysis shows BBC reporting of the humanitarian impact of OCL on Palestinians was often framed within, or accompanied by, Israeli rationales and/or defences of action. Reports of Palestinian casualties were regularly followed by Israeli explanatory themes defending or explaining Israel's actions. In contrast, AJE's coverage generally presented the Palestinian impact from the perspectives of those at the receiving end of it — Palestinian civilians and humanitarian staff in Gaza. While AJE's reporting of the impact on Palestinians regularly included Israeli defences of action, these were generally presented within a sceptical framing that underlined contradictions between Israeli claims and the humanitarian reality on the ground as witnessed by AJE's own reporters.

BBC journalists frequently endorsed Israeli officials' claims about, and characterisations of, the human impact of military actions, such as the claim that "the IDF is only targeting military targets". BBC reporting repeatedly adopted, at times implicitly, several key Israeli rationales, such as that Hamas is to blame for civilian casualties and that all Hamas-linked people and buildings are legitimate military targets. AJE was much more sceptical of Israeli claims regarding avoiding civilian casualties, and made extensive use of its on-the-ground reporting to contextualise and scrutinise them. AJE reporters often explicitly articulated the view that official Israeli claims about 'surgical strikes' were part of a public relations effort targeted at international audiences, and also that these were directly contradicted or undermined by on-

the-ground reporting of the civilian toll of its military actions. Whilst both BBC and AJE reported on the humanitarian crisis, BBC reports framed it as a recent development almost exclusively caused by the conflict itself. In contrast, AJE extensively reported the role of the 18-month siege, both in terms of how it aggravated the impact of the military hostilities on the civilian population, and was itself made worse by the conflict.

Overall, the BBC's coverage of the human impact on Israelis often echoed the Israeli framing of presenting Hamas rockets as a significant threat that required, explained or justified Israeli military action. AJE's coverage also presented Israeli rationales and defences of action when discussing rockets, but generally always highlighted Gaza as the key site of the conflict and its human impact.

Legality/International Law:

The thematic analysis shows that international law accounted for 2% of the BBC's coverage and 4% of AJE's. BBC coverage rarely featured legality as a dimension of analysis, and the term 'international law' appeared only twice in the 22 bulletins under examination and never by a BBC newscaster or correspondent. The use of White Phosphorus was reported extensively on AJE but rarely mentioned on the BBC. In the reporting of specific incidents with clear legal implications, such as attacks on UN buildings, BBC reporting often echoed Israeli framings, for instance by providing Israeli rationales and defences of action and not offering Palestinian counterinterviews. The only explicit reference to war crime accusations in the BBC's bulletins was in relation to Hamas actions.

Although AJE's reporting focused in great part on the legal implications of Israeli actions, AJE journalists often questioned both Israel's and Hamas's claims in this regard. AJE was much more likely to present statements by UN and international organisations as especially authoritative on matters of legal and moral responsibility, whereas the BBC was much more likely to present them neutrally, as views that are equally open to dispute as claims by Israeli officials.

World Reaction and Protests:

The crucial role of international pressure and mediation efforts to a resolution of the conflict was highlighted in both AJE and BBC reporting. Israel's initial rejection of a ceasefire was also reported by both the BBC and AJE. Both BBC and AJE coverage reported on the significance of the US role during OCL as well as in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more generally, though

AJE's reporting was more explicitly critical and the only one to examine the underlying context for such support.

The thematic and textual analysis findings show notable differences between how the BBC and AJE covered protests against OCL. The BBC's protest reporting generally did not devote significant coverage to protesters' grievances and demands and instead highlighted the violence and public disorder aspects of the protests. When covering protests in the Arab world, BBC reporting emphasised themes such as "Arab rage" and "the rise in extremism", which echoed Israeli framings. In contrast, AJE's reporting was largely focused on protesters' grievances and demands, as well as on their criticisms of Arab and international leaders' political and diplomatic failings.

The thematic analysis also uncovered significant differences in how AJE and BBC reported the conflict's global significance and implications. AJE generally framed the Gaza War as a national resistance struggle pitting an occupied population against a military occupier, thus echoing the Palestinian perspective. The BBC's coverage, in contrast, generally adopted a "War on terror" framing, portraying the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and OCL, as part of a wider ideological and military confrontation pitting the West against its enemies. In doing so, the BBC coverage echoed several elements of the Israeli narrative but also long-standing themes that became especially dominant in Western discourse and representations of the region in the post 09/11 era.

Operational and Military Updates:

Military, operational and ceasefire updates were the largest thematic area on both the BBC and AJE. BBC coverage placed strong emphasis on the operational aspects of the conflict, such as Israel's goals, aims, objectives, and the parameters for its success or failure, and often adopted the Israeli framing of presenting OCL as a "job" or "task" that needed doing. BBC reporters thus regularly presented military developments in terms of their implications for Israeli aims and objectives.

AJE largely adopted a humanitarian framing in its reporting, which viewed and presented the conflict primarily as a humanitarian crisis, where the key questions underpinning the reporting related to the impact of military actions on the civilian population, the moral and legal justification for military actions, and the prospects for, and obstacles to, ceasefire or peace between Israel and Hamas.

The key findings of the content analysis for each thematic area are presented in Table 8.31 below:

	BBC	AJE
Themes/Areas		
Sourcing Analysis		
Balance of I/P voices	BBC dedicated three times as much coverage to Israeli sources (58.8 lines) than Palestinian ones (21.75 lines)	AJE dedicated a similar amount of coverage to Israeli (228.8 lines) and Palestinian (220 lines) sources.
Governmental/Non-Governmental Sources	BBC coverage was much more reliant on governmental (63%) than non-governmental ones (37%).	Governmental and non-governmental sources received equal coverage (654.75 and 642.75 lines, respectively).
Internal/External Sources	BBC was heavily reliant on its reporters, who accounted for two thirds (66%) of its coverage.	AJE reporters accounted for 53% of total coverage.
How I/P voices were represented	BBC bulletins often used language that suggested Israeli voices & statements had more credibility than Palestinian ones. This was also the case in the BBC's	AJE used similar formulations to present Israeli and Palestinian voices. But was especially sceptical of Israeli official voices and broadly deferential or non-sceptical

	online reports, albeit to a smaller extent.	when presenting the views of Israeli and Palestinian civilians and UN/NGO sources.
Thematic Analysis		
Top thematic areas of coverage	After Military and Ceasefire updates (28%), the largest area of coverage was Israeli perspectives (21%), followed by World reactions (15%).	After Military and Ceasefire updates (25%), the largest area of coverage was Palestinian casualties (20%) and historical and political context (17%).
Israeli and Palestinian Rationales and Defences of action		
	BBC dedicated more than 3 times as many lines to Israeli rationales (266.5, 21%) than to Palestinian ones (76.75, 6%).	AJE dedicated a similar proportion of its coverage to Israeli perspectives (9%) as to Palestinian (10%) ones.
	Almost a third of Palestinian perspectives (28%) were in the form of declamatory statements, whereas these accounted for less than 5% of Israeli ones.	Palestinian declamatory statements represented 10% of AJE's coverage of Palestinian perspectives.
	Palestinian declamatory statements were often	Palestinian declamatory statements were generally

	presented without rationales, whereas Israeli declamatory statements were presented alongside Israeli rationales or defences of action.	presented alongside Palestinian rationales rather than instead of them.
	Israeli perspectives were 9 times more likely to be presented on their own than Palestinian ones. Palestinian perspectives were often absent even in reporting of a contested theme such as “Israel uses surgical strikes” or “there is no humanitarian crisis”.	Israeli and Palestinian explanatory themes were equally likely to be presented on their own.
Historical and Political Context		
Historical Background	Key elements of historical context such as the Israeli occupation or the refugee question were either missing or referenced without any detail or adequate explanation. This was the case for both TV and online reporting.	Key historical reference points were regularly provided, especially the refugee question and its resonance for Gaza residents.

<p>2008 Ceasefire</p>	<p>The June ceasefire 2008 was rarely mentioned and never in any detail in the TV coverage, but received significantly more mentions in the BBC's online reporting.</p>	<p>The 2008 ceasefire and the reasons for its collapse were regularly featured.</p>
<p>Tunnels and rockets</p>	<p>Significant proportion of the BBC's reporting of the immediate causes of OCL was dedicated to presenting the threat of rockets and tunnels, usually within Israeli rationales for action.</p> <p>This was also the case in the BBC's online reports, with rockets being mentioned in more than 90% of all articles. Mentions of tunnels as sources of smuggling weapons outstripped mentions of their role as a lifeline for the civilian population by a ratio of 15 to 1.</p>	<p>The threat of rockets and tunnels was presented, as well as Israeli rationales, but the role of tunnels as lifelines was especially highlighted.</p>
<p>The Israeli blockade and humanitarian crisis</p>	<p>BBC coverage rarely referenced the 18-month blockade as a cause of OCL, and there were no direction mentions that the</p>	<p>The 18-month siege was extensively referenced and presented as a core element of context, especially in terms of explaining the</p>

	<p>humanitarian crisis in Gaza preceded the start of OCL.</p> <p>The blockade received greater coverage in the BBC's online reporting, but this often missed key elements of context and detail.</p>	<p>humanitarian crisis in Gaza and its aggravating effect during OCL.</p>
US support for Israel	<p>BBC reported the importance of US support for, and influence on, Israel but only in general terms, and without exploring the reasons underlying this support.</p>	<p>AJE coverage featured extensive reporting on all facets of US support for Israel (military, financial, political) and also explored the reasons behind it.</p>
Humanitarian Impact		
Palestinian casualties	<p>Reporting of Palestinian casualties was often framed by Israeli defences of action such as the proximity of military and civilian targets.</p>	<p>The high casualty toll was often presented as contradicting Israeli claims and defences of action.</p>
	<p>Israeli terminology such as "surgical strike" and " Hamas targets" was uncritically used regularly.</p>	<p>Israeli claims and terminology were always presented as such, and their public relations aspect was highlighted.</p>

	The impact on Israelis was often presented using dramatic imagery and language.	The impact on Israelis was generally contextualised within the disparity in casualties between the two sides.
UN/NGO credibility	The BBC often implicitly echoed the Israeli position of presenting statements by the UN and humanitarian or human rights organisations as partisan views that are open to dispute.	AJE gave great significance and prominence to statements, assessments and demands made by the UN and humanitarian NGOs.
Rationalisation vs Contextualisation	The “densely populated” nature of Gaza was presented in a rationalisation framing to “explain” high casualty toll.	The “densely populated” nature of Gaza was presented as evidence that undermined Israeli defences of action.
Humanitarian Crisis	The humanitarian crisis during OCL was presented as a recent development largely caused by the OCL conflict itself.	The humanitarian crisis was presented as a long-running issue caused by the blockade and which both aggravated the impact of OCL and was made worse by it.
Legality and International Law		

<p>Legality as thematic area</p>	<p>BBC bulletins did not dedicate significant coverage to legality/international law (2% of total coverage).</p> <p>The theme of legality was referenced in 8 out of 76 articles of the BBC's online reporting.</p>	<p>Legality was a minor but non-negligible area of coverage with 4% of total coverage.</p>
<p>Conveying the importance of legality</p>	<p>There was little indication to viewers that legality and international law were important dimensions for understanding the conflict and evaluating the stances and claims of the protagonists.</p>	<p>The importance of legality as a key consideration was highlighted in the coverage, often explicitly.</p>
	<p>Mentions of legality and international law mostly appeared in reporting of claims made by external sources, such as the UN and NGOs.</p>	<p>Legality featured both in AJE's own analyses as well as when reporting statements by outside sources.</p>
	<p>When legality explicitly appeared in BBC's own analyses it was in reference to Israeli claims against Hamas. The reporting often echoed Israel's position of</p>	<p>AJE's framing of legality often highlighted Palestinian themes and priorities. Israeli rationales and defences were often presented critically.</p>

	<p>presenting accusations by the UN and international organisations as a matter of dispute or controversy.</p> <p>Two BBC online articles had an explicit focus on the legality of Israeli actions.</p>	<p>Statements by the UN and international organisations were presented as authoritative, including when they contradicted or undermined Israeli claims.</p>
World Reaction & OCL's Global Context		
Protests	<p>The “public disorder” perspective, presenting violence or disruption at the protests as the main framing, accounting for 74% of all protest coverage. Protester demands were rarely reported, accounting for 26% of the coverage.</p> <p>The BBC's online coverage gave greater prominence of protesters' demands.</p>	<p>AJE reported the “public disorder” aspect of protests but never adopted it as the main dimension of the reporting. Protesters' demands and grievances was the main focus of the coverage, accounting for 78% of AJE protest coverage.</p>
Diplomatic efforts	<p>BBC bulletins reported the slow nature of the diplomatic process, but often presented Israeli rejection of a ceasefire within Israeli rationales.</p>	<p>AJE reporting was explicitly critical of the slow pace of diplomatic efforts, highlighting the human cost of delays to a ceasefire.</p>

US Role	The US's rejection of calls for a ceasefire was presented alongside Israeli rationales.	The US's role in opposing the ceasefire was reported in critical terms.
"War on Terror" vs "National resistance/Liberation"	BBC presented OCL's Global significance through a "War on Terror" narrative, as part of a confrontation between the West and Radical Islam.	AJE presented OCL as a national resistance and liberation conflict, but generally placed its global significance in terms of Western aggression against and domination of the Middle East.
Reactions in the Arab and Muslim world	<p>The BBC often presented the protests in the Arab/Muslim world using tropes such as "Arab rage."</p> <p>The BBC adopted "the risk of radicalisation" theme which was presented within a 'War on Terror' framing.</p>	AJE placed great focus on Arab reactions, both official and popular. Its coverage of protests highlighted public criticism of Arab leaders for their political and diplomatic failures to stop violence against Palestinians.
'Israeli surrounded by enemies'	BBC adopted Israeli framings of Israel as a Western democratic outpost in a hostile region, as being surrounded by existential enemies such as Iran and Hezbollah.	AJE did not adopt the Israeli theme of Iran and Hezbollah as key parts of the OCL context and gave it little, and broadly sceptical, coverage.

Framing of Palestinian violence	The anger expressed by Palestinians, and echoed by protesters in Arab and Muslims countries, was presented as being irrational or lacking any cogent or coherent motive.	AJE presented Palestinian violence as based in specific grievances and rooted in historical and political issues, such as the occupation, the refugee question and the blockade.
Operational/Military Updates		
Thematic breakdown	Military and ceasefire updates was the largest (28%) thematic area in the BBC's TV coverage.	Military and Ceasefire updates was the largest (25%) thematic area in AJE's coverage.
Ceasefire prospects	Coverage of ceasefire prospects was often presented using an Israeli framing, highlighting implications of a ceasefire for Israeli strategic aims and objectives.	Coverage of ceasefire prospects generally highlighted the humanitarian implications of delays to it.
Ceasefire demands and conditions	BBC coverage regularly presented Israeli conditions for a ceasefire, usually within Israeli rationales, but only occasionally reported Palestinian demands and conditions.	AJE regularly reported Israeli and Palestinian conditions for a ceasefire and often presented them together.

“Getting the job done”	Israeli framings of OCL as a “job” to be finished in a race against the “clock,” was often adopted and reproduced uncritically in the BBC’s coverage.	AJE often presented or echoed the Palestinian perspective viewing OCL as a crisis against which the population was powerless and could only seek t.
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Table 8. 31 Content Analysis key findings

8.4.3 Four Dominant framings:

Examining the thematic, textual and sourcing analysis findings shows that the BBC and AJE adopted fundamentally different framings in their coverage of OCL. The BBC adopted what might be termed an **‘Operational’ framing** of OCL when reporting the conflict’s military, operational and humanitarian aspects, and a **‘War on Terror’ framing** when reporting on OCL’s geopolitical dimension. For its part, AJE adopted what might be called a ‘Humanitarian Crisis’ or a **‘War on Gaza’ framing** of OCL’s military and humanitarian dimensions, and a **‘National Resistance/Liberation’** framing in its reporting of the conflict’s geopolitical significance.

The BBC’s ‘operational’ framing presented OCL as a mission in which a state’s political and military leadership pursued a set of political and strategic goals within a context of limited time and international pressure. The content analysis findings show that this “getting the job done” perspective fundamentally shaped the BBC’s coverage of OCL. This can be seen, for instance, in how much of the BBC’s reporting was presented through the lens of Israel’s military and political objectives and goals, or the geopolitical implications for Israel and its allies. Throughout the coverage, BBC reporters often framed military or political developments in terms of their implications for Israel meeting its own stated or implicit strategic and political objectives. Even humanitarian matters such as the impact on civilians and the prospects for a ceasefire were occasionally presented explicitly in terms of how they impacted Israel’s ability to achieve its aims and objectives. In terms of OCL’s global and geopolitical implications, the BBC reporting adopted a ‘War on Terror’ framing that presented the conflict as part of a wider confrontation pitting a democratic West against radical Islamic extremism. This can be seen in the BBC coverage’s regular adoption of themes such as “Arab rage”, “Israel is surrounded by enemies” and the “rise of extremism”, which closely echo several official Israeli rationales.

In contrast, AJE’s “humanitarian crisis” or “War on Gaza” framing presented OCL as a crisis that is primarily humanitarian in nature, and reported developments in those terms. Military and political developments were thus largely presented and discussed from the standpoint of their implications for the Gazan population. Discussion of Israeli military aims and objectives were also generally framed in terms of their human cost and implications. In the geopolitical context, AJE coverage presented OCL as a national resistance struggle pitting the Palestinian people against military occupation by a powerful Western ally, a struggle that is rooted in specific historical and political grievances. It also highlighted themes of Arab and international failure, complicity or responsibility for the plight of Palestinians during OCL and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more generally.

The main features of the two framings are presented in Table 8.32 below:

BBC	AJE
‘Operational’ Framing	‘War on Gaza’ Framing
This contextualised humanitarian and ceasefire updates in terms of their operational implications for Israeli aims and objectives.	This contextualised military and operational updates in terms of their human and humanitarian implications.
Presented the political and military dimension, usually from the Israeli perspective, as the most significant aspect for understanding new developments.	Presented the humanitarian dimension and cost as the most significant element of the conflict and of the reporting.
Presented military operations as a “job to get done”, a “mission” for Israel, usually in the context of time pressure and “the clock running out.”	Presented military operations in terms of the mounting human cost for a besieged population waiting for a ceasefire.

Regularly presented the prospect of a ceasefire in terms of its implications for Israel's ability to achieve its goals in time.	Presenting the prospect of a ceasefire in terms of how urgently it is demanded and needed by the population.
'War on Terror' Framing	'National Resistance' Framing
Presents OCL as part of a wider confrontation pitting western democracies against radical Islamic extremism.	OCL is part of a resistance struggle pitting non-Western nations against Western domination and aggression.
Presents the risk of Islamic radicalisation as a major implication of OCL and a threat against the West.	Presents regional politics as a secondary and non-essential dimension for understanding OCL, and vice versa.
Presents Palestinian, and by extension Arab/Muslim, violence as mainly ideological in nature, rooted in prejudice and irrational hatred.	Presents Palestinian violence as resistance and motivated by specific political, economic and humanitarian grievances, including the occupation, the refugee question and the Israeli blockade.
	Highlights Arab and international failure, responsibility and complicity for the plight of Palestinians during OCL and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict more generally.

Table 8. 32 The four dominant framings of AJE and BBC coverage

In the next chapter, the key production factors underpinning AJE and BBC's OCL coverage are investigated through interviews with BBC and AJE journalists and media academics. Chapter Ten presents a discussion of how the two categories of findings (content analysis and production factors) inform and relate to each other and to the wider literature in the context of the present research's aim and questions.

CHAPTER NINE: Interview Findings: News Production Factors

9.1 Introduction

The content analysis findings presented in the previous chapter highlighted several important quantitative and qualitative differences and imbalances in AJE and BBC's respective coverage of the Gaza War of 2008-9/Operation Cast Lead — including differences in sourcing, thematic emphasis and framing. As discussed in Chapter Four, an essential dimension of understanding and analysing media output is the factors shaping the news selection and production processes. The present chapter is thus underpinned by the assumption that investigating the logistical, operational, cultural, ideological and political production factors shaping the coverage can help reveal important insights regarding the content analysis findings of this research.

In this chapter, the news production factors shaping AJE and BBC coverage of OCL are investigated primarily through fieldwork interviews with eleven media scholars and practitioners, including former and current AJE and BBC staff and journalists with direct involvement in coverage of the Gaza War of 2008/9.⁵⁶ The chapter begins with an overview of the interview findings, presenting the key production factors revealed by the interviewees' responses. The rest of the chapter is devoted to discussing each factor in turn in further detail. It must be noted at the outset that the focus of this chapter is primarily to present the main findings of the interviews. The next chapter (Chapter Ten) critically engages with the findings of this chapter, as well as those of the previous one, in the context of the existing scholarship and theoretical debates, including the relationship between the interview findings and those of the content analysis.

9.2 Interview findings: An overview

The interviews conducted by the researcher highlight a number of factors that have shaped the news selection, production and structuring aspects of BBC and AJE coverage of the Gaza War 2008-9/OCL. These include logistical, technical, organisational, cultural, political and ideological factors, as presented in Table 9.1 below. Most of these factors were explicitly articulated by the interviewees, while others — notably those relating to professional or institutional self-conceptions — were identified by the researcher based on the interview transcripts.

⁵⁶ The titles and positions used to present interviewees are those they held when the interview took place.

News production and selection factors in AJE/BBC coverage of OCL	
Category	Factors
Logistical/Technical factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Public Relations: The superiority of Israel's Public Relations effort and weakness of Palestinian PR. • Media Access: Israel's media ban on international journalists entering Gaza, and AJE's extensive presence in the Gaza Strip during the conflict. • TV format constraints: The time constraints and other limitations imposed by the TV news format. • Expertise constraints: Limitations imposed by lack of linguistic and other types of expertise, including, disparity in access to English vs Arab-speaking sources and resources.
Political factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Political Pressure and Lobbying: The superiority of Israel's Political Lobbying and weakness of Palestinian lobbying. • Host Government's Political Outlook: The impact of Qatar/UK foreign policy on AJE/BBC editorial approach, respectively.

Cultural, Institutional, Ideological Factors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Journalistic assumptions and self-conceptions: AJE/BBC journalists' conceptions of their professional role and values. • Institutional self-conceptions: How BBC/AJE journalists conceive of their respective institutions' status and mission. • Western vs Global South outlooks: The impact of Western vs Global South ideological assumptions and outlooks on BBC and AJE editorial approach.
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Table 9. 1 Main news production factors of BBC/AJE coverage of OCL

Based on the table above, the researcher has identified five main production factors:

- 1) **PR and Lobbying:** The superiority of Israeli Public Relations and Political Lobbying.
- 2) **Access to Gaza:** The impact of Israel's media ban and Al-Jazeera's extensive Gaza presence.
- 3) **Journalistic Assumptions and Self-Conceptions:** The professional and institutional assumptions and self-conceptions of BBC/AJE journalists with regard to journalistic values, norms and mission.
- 4) **Political and ideological context:** The political and ideological context of the BBC and AJE's Britain-Western and Qatar-Global South identities and outlooks.
- 5) **Logistical/Technical constraints:** Logistical constraints of TV news format.

Each of these factors is discussed in turn in further detail in the following sections.

9.2.1 Production Factor 1: The superiority of Israel's Public Relations and Lobbying

The Israeli Public Relations effort during OCL

One of the main factors highlighted by the interviewees to explain the dominance of Israeli sources, perspectives and framings in Western news coverage of OCL, notably in the BBC's

reporting, is the effectiveness of Israel's public relations effort during the conflict and the corresponding weakness of Palestinian PR. To better contextualise the interview responses, it is perhaps important here to provide an overview of the status of Israeli and Palestinian public relations efforts in the lead-up to and during the Gaza War of 2008/9.

Throughout OCL, Israel's public relations efforts were principally coordinated by the Israeli National Information Directorate (INID), a body that came into existence in early 2008 to coordinate and manage Israeli 'Hasbara' ('Propaganda' in Hebrew) efforts. Articulating the official rationale for its creation, Yarden Vatikai, the chief of the INID, stated:

The hasbara apparatus needed a body that would co-ordinate its agencies, coordinate the messages and become a platform for co-operation between all the agencies that deal with communication relations and public diplomacy. (Vatikai cited in Shabi, in the *Guardian*, 2 January 2009)

Guardian columnist Jonathan Freedland, discussing INID's impact on UK and US media coverage of OCL, highlighted a change in Israel's information strategy in the months leading up to the conflict:

Even here at The Guardian we have been lavished with attention by Israel ... I think the Israelis have understood that the BBC and the Guardian and others actually have powerful websites that have an impact in the arena that matters most to Israel, which is American public opinion. (Freedland, *Guardian*, 9 January 2009)

That INID had long been prepared for the offensive was also reported by Anshel Pfeffer in a *Jewish Chronicle* article published in the first week of OCL:

The directorate, which has been up and running for eight months, began planning six months ago for a Gaza operation. A forum with representatives of the press offices of the Foreign and Defence ministries, the IDF Spokesman Unit and other agencies held numerous meetings to decide on the message. The forum held two system-wide exercises in the past two months, one aimed at foreign media and, last week, one dedicated to the Israeli press. (Pfeffer, *Jewish Chronicle*, 31 December 2008)

Dan Gillerman, Israel's ambassador to the UN until a few months before OCL, was brought in to help lead the diplomatic and PR campaign. As he put it:

This was something that was planned long ahead [...] I was recruited by the Foreign Minister to coordinate Israel's efforts, and I have never seen all parts of a very complex

machinery – whether it is the Foreign Ministry, the Defence Ministry, the Prime Minister's office, the police or the army – work in such co-ordination, being effective in sending out the message. (McGreal, *The Observer*, 4 January 2009)

The Gaza War of 2008/9 also saw the emergence of social media as a major public relations resource in the Israel/Palestine conflict (as well as a lobbying tool, as discussed later in this chapter). At the start of OCL, Avital Leibovich, Israel's Military Spokesman, declared that "new media is a new war zone within the media - we are planning to be relevant there" (cited in Shabi, *the Guardian* 2 January 2009). Israel's INID had a dedicated 'new and social media' operation, which deployed social media tools and outlets to disseminate its core messages. Examples of the new media strategy in action during OCL include the Israeli government holding online press conferences on Twitter and the IDF launching its own YouTube channel broadcasting and showcasing what it presented as 'surgical strikes' on targets in Gaza. The Directorate's approach involved repeating the same core messages across all channels and platforms to ensure these filtered through to, and dominated, media coverage of the conflict. The process was described by Guardian correspondent Chris McGreal:

In briefings in Jerusalem and London, Brussels and New York, the same core messages were repeated: that Israel had no choice but to attack in response to the barrage of Hamas rockets; that the coming attack would be on "the infrastructure of terror" in Gaza and the targets principally Hamas fighters; that civilians would die, but it was because Hamas hides its fighters and weapons factories among ordinary people. (McGreal, *The Observer* 4 January 2009)

INID's emphasis on ensuring the same specific messages are deployed, repeated and reinforced was also highlighted by Philo (2011). Discussing the rationale behind this approach at a conference attended by the researcher at the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS), Philo noted:

The whole intention of this approach is that every time viewers saw a terrible graphic image, they would immediately get with it the Israeli wide explanation of why this would occur, the origins, the history of the conflict, the reasons why these actions were necessary. And, at the same time, the Israelis would say, “this is terrible, we don’t want this, we are being attacked all the time, this is us responding”. And you will hear this again and again and again, and all these words that you hear are tested, are worked through in the most sophisticated way.
(SOAS, London, 19 May 2011)

The view that the Directorate’s strategy was effective during the conflict was expressed by several Israeli political and military officials, both during and after the conflict. At the end of the first week of OCL, IDF spokesman Major Avital Leibovich declared that “quite a few outlets are very favourable to Israel, namely by showing [its] suffering ... I am sure it is a result of the new co-ordination” (Leibovich cited in Shabi, *The Guardian* 2 January 2009).

Israel’s Public Relations effort during OCL was highlighted by several interviewees for this research. Sherine Tadros, AJE’s Middle East Correspondent who was one of the very few international journalists who covered OCL from inside the Gaza Strip, noted the efficiency of Israel’s “well-oiled and very structured” PR effort, which was centred on providing journalists with a “constant flow of information”. She provided some examples of this effort in action:

The Israeli PR machine is well-oiled and very structured...They showed videos of the Israeli army, and they also offered constant access to them; you call the Israeli army, and they would tell you their response to certain things. If you wanted, they would give you injured numbers, or the number of rockets fired into Southern Israel. There was a constant flow of information from their side. (Interview, 11 June 2012)

Riyaad Minty, AJE’s Head of New and Social Media, was particularly impressed by Israel’s deployment of new media technologies in its Public Relations effort. He described some notable aspects of this:

Israeli government spokesmen had a very strong presence online. The IDF had a YouTube channel and were able to show the black and white photos of the missiles strikes and say, “so this is what’s happening!” I think it was very impressive... They were very effective in the way that they were using Twitter, in the way they were using YouTube... (Interview, 22 May 2012)

Not all interviewees agreed about the extent to which Israel’s PR efforts have been successful in achieving their aims. James Rodgers, a media academic and former BBC Middle East Correspondent, who was based in Gaza in 2002-2004, acknowledged that “the Israeli government press officers are extremely efficient” but expressed scepticism regarding the level of INID’s claimed success. Asked by the researcher whether the Israeli PR effort affects international media coverage, Rodgers stated:

I think it does and they spend a lot of money on it ... But I think there are limits, you can have a very efficient PR machine, and you can mitigate the effects of bad publicity, but you can’t stop them all together. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

Most of the interviewees highlighted the impact of Israeli PR in terms of how it facilitated the reporting of the Israeli perspective by making it easy for journalists to have Israeli statements, quotes from officials, military and other statistics, images and videos, and other content about the conflict. For Rodgers, however, the fact that Israelis might provide journalists with easy access to the Israeli perspective through ready-made briefings had little impact on the BBC’s reporting:

[The Israelis] might well provide people with ready-made reports but the BBC wouldn’t use them. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

It is worth noting that while several AJE and BBC interviewees highlighted the efficiency and effectiveness of the Israeli PR effort, both in general and during OCL, none of them believed their own work was influenced by Israel’s PR efforts.

Weak Palestinian PR

When explaining Israel's PR superiority, several interviewees drew attention to the relative weakness of Palestinian (and Arab) public relations efforts. For instance, Tadros believes a significant part of Israel's PR success during OCL was due to the fact it was operating against an ineffective Palestinian public relations operation. The stark imbalance between the two sides' PR offerings, Tadros told the researcher, made it far more likely for Israeli messaging and perspectives to find their way into international coverage than Palestinian ones. As Tadros explained:

On the Hamas side it is a lot, a lot different, there wasn't that kind of access, it certainly wasn't available, and it certainly wasn't in English. So, for Western media coverage, it's always a lot easier [to present Israeli perspectives] because in your inbox you have greatly-worded responses from the Israeli army, talking about the fired rockets, injuries, people in shock in Southern Israel, but from Hamas, from the authority in the Gaza Strip, you have nothing, all you have is some strange soundbites that emerge throughout the day of someone wearing a mask saying "we will continue to resist the occupiers" ... (Interview, 11 June 2012)

Tadros notably highlighted the rudimentary nature and lack of sophistication of Hamas's communication operation, telling the researcher:

... the PR Machine of the Palestinians in general, and certainly Hamas and the authorities in Gaza, is so poor and not advanced that they really didn't have the same effect [as the Israelis] ... I mean the way they communicated on an official basis was to send us faxes, or sometimes emails from a Yahoo account, I mean very baby-like ... (Interview, 11 June 2012)

Tadros's comments echo the assessment made by the BBC's World Affairs correspondent, Paul Reynolds, in an analysis piece for the BBC website published on January 8, 2009. Reynolds noted a significant difference between the content and tone of Israeli and Palestinian PR messaging:

The Israeli effort tends to operate on two levels - it deploys arguments to justify its strategy and tactics, but it also gets into detail on individual cases, such as the attack on the school in Gaza [...] Hamas often relies on generalised statements. It routinely

denies claims against it, such as hiding weapons in mosques or using schools or even ambulances as cover. It sometimes acts as if there was a greater truth to be put over, which goes beyond the detail of some contested incident. (Reynolds, 8 January 2009).

The inadequacy of Palestinian PR efforts was also highlighted as a significant factor by Richard Sambrook, media academic and former BBC Director of Global News, who told the researcher:

... the Israelis are better organised and more pro-active in responding to events with PR or propaganda. There are of course Palestinian spokespeople and lobbyists, but they are not as visible or pro-active. (Interview, 1 September 2020)

For former British Culture Secretary Ben Bradshaw, himself a former BBC Reporter before turning to politics, Palestinian PR failures were in part due to cultural and institutional factors. As he told the researcher:

One of my great frustrations was the failure of the Palestinian Authority on the Palestinian side to get their arguments across, to put up some people speaking good English, particularly women. They have got good young people that they could have used as spokespeople, but they would still use the sort of elderly men with very faltering English... (Interview, 22 May 2012)

Carlos Van Meek, AJE's Head of Output, also highlighted the weakness of the Arab PR effort as being a factor in the disparities in international media coverage of Israeli and Palestinian narratives:

[The] Arab world needs to learn how to play this game a bit more adequately and come to terms with its limitations, when they do that, I think, you will start to see a difference. (Interview, 24 May 2012)

Another interviewee, former BBC Middle East correspondent Tim Llewellyn, also highlighted the superiority of Israel's PR machine as a key reason for the dominance of Israeli perspectives in Western reporting of Israel-Palestine, including on the BBC. However, Llewellyn also emphasised Western media's reluctance to call upon competent Palestinian voices as a crucial

factor behind the absence of Palestinian perspectives in BBC coverage. As he noted in a 2011 Guardian article:

When the BBC and ITV did start reporting the horrific civilian casualties in Gaza and the use of phosphorus, Israeli spokespersons were immediately on hand to deny, explain or obfuscate. The Palestinians, especially Hamas, were rarely able to answer allegations. The Palestinians in situ usually lacked the resources or opportunity to make their case. The many articulate Palestinians in London available to help were rarely called on, whereas, as one BBC insider said, "the Israeli ambassador was practically camped at TV Centre". (Llewellyn, *Guardian* 23 May 2011)

The superiority of pro-Israel political pressure and lobbying

As discussed in Chapter Four, political factors which can impact the news production and selection processes include political pressure, lobbying, and flak targeted at media organisations or individual journalists. 'Pressure' in this context refers to an action that can be exercised by individuals or organisations that is targeted at media outlets or staff in order to move their journalistic output towards, or away from, particular editorial choices. This can take the form of letter writing or telephone campaigns, as well as financial and commercial inducements or penalties. In the context of the Israeli-Palestine conflict, political lobbying is one of the common methods through which pressure and flak are exerted on the media, as noted by Walt and Mearsheimer (2006) and others, and several Pro-Israel lobby groups in countries such as the US and UK regularly engage in campaigning efforts to ensure US/UK media coverage is more aligned with the Israeli perspective. During the Gaza War of 2008-9, INID's public relations strategy also encompassed a lobbying function by initiating and facilitating advocacy efforts targeting media outlets, notably through the deployment of new technologies. According to Shabi, this strategy involved building and deploying networks of supporters to disseminate official Israeli messages on media platforms:

The hasbara directive also liaises over core messages with bodies such as friendship leagues, Jewish communities, bloggers and backers using online networks... (*Guardian*, 2 January 2009)

According to Silverstein (2009), Israel's Foreign Ministry recruited pro-Israeli media volunteers to support the government's PR efforts during OCL by flooding targeted news websites, particularly those deemed critical of Israel — such as the BBC, *Huffington Post*, *Dutch*

Telegraph — with pro-Israel arguments and messaging. Silverstein reported the following email sent on behalf of Israel’s Foreign Affairs to supporters:

Dear friends,

We hold the [sic] military supremacy, yet fail the battle over the international media. We need to buy time for the IDF to succeed, and the least we can do is spare some (additional) minutes on the net. The ministry of foreign affairs is putting great efforts in balancing the media, but we all know it's a battle of numbers. The more we post, blog, talkback, vote – the more likely we gain positive sentiment.

I was asked by the ministry of foreign affairs to arrange a network of volunteers, who are willing to contribute to this effort. If you're up to it you will receive a daily messages & media package as well as targets.

If you wish to participate, please respond to this email. (Guardian, 9 January 2009)

The impact of pro-Israel lobbying — both direct and indirect — on BBC media coverage of Israel/Palestine, and OCL in particular, was highlighted by several interviewees for this research. Former British Minister and BBC journalist Ben Bradshaw told the researcher that Israeli lobby groups regularly exercised pressure on the BBC over its reporting of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict:

... as a former journalist ... and as a former minister ... as soon as you say or report anything that the Israeli Government don't like, they are on the phone, they are very good at it. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

According to Bradshaw, the Israeli Government and Israeli lobby criticised the BBC for being “too pro-Palestinian” in its reporting:

British journalists and the BBC in particular get a lot of complaints from the Israeli Government and from the Israeli lobby that their reporting is too pro-Palestinian. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

Writing in the Guardian in 2014, Tim Llewellyn argued that “the general BBC and ITN attitude is to bow to the strongest pressure” (*Guardian*, 20 June 2014). Asked by the researcher to elaborate further, Llewellyn stated:

The friends of Israel... monitor everything the BBC says or does. So, what I would say is that the BBC is in defensive mode. Those that shout the loudest do the most damage. (Interview, 23 July 2018)

For Llewellyn, the issue with BBC reporting of the Middle East is often not at the level of individual journalists but institutional pressures and external lobbying. Most BBC journalists, Llewellyn told the researcher, seek to fulfil their journalistic mission but are hampered by structural or organisational constraints:

Most of them set out to tell the story as clearly, distinctly and truthfully as they can. But they soon find out that that is impossible... (Interview, 23 July 2018)

According to Llewellyn, British journalists attempting to “put the story into context” were likely to face criticism from the Israeli government or pro-Israel supporters. He described to the researcher the ways in which pro-Israel political pressure and lobbying are exerted on the BBC, and how this impacts those working within it:

The restrictions on reporters trying to break this cycle are enormous. If a Jeremy Bowen or a Jon Snow or whomever actually goes to Gaza and tries to put the story into context, they and the BBC know that the Israeli Government and its many influential friends here in London will go apeshit. Phones will ring off the hook at every level. Managers, producers and editors will be harassed, at home and in the office. The tweeting and the Facebook assaults on the BBC and the integrity of its reporters will be questioned, everywhere, in Parliament, in the papers. It is pretty frightening if you are just a BBC suit trying to survive. (Interview, 23 July 2018)

Former BBC Director of Global News, Richard Sambrook, while acknowledging that the BBC was a frequent target of lobbying regarding its Middle East reporting, which it took seriously,

insists that this had no impact on the BBC's editorial processes and decision-making. As he told the researcher:

The BBC receives constant lobbying on a wide range of issues including from multiple parties concerned about the Middle East. In my experience it considers such lobbying carefully, from wherever it comes, but does not allow it to interfere with daily editorial decisions [...] I can recall no conversation at any time in the newsroom which said "X is complaining about this so we better do Y". (Interview, 1 September 2020)

However, Llewellyn argues that the impact of pro-Israel lobbying targeted at the BBC did not manifest itself in explicit editorial guidelines or instructions, but rather in much more indirect and subtle ways, in the form of internalised assumptions, for instance. As he told the researcher:

No senior editor at the BBC, or commissar, ever tells a reporter or producer "be a bit nicer to Israel"... but the thinking is there, deeply implanted. Jeremy Bowen has had his knuckles rapped so many times now that he just on the whole steers clear of Israel. (Interview, 23 July 2018)

Llewellyn believes one of the effects of such pro-Israel pressure was BBC journalists based in Israel-Palestine exercising self-censorship when it comes to criticisms of Israel:

... except in a few rare cases, the BBC's own correspondents on the spot are taking great care not to write or say anything that might signal to their desks in London that the Israelis are in any way to blame for anything. (Interview, 23 July 2018)

According to Llewellyn, such pressures in turn affect who the BBC selects to report on the conflict, leading to a prioritisation of 'blandness' over expertise among its Middle East staff:

In my experience, anyone who knows too much about Israel is lifted out. Barbara Plett, Katie Adler, Orla Guerin, they were all quietly removed. People who knew bugger-all but were bland, like James Reynolds, Kevin Connolly, did well there in the BBC's view because they covered it like a sports event, and their over-arching view was that of the nice white bloke reporting 'fairly' but thinking of his future at the BBC and not wanting to upset anybody. (Interview, 23 July 2018)

Llewellyn believes the fact that the BBC's Middle East bureau is based in Jerusalem plays a significant role in amplifying the impact of Israeli pressure and lobbying targeting the organisation:

Since about 2000, the BBC has mounted its coverage of the Middle East from Jerusalem (West Jerusalem) rather than Cairo or Beirut. It has as one of its most important overseas posts a bureau chief in West Jerusalem, organizing and monitoring all the coverage. [The BBC Middle East editor] knows what the bosses in London want, which is, essentially, not to make waves with the pro-Israel lobby. Reporters on the spot, whatever their sympathies, know this, and style their stories appropriately. That is to say that every Israeli violation or intrusion has to be ameliorated by a reference to how violent the Palestinians can be. (Interview, 23 July 2018)

Weak Palestinian and Arab Lobbying

Some of the interviewees contrasted the effectiveness of pro-Israel political pressure and lobbying, on the one hand, with the relative absence or inadequacy of pro-Palestinian political pressure. Carlos Van Meek, AJE's Head of Output, highlighted the stark imbalance in lobbying power targeted at AJE between the Israeli and Palestinian governments, telling the researcher:

Israel has a very powerful lobby. I think the Palestinians have a long way to go to kind of catch up with that kind of firepower. (Interview, 24 May 2012)

However, it is important to note that none of the AJE or BBC journalists, producers and other staff interviewed by the researcher believed that political pressure — whether by Israelis or

Palestinians — had any impact on their own reporting or editorial approach during OCL. For instance, AJE’s Executive Producer, Ramsey Zarifeh, whilst acknowledging that AJE had been the target of political lobbying and pressures during OCL, insisted that this had no impact on its coverage of the conflict, telling the researcher:

For sure, the Israeli government and the Palestinian government might come to us and complain, and we put that view across [...] but nothing, I would say, had any influence on the way we covered the story. (Interview, 23 May 2012)

AJE Correspondent Sherine Tadros told the researcher she did not come under any pressure, whether from Israel or Hamas, during her reporting from inside Gaza during OCL, but noted a difference in the two parties’ stances towards her presence in Gaza:

Hamas was not an organised force, there was no one watching, especially our coverage in English, they didn’t realise we were there ... The Israelis were very much aware of what we were doing, we didn’t have any problems. I spoke to the army every day. They are a professional media machine. They knew we were in there when they started the war. (Interview, 23 May 2012)

During OCL, one of the most notable incidents that brought the role of political pressure to the fore was the BBC’s decision to decline a request by the Disasters Emergency Committee (DEC) to broadcast a national humanitarian appeal on behalf of the people of Gaza. For the DEC, which represents a coalition of some of the UK’s best known humanitarian NGOs, this decision “marked the first time in the over 40-year relationship between the two organisations that a request was refused by the BBC” (McCurdy & Engelbert, 2012). In response to ensuing criticism, BBC officials declared the decision was:

... made because of question marks about the delivery of aid in a volatile situation and also to avoid any risk of compromising public confidence in the BBC’s impartiality in the context of an ongoing news story. (*BBC defends Gaza appeal decision*, BBC News, January 22, 2009)

When asked by the researcher about the controversy, Richard Sambrook endorsed the BBC’s position:

I can only refer you to the BBC's explanation at the time (the difficulty of separating political from humanitarian aspects) which, although unpopular in some circles, was in my view justified. (Interview, 1 September 2020)

However, Cromwell and Edwards believe the argument put forth by the BBC contradicts its own earlier decisions in similar situations, such as the DEC appeal for Kosovo in 1999. As they note:

In 1999, the BBC had allowed its own high-profile newsreader, Jill Dando, to present a DEC appeal for Kosovo at the height of NATO's 78-day bombing campaign against Serbia. This was also an ongoing and highly controversial conflict. (Cromwell & Edwards, 2009:42)

One of the most notable references to the impact of Pro-Israel lobbying during OCL was by AJE's Shereen Tadros, who recalled an internal BBC conference she attended weeks after OCL, during which BBC staff expressed criticism of the BBC's reporting of the conflict and suggested pro-Israel lobbying had resulted in their feeling "restricted" in what they could report:

I remember two months after the Gaza war I attended a conference that the BBC had, an internal conference, where they were discussing their own coverage of the Gaza war, and the big inside story from that conference, which I haven't actually spoken about yet but I certainly will share this with you, was a lot of criticism from within BBC staff as to how they handled the war, because of pressures from the Israeli lobby and so on. There was a clear indication by people in the room who were BBC staff that there were times when they felt restricted in what they could report. (Interview, 23 May 2012)

9.2.2 Production Factor 2: Access to Gaza: Israel's media ban and AJE's extensive presence

Imposing constraints on the media, whether through restricting physical access to conflict zones or imposing military censorship on reporting, is a long-established feature of conflict reporting, as noted in the scholarship on mediated conflict (e.g. Norris et al., 2003), including in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (Zaharna, 1995; Wolfsfeld, 1997).

A key factor highlighted by the interviewees for this research was the question of media access to Gaza, notably the ability of journalists to enter the territory and operate freely within and during the conflict. While the interviews were primarily focused on coverage of OCL, the issue of access was also raised in more general terms as a key factor in media reporting of the I/P conflict. For instance, James Rodgers described to the researcher some of the access and censorship constraints he experienced while working as the BBC's Gaza correspondent between 2002 and 2004:

The restrictions which I did encounter and had to deal with were principally within the [Gaza] territory because, you remember, on those days there were still Jewish settlements inside the Gaza strip and that meant — at times of conflict [...] as you know Gaza is a very small territory — it could take an awfully long time to get from one point to the other. And sometimes it just wasn't possible, and sometimes I was concerned not to go — for example to, Rafah — because I wasn't sure if I'd be able to get back again. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

Rodgers also highlighted the fact the Israeli authorities operated a system of military censorship to which all international journalists were subjected, but noted this was rarely enforced:

... you still have to agree, to get a press card, to military censorship, in practice this is rarely enforced, but the provision does exist, and you have, in order to get your press card, to accept that as a condition of getting a press card. Without a press card, your activities are very limited. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

Israel's media ban during OCL

At the onset of Operation Cast Lead, the Israeli government closed the borders of the Gaza Strip and imposed a ban on journalists entering the territory. The ban remained in effect for the entirety of the conflict, though the IDF allowed a total of 16 international journalists to enter the Strip after 12 days but only as 'embedded' reporters with IDF units. After 15 January 2009, two weeks after the start of OCL, a larger number of journalists was able to enter Gaza through the Rafah crossing with Egypt. On 23 January, the Israeli authorities announced the lifting of the ban on international journalists entering Gaza from Israel. (Reporters Without Borders, 2009:4)

Israel's media ban was a major factor shaping the nature of international news coverage of the 2008/2009 Gaza war, as highlighted both by the scholarly literature and in the interviews conducted for this research. A February 2009 report published by Reporters without Borders (RSF) on Israel's media strategy during OCL, titled "*Israel/Gaza Operation 'Cast Lead': News control as military objective*", quotes a BBC journalist's anonymous comment on the effect of ban on international media:

We can guess at the destruction, but we do not know about the human stories behind it. (RSF, 2009:4)

According to Robert Fox, defence correspondent of the London Evening Standard, the media ban was an important part of Israel's military strategy:

The exclusion of foreign correspondents is a very important part of the Israeli plans. [...] It was one of the main lessons they drew from the war in Lebanon in 2006. They want to 'manage the information space', as happened in other wars, including the Falklands. (Fox cited in Reynolds, BBC News Online, 12 January 2009)

Jeremy Bowen, the BBC's Middle East Editor, noted that the timing of OCL coincided with most international journalists being away:

The first Israeli attacks happened over Christmas, so most expat journalists were on holiday, often a plane flight away. (Interview, 26 March 2019)

Locked out of Gaza at the start of the conflict, most Western journalists had to conduct their reporting from West Jerusalem. In the southern Israeli town of Sderot, across the border from Gaza, the Israeli authorities set up a media centre for international journalists which offered extensive access to military public relations officials (as well as 'Gaza border tours' and visits to the 'Qassam museum'). Consequently, with no direct access to events on the ground, international journalists with no on-the-ground access to Gaza were almost entirely reliant on the Israeli authorities, including the Information Directorate, for military news and updates. According to Bowen, the ban was intended to promote the Israeli narrative as well as to prevent 'embarrassing' coverage:

The Israelis stopped us going in to try to make their narrative paramount, and I think to stop any embarrassing (for them) coverage of their activities and the casualties and damage that transpired. (Interview, 26 March 2019)

Unlike the BBC and other international media organisations, Al-Jazeera had a strong presence in Gaza at the start of OCL, and was the only major international media organisation to report extensively from within the territory for the entire duration of OCL. Carlos Van Meek, AJE's Head of Output, highlighted the importance of AJE's on-the-ground presence, notably in terms of its ability to verify claims and reports in ways other organisations could not:

We were in Gaza, so we could verify [reports], we were the only ones who could verify on the ground, so that was easy for us, and in Israel that is easy for us, and abroad... We were actually the only network that could actually verify on the ground. (Interview, 24 May 2012)

For Van Meek, access to the Gaza Strip and to first-hand Palestinian perspectives was also crucial to presenting both Israeli and Palestinian narratives, and AJE was uniquely placed to do this:

From our perspective we have to look at it like, Israel says this, that is one side. We happened to have crews inside of Gaza, we were the only network to have a crew, in fact we had two, so we told the other side of the story quite effectively while still keeping the Israeli authorities on our air constantly. Because disregarding what the Israelis say would have been the wrong thing to do. It is important to keep their message out there, but it's also equally important to get in this particular context, to get the side out from Gaza and from other places. (Interview, 24 May 2012)

The importance of being on the ground during the conflict was also highlighted by Sherine Tadros, who was herself one of the very few correspondents reporting from within Gaza during OCL. Witnessing events first-hand, Tadros told the researcher, made her more willing to question Israeli official claims:

... we kept seeing the Israelis were dropping the leaflets on people, telling them not to be in places where Hamas are operating from, that “we will strike them if we find a weapon”. We were literally there when people were getting the leaflets, and the big question was “where do you want us to go?” If there is no safe place? (Interview, 12 June 2012)

There were notable differences between AJE and BBC interviewees with regards to the impact of the ban on international media coverage. Several AJE interviewees believed the ban deepened Western media’s reliance on Israeli governmental sources and INID’s ready-made reports, and that it played an important part in shaping Western media’s coverage of OCL, which Al-Jazeera, they believed, was able to largely circumvent. As Riyaad Minty, AJE’s Head of New and Social Media, told the researcher:

... if you are not in, you are going to be at the borders talking about it. And at the border, you can’t really tell the story because you are relying on the [Israeli] government’s sources again, or citizen media which can be misleading at different times. You need to be inside to be able to understand the context of that. We had that advantage. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

For Minty, news organisations which did not have correspondents inside Gaza were not able to show “the complete picture”, particularly when it came to reporting “evenly” on the impact of the conflict on Israelis and Palestinians:

We had correspondents that were there on the ground, so they were able to take the eyewitness accounts on the ground and match that with what was happening on the other side, and tell the story, because if there was a rocket launched from Gaza into Ashdod, you have the Ashdod side, where it was landing ... but when an Israeli missile strike hit Gaza, that side wasn’t evenly told at all, and so correspondents on the ground are very critical to how things are told, to the narrative and the complete picture. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

This view was echoed by Tadros, who believes much of the reporting she conducted during OCL would have been “very difficult” to carry out by journalists based outside Gaza. She explained to the researcher some of the steps and challenges she faced:

... then you have specific events, like the Samouni family, like the UN school event, these were two specific events that were very difficult for anyone who was not inside the Strip to report on, the Samouni family story seemed so incredible — that the soldiers could do that to women and children, to leave them in an area with not enough evacuation — it sounded incredible, even I didn’t believe it the first time, it took me days to verify that story, I approached the area where it happened, I was 800 meters off, you could actually see the area was totally levelled, and then I had another few days of actually speaking to people who were inside the house, kids who were in the house, and also to the Red Cross, actual people who went in to evacuate the people in the house at the time, there were lots of different stages to how we reported the story. (Interview, 12 June 2012)

Tadros believes that AJE’s access to events on the ground inside the Gaza strip presented a significant challenge to Israel’s PR efforts and aims:

It would have been so easy for [Israel] to win the PR war, at least from a Western perspective, had we not been there ... (Interview, 12 June 2012)

The advantage of having an on-the-ground presence was also highlighted by Ibrahim Helal, AJA’s deputy manager, who told the researcher:

... the story in Gaza, although it is complicated — it is a hostile environment, it is difficult and tough — but editorially speaking it’s easy because if you have a bombardment you can see, if you have attacks you can see, if you have arrests you can see. (Interview, 21 May 2012)

AJE reporters were able to verify their sources, notably by working in conjunction with colleagues at their sister channel, Al-Jazeera Arabic, which had an even more significant

presence and long-established network of contacts. As Ibrahim Helal, Al-Jazeera Arabic's Deputy Managing Director, told the researcher:

Because of the presence of AJA — for 13 years at the time — in Gaza, we had a very strong AJ bureau; 4 correspondents, countless people, fixers, helpers. Gaza is small but complicated, and luckily Ayman [Mohyeddin] and Sherine [Tadros] managed to build very good chemistry with the AJA bureau and they managed to know who is who, and who is telling you that because he belongs to that faction or not, or he is saying the truth... (Interview, 21 May 2012)

The ability of local activists or ordinary civilians in Gaza to post images and videos about events on the ground created a significant amount of citizen-created content which presented a number of challenges for traditional media outlets, including the BBC and AJE. One of the key issues was the difficulty of verifying and authenticating the veracity of such content posted on social media. According to Al-Jazeera interviewees, AJE, with its presence on the ground, once again found itself enjoying a clear advantage.

When asked about the impact of the media ban on the BBC's coverage of OCL, Bowen acknowledged that due to the pressures on local staff, the media ban affected the extent to which the BBC was able to "dig deep" when presenting the Palestinian perspective. As he told the researcher:

We were able to cover the Palestinian perspective, but because of the work pressure on our local staff, we were not able to dig deep until the gates were opened. (Interview, 26 March 2019)

However, Bowen believes the media ban did not prevent the BBC from being able to cover the conflict adequately, and noted the importance of the BBC's own Gaza-based journalists in that regard. As he told the researcher:

At the BBC we were lucky to have excellent Palestinian journalists in Gaza. They fed out pictures, and reports, which were used on English language as well as Arabic broadcasts. (Interview, 26 March 2019)

Moreover, Bowen believes that while the ban initially ‘worked’ from an Israeli perspective, it later became counterproductive. As he told the researcher:

Blocking access during that conflict was a deliberate tactic by the Israelis, which probably worked for them [...] But it is not possible these days to seal somewhere off, because of social media. As the days went by, and as legal challenges were launched, restricting access became counterproductive for the Israelis. (Interview, 26 March 2019)

In this context, one of the unintended outcomes of Israel’s ban was the rapid growth in the use of social media by Palestinian voices, both of professional journalists and bloggers. As Ward (2009) notes:

With the foreign press shut out, scarce electricity, and little internet infrastructure, the media dynamics in Gaza centred on a handful of Palestinian journalists who worked across a range of media formats to provide footage and primary reporting necessary for traditional and new media alike. (Ward, 2009)

This was highlighted by several interviewees. AJE’s head of Social and New Media, Riyad Minty, noted the importance of pro-Palestinian bloggers:

You had bloggers who are sympathetic to Palestine— some within and some who were outside —who were able to pick up images, whatever it is, and they launched their own campaigns to broadcast that online... (Interview, 22 May 2012)

An important point highlighted by some AJE interviewees is that Al-Jazeera’s access was not completely unfettered in Gaza and that operating in a conflict zone brought with it serious constraints that impacted on journalists’ ability to conduct their work. As Tadros told the researcher:

[T]he whole of the Gaza strip felt like a target, so there was a little bit of me who thought there is little point in trying to stay in one place, or trying to stay safe, so in that way we ended up covering a lot, but I have to say that there were moments when there were thoughts in my head that I shouldn't go an extra mile this way, or an extra mile that way, or at least stay out very long ... (Interview, 12 June 2012)

9.2.3 Production Factor 3: Professional assumptions and self-conceptions

As discussed in the theoretical overview conducted in Chapter Four, news output is intrinsically affected and shaped by how the people who produce it — reporters, editors, producers — understand and conceive of their professional role and mission. Journalistic self-conception, namely how journalists understand their journalistic values, norms and functions, was a key theme of the interviews conducted for this research. The similarities and differences between AJE and BBC journalists in this regard are explored in the rest of this section.

Journalistic values:

An important theme running throughout the interviews was that of journalistic values. When discussing media coverage of I/P conflict and OCL, interviewees often invoked journalistic values such as “honesty”, “objectivity”, “accuracy”, “impartiality” and “fairness”, and many of their justifications or criticisms of particular editorial approaches — both their own or those of others — were articulated in terms of underlying views and assumptions about what journalism should be and do⁵⁷.

All of the interviewees — whether from AJE or BBC — noted the importance of telling “all sides” of the story as a crucial condition of fair and objective reporting, with some highlighting that dealing with the “dual narrative” aspect of the conflict often presented a significant journalistic challenge. For instance, the BBC's Middle East correspondent, Jeremy Bowen, told the researcher:

⁵⁷ As the present chapter is primarily focused on presenting the empirical findings of the interviews, a discussion of how these findings inform the debates in the literature on journalistic role conceptions and values is undertaken in the next chapter.

We work very hard to represent all sides of the argument [...] There are multiple narratives, and the various sides involved expect journalists to follow their narrative. Since that is impossible, criticism that is often bitter is par for the course. (Interview, 26 March 2019)

The importance of presenting “all sides” was repeatedly highlighted by AJE interviewees, with some invoking it as a proxy or litmus test for journalistic values such as ‘balance’, ‘honesty’, ‘impartiality’ or ‘fairness’. For instance, Ramsey Zarifeh, Executive Producer at AJE, told the researcher that “we were very anxious to ensure that we were getting every side” (Interview, 23 May 2012). When asked about his assessment of AJE’s OCL coverage, Zarifeh described it as “very balanced, contextual coverage”, and highlighted the diversity of perspectives being represented on the channel as evidence of this:

I think that we have provided a very balanced, contextual coverage. We didn’t just report from Gaza, we reported from Israel and the International community as well, and that was an important part of the coverage, because how what was going on in Gaza was being talked about or discussed by other countries, whether it was Europe, the United States or anyone else, so we were reflecting the global mood, we were obviously, as I said earlier, reporting the story in Gaza as things unfolded, and we were reporting the Israeli perspective from Israel. So, I think if you look at the broad sort of overall strategy of what we did, I think it will be hard to say that we were biased. (Interview, 23 May 2012)

Responding to the same question, Riyadh Minty, AJE’s Head of New and Social media during OCL, echoed Zarifeh’s emphasis on the importance of representing “both sides” as evidence of ‘fair’ reporting:

... [AJE’s OCL coverage] was completely fair and open, we covered both sides, I think both parties who were involved in the conflict had a voice, and had a view on each side of the story. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

When explaining what he thought were the most important news values within AJE, Minty listed the values of “transparency” and “honesty” but, once again, invoked AJE’s “the opinion and the other opinion” tagline as epitomising these values:

Transparency, honesty, our philosophy has always been “the opinion and the other opinion.” (Interview, 22 May 2012)

Similarly, several AJE interviewees associated journalistic values such as ‘impartiality’ and ‘balance’ with the principle of “telling both sides of the story.” For instance, when asked the question “how do you ensure balance and impartiality in your coverage?”, Ruben Banerjee, Senior Editor at AJE, told the researcher:

We try to reach out to both sides of the story. We are never one-sided. (Interview, 23 May 2012)

Carlos Van Meek, AJE’s Head of Output, offered an almost identical response to the same question:

Every side ... Let everybody speak! (Interview, 24 May 2012)

As stated above, the journalistic challenges of presenting “all sides of the story” were frequently invoked by both AJE and BBC interviewees. Former BBC Gaza Correspondent James Rodgers emphasised the practical difficulties of reporting on a conflict where there often were two starkly conflicting accounts:

I can think of examples where you got Israeli and Palestinian official accounts of what had happened, and the two things just completely contradict each other. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

Similarly, Richard Sambrook, former BBC Director of Global Output, told the researcher:

The only object for editors, producers or reporters is to explain as well as and as fairly as possible what has happened and why. The challenge in the Middle East is the lack of agreement over what happened and why, with dual narratives frequently disputing facts. (Interview, 1 September 2020)

When asked by the researcher how he dealt with conflicting narratives, Rodgers told the researcher:

With great difficulty. You couldn't, in fact, sometimes, and you just need to admit defeat as a correspondent. You have to say: "they say this, and they say this". It is the last thing you want to do. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

Rodgers highlighted the importance of past experience and local expertise in mitigating the challenges presented by inconsistent or contradictory narratives:

When you have been somewhere for a few years, and you have had experience of similar instances and similar events, you can make a judgement. You can draw in your knowledge and say, well, this is what we have said happened this time, but last time we have said that this happened but actually this has happened. You can't say with certainty what has happened, but you can draw on your experience and your knowledge to make a more educated guess. I am pleased to say it happened very rarely to me, especially because of my Palestinian colleagues I had really good sources of information there. So, it wasn't too bad at all. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

The emphasis on experience and local expertise was also echoed by Ibrahim Helal, AJA's Deputy Director, who told the researcher:

... because of our war coverage in Afghanistan in Iraq and years and years of covering the intifada... we can tell even now on YouTube what fake pictures, what could be right, what could be wrong, and if there is a very small doubt, we chop it out, of course immediately, sometimes we have suspicions that this doesn't make sense, to have an explosion here after shooting there because we have experience of dealing with this, and we have many people here who have covered wars from before, so filtering information and filtering footage is easy, there is no manual there is no written manual, but we have experienced people, we have people who can tell you this written statement is not from al Qaida, or is not from Hamas, or it cannot be said by Fatah ... there is always a context to the story, and when you have enough experience in the political side of the story [...] you would know whether the story makes sense or not, because of the context. (Interview, 21 May 2012)

The importance of contextualisation

The importance of providing historical and political contextualisation as a key journalistic principle was highlighted by most AJE and BBC interviewees. For instance, Jeremy Bowen, the BBC's Middle East Editor, told the researcher:

I am very concerned with the historical context, and try to include it as much as possible. (Interview, 26 March 2019)

However, the view that historical context must be included in daily news coverage of a conflict such as OCL was contested by James Rodgers, who challenged the assumption that daily news reports should necessarily provide historical contextualisation. As he told the researcher:

It is news, it is not history. It is journalism, it is not history. It is very difficult. [...] The word journalism comes from the French word for 'day'. It's what has happened today and, of course, it should have context, but sometimes it is just not possible. On the other hand, you know if you give all the historical context all the time, firstly you don't have room to say what has happened today and secondly you will lose that part of the audience that knows it already and those are the ones most interested anyway. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

Rodgers's view was in marked contrast to that expressed by several AJE interviewees, as in the following comment made by Riyad Minty, which presents historical contextualisation as an essential feature of news journalism:

... You know, anyone can tell you what is happening right now, they can do that for you, if you are a journalist you need to go beyond the headlines, and make sense of it all, and you have to look at the history, it is not as simple as "a building got destroyed", "a missile was launched from this side, and this is the response", you know how many steps you need to go back to find the truth? You have to keep on going back, and tell all sides of the story, because if you continue only looking for 'right here right now', it could be very misleading... (Interview, 22 May 2012)

For Rodgers's fellow former BBC Middle East correspondent, Tim Llewellyn, the daily realities of life for Palestinians are "hard to report as news" because of their "routine" nature. In consequence, Llewellyn told the researcher, it is precisely during escalations in the conflict — such as during OCL — that contextualisation becomes essential:

... the day-to-day horror, the attrition, the misery, the bans on freedom of movement, labour and opportunity for Palestinians is hard to report as news, because it is a routine. I can understand that from day to day the BBC and the MSM cannot cover this as daily news and headlines. When something dramatic happens, like Operation Cast Lead, or the 2014 invasion or the most recent 2018 sniper assassinations, i.e. when the story becomes a headline, that is when the context should be reported. (Interview, 23 July 2018)

Journalistic values in context

A notable difference between BBC and AJE interviewees' respective conceptions of journalistic norms and values was the extent to which these were framed within a larger political or moral outlook. For instance, BBC interviewees such as Bowen, Sambrook and Rodgers never invoked journalistic values as part of broader political or moral principles or imperatives, and only commented on journalistic decisions, practices or processes — such as “providing historical context”, or “presenting all sides” — strictly in terms of professional journalistic standards such as ‘objectivity’, ‘fairness’, ‘clarity’ and ‘impartiality’. Sambrook’s comment, quoted earlier, is illustrative in this regard:

The only object for editors, producers or reporters is to explain as well as and as fairly as possible what has happened and why. (Interview, 1 September 2020)

The notion of BBC editors adopting a ‘political line’ was explicitly rejected by Sambrook as antithetical to the BBC’s editorial principles:

Sometimes people assume the BBC is like a newspaper and the editor can determine a political line. It isn’t. Individual programme editors have delegated authority to make their own decisions to which they are later accountable. It is sometimes frustrating but protects BBC output from any unified position. (Interview, 1 September 2020)

In contrast, Al-Jazeera interviewees often framed their understanding of journalistic norms such as ‘objectivity’, ‘honesty’, and ‘fairness’ within broader principles that often were political or

moral in nature, such as “to give the voice to the voiceless”. For instance, when asked by the researcher what AJE’s most important news values were, Ruben Banerjee, Senior Editor at AJE, told the researcher:

Objectivity, honesty... We give the voice to the voiceless — the guiding principle — so that helps us to stand out. (Interview, 23 May 2012)

The researcher’s interviews with Al-Jazeera journalists also revealed significant scepticism towards, and criticism of, how Western media understood and applied journalistic norms — notably ‘balance’, ‘impartiality’, ‘neutrality’ and ‘fairness’. For instance, Shereen Tadros, while insisting that presenting “both sides” of the story was essential, expressed strong criticism of Western media’s application of notions such as journalistic “balance” in ways that ignored or did not sufficiently take into account the asymmetrical realities of conflicts such as OCL. As she told the researcher:

I think that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, as the Gaza war was, is in itself very one-sided. When you have a situation where you have [hundreds of Palestinian casualties versus a few Israeli ones], just reporting that is biased, in that you’re leaning towards one side, but the truth is that it was, this was a sophisticated army launching a war against a civilian population, you know, and although that could sound one-sided, but actually it’s just the truth [...] (Interview, 11 June 2012)

Tadros contested the notion that coverage that reflected the asymmetrical “one-sided” nature of the conflict, notably in terms of civilian suffering, was itself “one-sided”:

The story was leaning to one side, the fact that we reflected that could make it look to the outside world like we were leaning, but we were just presenting what was happening. (Interview, 11 June 2012)

For BBC interviewees such as Richard Sambrook, however, expressing sympathy on “humanitarian grounds” for “the victims of violence” was a breach of journalistic balance:

[...] I have observed a tendency to sympathise more with the Palestinian cause on humanitarian grounds. If there was any “rebalancing” of coverage required it was nearly always in my time attempting to put the Israeli case rather than the opposite simply because journalists, especially led by pictures, often favour the victims of violence. (Interview, 1 September 2020)

For Tadros, the issue of reporting on a conflict where the suffering was inherently “one-sided” presented a fundamental challenge to the Western media’s approach to the notion of ‘balance’:

What do you do when a conflict actually is not 50-50? When it is so obviously leaning towards one side? When it is so obvious that one side is suffering more than the other? Is it our job to ‘balance’ it out by giving more airtime to the other side? The really sorry, sad story behind all this is how scared some of the other networks were about the truth, because the truth sounded skewed... (Interview, 11 June 2012)

Tadros was equally critical of Western conceptions of journalistic values such as ‘fairness’ that ignored the imbalances of the news production process itself:

Being neutral is not giving 5 minutes to a Palestinian guy, and 5 minutes to an Israeli guy, it is not fair when you give 5 minutes to an Israeli official who speaks perfect English versus Palestinian who speaks two words of English, is really mumbling it together and has no media training, is that fair? That you give them the same equal amount of airtime to both? (Interview, 11 June 2012)

Tadros emphasised to the researcher that despite her criticisms, she nonetheless believed in the importance of presenting both sides of the story which, she told the researcher, AJE’s reporting of OCL epitomised:

You should look back and see how many interviews we did with Israeli officials, because I guarantee you it is more than any other English-speaking network in the 3 weeks of the war. We gave the Israeli government ample opportunity. There was never a time — and they said this to me themselves, “there was never a time when we wanted to speak to you guys that you didn’t have us on air in a second”. Whenever something happened, the first thing was “let’s get an Israeli official”. (Interview, 12 June 2012)

Several other Al-Jazeera interviewees echoed Tadros’s view that journalistic values should be understood and applied in a way that took into account the context and realities of the conflict being reported, including asymmetries between the conflicting parties. For instance, several AJE interviewees placed the importance of historical contextualisation explicitly in terms of a broader political and moral outlook, as illustrated in the following comment by Riyadh Minty, which references concepts such as ‘oppression’ and ‘human rights’ when explaining the importance of contextualisation:

Journalism as covering stuff for two days is the biggest mistake, you have to do your research, you have to understand that you are talking about thousands of years of history, you are talking about going back 40 to 50 years, to major events that happened, you are talking about people who have been oppressed for a long period of time, whose human rights have basically been taken away from them, you cannot report on a conflict as if it is [only] happening ‘right here right now’, you have to go and get the context and, if you call yourself a journalist, to be honest. That’s the bottom line, and viewers need to be able to know that. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

The role of journalism in context:

Another important difference that emerged out of the interviews relates to how AJE and BBC journalists viewed their journalistic mission, and how this shaped their understanding of their journalistic values. As discussed above, AJE interviewees highlighted values such as ‘honesty’, ‘transparency’, ‘objectivity’ and ‘accuracy’ as key journalistic values, yet they also presented their journalistic work as being motivated by a wider moral and ethical outlook, such as Banerjee’s comment, quoted earlier, of “being a voice of the voiceless”. This ethical or moral

framing of the professional journalistic mission extended to their notion of what the ‘role’ of journalism was.

For instance, as illustrated throughout this chapter, a key theme highlighted by both BBC and Al-Jazeera journalists is that of the crucial importance of first-hand reporting and the need to establish ‘the truth’, ‘the facts’, and ‘the reality’ of ‘what is happening on the ground’. However, unlike their BBC counterparts, Al-Jazeera interviewees frequently framed this journalistic ideal — of accurately verifying and reporting the reality on the ground — explicitly in terms of its function as a means of countering the “spin” and dominant narratives, especially those of powerful governments, and holding them to account. For instance, Tadros spoke of how she sought to use her presence on the ground to “hold to account” official narratives:

[Israel’s] overarching idea is that they were not [acting against] the civilian population but to try and get rid of Hamas, that for me was the overarching thing that I tried to hold to account, *were* they targeting Hamas structures? *Were* most people who are being killed fighters or from Hamas or other militias or Islamic groups in the Gaza strip? We found very, very early on, maybe the first day, that this was not the case. (Interview, 11 June 2012)

Tadros told the researcher she did not believe her role was to act as a “counter” to Israeli PR, but that she nevertheless welcomed the notion that her reporting could be a resource used by others:

We are not there to answer Israel’s PR machine or to provide a counter to it. In fact, if our reporting does that, then great, if it can then be used by other groups to do that, then all the better. (Interview, 11 June 2012)

Ramsey Zarifeh, AJE Executive Producer during OCL, presented AJE’s journalistic work in similar terms, as “cutting through the spin” of governments from all sides by reporting accurately what was happening on the ground:

I think the way we handle in which way governments spin the stories is trying to reflect or report accurately what we see happening on the ground so, in the case of Gaza in [2008/9], we were in a very fortunate position, we had two correspondents' teams in Gaza whereas most of the rest of the media had one or none, so we were in a fortunate position in that we kind of could cut through any spin, from either side of the story really, by just reporting what we saw was happening. You know the incursions, the bombs, the bombing raids, whatever it was, you are able to cut through the spin by accurately reflecting what was going on on the ground. (Interview, 23 May 2012)

It is important to highlight at the outset that none of the AJE interviewees believed it was the “role” of journalism to bring about societal or political change, a notion which was explicitly rejected by Riyad Minty, AJE's Head of Social and New Media, who told the researcher:

I don't think that [changing things] is a job for reporters to do. I think the job of a reporter is to tell a story, and it is up to people and governments how they decide to act on that. [...] I think that in any conflict in the World, wherever it is, it is our job to tell the truth, and the public needs to make up their opinion on that and whatever it is, from both sides. The point is being able to say “this is what's happening on the ground” and if change comes, it is up to public opinion and how they deal with the story. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

This is echoed by Shereen Tadros, who told the researcher that the role of journalism was only to “observe, to tell, and to give context”:

What I have learned the hard way in this industry is that the most that we can do as journalists is document what's happening so nobody can ever come back to us and say “there is no record of this”, “this never happened”, “this genocide never happened”, “this mother never died”, it's all we can do, apart from that, I am not sure how much we can affect policy or whether, as journalists, our target should be that. We are there to observe, to tell, and to give context, and if we do that correctly that is our job done. (Interview, 11 June 2012)

Most AJE interviewees described their conception of journalism in similar terms to Tadros and Zarifeh — both as a tool for holding powerful interests and dominant narratives to account by reporting accurately “what was going on on the ground”, and a resource that can be used by others for achieving societal empowerment and positive political change, as exemplified by the following comment by Riyadh Minty, which frames AJE’s news values within a mission of “empower[ing] people” and being the “voice of the voiceless”:

Transparency, honesty, our philosophy has always been “the opinion and the other opinion”, that’s important to us, and being the voice of the voiceless, that’s why I joined Al-Jazeera, because it is something that I believe in, that people need to be involved, people need to have a voice, and we need to be able to be there to empower people, whoever that is, whatever stories they may have, whatever voices they want to be told. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

This articulation of the journalistic mission — according to which creating positive societal or political change was a desirable but indirect outcome rather than the explicit aim of journalistic work — was not restricted to AJE journalists but was also expressed by Al-Jazeera Arabic interviewees. For instance, AJA’s Director of News, Ibrahim Helal, told the researcher:

It is very difficult for me to believe that the media can change reality, we change the awareness, this is our level, we change the level of awareness, and then the change of reality comes [...] awareness is just one element of the reality that we have access to, we don’t have access to action. (Interview, 21 May 2012)

None of the BBC interviewees, in contrast, spoke of journalism’s role in broader moral or ethical terms, and instead always presented their journalistic work within a framing of professional values, norms and standards. For instance, Sambrook’s description, below, of the role of journalists, while not too dissimilar to that offered by Tadros, Minty and other AJE interviewees, is expressed strictly within the professional terms of journalistic values and norms:

The only object for editors, producers or reporters is to explain as well as and as fairly as possible what has happened and why. (Interview, 1 September 2020)

Sambrook also highlighted the BBC's regulated status and the accountability mechanisms this enforced around its duty to be "objective fair and impartial", which he explicitly contrasted with 'international channels' that are "freer to report in any way they wish":

The BBC is regulated – and formally accountable to its board and to Ofcom – to be objective, fair and impartial. International news channels do not share that regulation or code and are freer to report in any way they wish. The key question to my mind is accountability for coverage – the BBC has a formal framework which is frequently used. International channels rarely do. (Interview, 1 September 2020)

Sambrook's comment evokes some of the scholarly debates highlighted in Chapter Four regarding the roles of journalism in a global context — notably whether such roles differ by region/culture — and will be revisited in the discussion conducted in the next chapter.

Approach to criticisms

Throughout the interviews with current and former AJE and BBC staff, a notable theme was how their own institution was perceived by others and also a heightened awareness of being the target of intense criticism, which the interviewees considered largely unfair and motivated by bias. For instance, BBC interviewees largely blamed criticism of its I/P coverage on the bias and partisanship of critics, and saw it as an inevitable consequence both of the BBC's status as a major international media institution and its editorial approach based on impartiality and balance. For instance, the BBC's Middle East Editor, Jeremy Bowen, told the researcher:

Any prominent broadcaster like the BBC will have a lot of scrutiny, which is fine by me. There are multiple narratives, and the various sides involved expect journalists to follow their narrative. Since that is impossible, criticism that is often bitter is par for the course. (Interview, 26 March 2019)

Ben Bradshaw also noted how criticism of the BBC's Middle East coverage emanated from "one side or the other":

The BBC has undertaken numerous inquiries into its coverage of the Middle East sparked by complaints from one side or the other. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

For James Rodgers, one consequence of the criticism was that BBC journalists had to be “very careful” to avoid “making it easier for people who are going to criticise you anyway.” As he told the researcher:

... I don't think there is any conflict in the world where there is as much scrutiny of the language which reporters use, and if you make mistakes with that then it gives your critics — and there are many critics it is impossible to write anything about this conflict that everyone is going to agree with. Absolutely impossible. So, you have to accept that your work is going to be criticised, but if you make factual errors or declamatory terminology then you are just making it easier for people who are going to criticise you anyway. So, you have to be very careful. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

AJE interviewees were similarly conscious of how they were perceived by critics, notably within other media organisations. Carlos Van Meek, AJE's Head of Output, remarked on criticism AJE received over its OCL coverage from rivals, which he ascribed in part to 'professional jealousy'. As he told the researcher:

The fact that we were in Gaza made us a target for other media, insisting that maybe we were overplaying one side in Gaza, a lot of it has to do I think with professional jealousy, we told it straight, we were the only ones there, and we went there early and often, ok, that was an opportunity for us to showcase our depth and breadth of coverage. (Interview, 24 May 2012)

When asked to comment on some of the criticisms levelled at the BBC and AJE, Sambrook and Van Meek both highlighted their respective organisations' achievements:

The BBC, when it appointed Jeremy Bowen as Middle East Editor, made significant efforts to build more context into his daily reporting which certainly made a difference – he won a number of independent awards noting his attempt to contextualise daily events. (Interview with Sambrook, 1 September 2020)

I think people saw that Al-Jazeera did a remarkable job, its crews did a remarkable job ... I think we had the most detailed coverage overall, and I think that reflected in the awards we won as a result, and the respect we garnered from our colleagues and viewers as a result. (Interview with Van Meek, 24 May 2012)

9.2.4 Production Factor 4: Political and ideological context: The West/UK vs Global-South/Qatar

Another theme highlighted in the interviews was the extent to which the political spheres in which the BBC and AJE operated, namely the UK/West and Qatar/Global South, respectively, shaped their coverage of OCL — whether directly, such as in the form of political influence by the British and Qatari governments, or more indirectly through prevalent ideological and political assumptions.

Throughout the interviews, Al-Jazeera’s status as a distinctly non-Western or even counter-Western broadcaster was repeatedly highlighted by its journalists, as well as in some BBC interviews. One point of emphasis in this regard was Al-Jazeera’s approach to elite and non-elite perspectives. For instance, Richard Sambrook identified a clear contrast between the ‘formal diplomatic and political’ perspectives foregrounded by the BBC and Al-Jazeera’s “overt mission to report the Arab street”, and suggested this was a potential factor in their different editorial approaches:

Al-Jazeera had the overt mission to report the Arab street. The BBC tends to favour formal diplomatic and political perspectives — this may lead to a difference in approach and tone. (Interview, 1 September 2020)

Among AJE interviewees, there was a strong emphasis on AJE’s identity as a channel which challenged not only Western framings and narratives but power imbalances between rich and powerful countries and elites in the West, on the one hand, and the marginalised populations

of the Global South, on the other, with frequent references to Al-Jazeera being the “voice of the global south” and “the voice of the voiceless”. Some AJE interviewees explicitly linked their own Global South personal and political backgrounds to their understanding of their journalistic mission and values. For instance, Riyadh Minty told the researcher:

I am a South African, I came through apartheid and, as a kid growing up, I know the importance of telling both sides of the story, and to go looking at the history of it all. You know, it is very easy to talk about the “right here right now” and we were fortunate at the time to have journalists and media who were able to look at the narrative, people who were able to understand the context, and the same needs to be applied to Palestine and Israel. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

Carlos Van Meek, AJE’s Head of Output, explicitly highlighted AJE’s Global South identity as being key to the difference between its editorial values and approach — notably with regard to reporting political and economic elites — and those of Western media:

Our values are very much focused on the Southern hemisphere, and I think our coverage reflects that. We don’t just simply do a story about a summit in Davos, we do the stories about what Davos is affecting globally, the blowback from decisions made in far-off capitals, so I think where we differ, instead of the summits where other networks focus their energy, we go to places those summits affect, and concentrate there on the cause and effect, and decisions made in far off places by people with a lot of money and a lot of influence and a lot of power, and I think that is what sets us apart. (Interview, 24 May 2012)

For Riyadh Minty, representing a Global South perspective that reversed “the flow of information” and told the “untold stories” of the third world from within, was at the core of AJE’s journalistic mission:

When the English channel was set up, the philosophy always was to change the flow of information from the South to the North, and by South we mean the Economic South, whereas previously if you are looking at another mainstream organisations they are centred in Western capitals and always sat on the outside looking down towards the third world, and we need to be from that third world telling the information up to the North, so that they can get a better perspective, and I think that's at the heart of a lot of what we are trying to do, to say "this story's untold, now we can tell it to the rest of the World". (Interview, 22 May 2012)

Several Al-Jazeera interviewees highlighted the network's extensive expertise and experience of the Middle East as representing a clear advantage over Western media organisations, but insisted this did not 'dictate' their editorial approach:

Al Jazeera's knowledge of the Middle East, and in particular the Palestinian cause, is vast and yes it has a tremendous influence on how we cover certain events, in case of point how we covered Cast Lead, but it doesn't dictate our editorial, it just gives us a better base from which to launch our coverage from. (Interview with Carlos Van Meek, 24 May 2012)

These comments clearly evoke the debates in the literature over the north-south information flows — such as the UNESCO/New World Information Order debates — that were discussed in Chapters Four and Six. In particular, they highlight the extent to which AJE's institutional identity is explicitly framed within that intellectual history. These questions will be further discussed in the next chapter.

For Tim Llewellyn, another impact of the political and ideological context in which the BBC, as well as other sections of the UK media, operates, is the emergence of a "mindset" that views Israelis more favourably than Palestinians:

I am afraid what we are dealing with is an attitude of mind, a mindset, that permeates the BBC and even good papers like the Guardian (strangely enough, not the F-T): and that is basically that Arabs are tricky and violent and Israelis are 'People Like Us'. As I am sure you know, many Arabs, Persians, Asian Subcontinentals and others who join the BBC or the Guardian or ITN or whatever soon learn to amend their rightful instincts and forget their knowledge as they join in the great British game. (Interview, 23 July 2018)

As quoted earlier, Richard Sambrook, former BBC Head of Global Output, disagreed with the claim that Western journalists, including at the BBC, were more sympathetic to Israelis. Bradshaw, himself a former BBC journalist, also contested, in fairly similar terms to Sambrook, the notion that British journalists identified more with Israelis:

I don't think that is the case, certainly as far as British Journalism is concerned, and in fact our British journalists, and the BBC in particular, get a lot of complaints from the Israeli Government and from the Israeli lobby that their reporting is too pro-Palestinian... (Interview, 22 May 2012)

Bradshaw noted that while British public opinion was "very sympathetic to Israel" in the past, it had been shifting in recent decades in a more Pro-Palestinian direction. This, he told the researcher, is likely to become increasingly reflected in UK media coverage:

I think what is true to say is that there has been a massive shift in public opinion in the United Kingdom over the last 20 or 30 years, which used to be — and I am generalising here — very sympathetic to Israel and the Israeli cause, but in the light of the events of the last 30 years, has shifted in a much more pro-Palestinian sympathetic position. I think it is inevitable, I mean media organisations and newspapers tend to reflect the views of their readers and consumers, so any shift there has been in the coverage of the British media to a more pro-Palestinian position, as the Israelis would see it, has, I think, been informed by the massive shift in public opinion in Great Britain from pro-Israeli to more sympathetic to the Palestinian position. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

The role of Qatar/Britain political influence

A significant point of similarity between AJE and BBC interviewees was their insistence on their organisations' professional and editorial independence from political interference or pressure from their own host states, the UK and Qatar, respectively. This was the case even when the interviewees believed such political pressures from a host state existed elsewhere. For instance, when the researcher asked Carlos Van Meek, Executive Producer and Head of Output at AJE, whether a state's foreign policy can affect media coverage of media organisations based within the same country, he agreed, stating:

News organisations like the New York Times had to apologise for its coverage in the lead up of the war in 2003. That is a very good example of foreign policy getting the better of a reputable — one of the World’s most reputable — news organisations, so it does happen. And then there are States-sanctioned media, they actually control the news divisions. I think that is very clear in many instances globally, take for example the Syrian press, it is controlled by the Syrian government, the press in North Korea is controlled by the North Korean Government, these are very clear examples, so it happens all the time. In the western media, sometimes the will of the government is overpowering, and news organisations fall victim to try to pander to those sensibilities, when they do they fail and they pay for it, but most reputable organisations correct and self-correct and fix those mistakes over time. (Interview, 24 May 2012)

However, when asked whether the Qatari government exerted any kind of political pressure on Al-Jazeera, Van Meek’s reply was a categorical “No”. When the researcher asked AJE’s Executive Producer, Ramsey Zarifeh, whether Qatar had imposed any constraints or pressures on AJE to influence its OCL coverage, Zarifeh was equally adamant:

Absolutely not, no. Never, in my experience, have we, the channel, and this would go for any story not just for this particular story, have we received any external pressure or internal pressure from Qatar, or other states, not to tell a story or to tell a story in a certain way. (Interview, 23 May 2012)

Zarifeh went on to elaborate further:

I can only speak from my experience, we are based here, in Qatar, we have never had any feeling at all that foreign policy has played a role, or has influenced the way we cover stories, or the way we gather news around the World. The state of Qatar has a very much 'hands-off' approach to how we work, whether a particular piece of Qatar foreign policy may head in this direction or that direction but that really is set away from whatever we do. As news gatherers, we search for the stories wherever they may be, but there has never been any direct or indirect influence or linkage if you like between a government's foreign policy and the editorial policy of Al-Jazeera. (Interview, 23 May 2012)

Former British Minister Ben Bradshaw told the researcher that a host nation's foreign policy can impact its media's coverage, but that this was largely a function of how democratic the country was:

I think news coverage obviously can be constrained by a nation's foreign policy, depending on the level of democracy and plurality in that country. I mean a country dictatorship has quite wide-ranging powers to determine its own media's news coverage... I'll probably suggest that an ability of a country to control or influence its media's news coverage depending on its foreign policy, increases and decreases in direct proportion in kind of level of diplomacy and media plurality that that country has. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

Echoing Van Meek and Zarifeh, Bradshaw was categorical that the British Government did not impose any constraints on the BBC's coverage, including its reporting of the Middle East, but did note that it sometimes provided support to BBC journalists who faced constraints from the Israeli authorities:

There were certainly no British Government constraints, on the contrary we would do — and I as a Minister I did it all the time — all we could do to help facilitate the operations for the BBC journalists, for example we got complaints from the BBC bureau in Jerusalem that they felt unnecessarily constrained by the Israeli authorities, and then we would raise that with the Israeli Government. (Interview, 22 May 2012)

For Tim Llewellyn, however, the institutional and political nature of the BBC, as an institution “representing” the British state, has a significant impact on the way it represents Israelis and Palestinians:

The BBC is a system. Israel is a system. Palestine isn't a system. The BBC represents a state. Israel is a state. Palestine is not a state. Therefore, the whole story is conceived as “difficult rebellious foreigners with ways of life very different from ours, deliberately and violently upsetting the workaday functioning of a democratic state”. (Interview, 23 July 2018)

It is important to note here that descriptions of the BBC and Al-Jazeera as enjoying complete independence from the British and Qatari states, respectively, have been the subject of significant scrutiny and criticism in the literature, as highlighted in Chapter Six. The significance of journalistic claims to political and editorial independence is revisited in further detail in the discussion chapter (Chapter Ten).

9.2.5 Production Factor 5: Logistical limitations and constraints of TV reporting

Another theme highlighted by interviewees as an important factor shaping coverage of the Middle East, and specifically in relation to OCL, was the logistical, operational, technical and linguistic challenges and constraints often imposed by the TV news broadcasting format. Several interviewees highlighted logistical and operational limitations, such as the duration of segments and the strict deadlines for recording and filing reports, as particularly impacting the extent to which correspondents were able to contextualise their reporting of daily news updates. When the researcher raised the lack of historical contextualisation in the BBC's coverage revealed by the content analysis findings, the BBC's Middle East Editor, Jeremy Bowen,

highlighted the issue of time as well as the lack of historical expertise amongst some Middle East reporters:

Usually the problem is time, or sometimes ignorance. I am very concerned with the historical context, and try to include it as much as possible. (Interview, 26 March 2019)

Asked to elaborate further on his answer, and how the issue could be remedied, Bowen explained:

Yes, I meant time available for the story. The answer is to try to weave some historical context into the script rather than have a separate section for a history lesson. By ignorance I meant that not everyone knows the relevant history or understands its importance. (Interview, 26 March 2019)

Former BBC Gaza correspondent James Rodgers also highlighted the impact of time constraints, both in terms of the length allocated to segments and the pressures to produce TV news packages within tight deadlines:

You have to try and get in there. You have to try and get in there over time and explain it. But sometimes when you have only got 40 seconds in a day to explain what happened it is very, very, difficult and I think some people who have been very critical of the way the conflict has been covered don't always appreciate what journalism is actually trying to do. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

For Rodgers, the issue of time constraints "is not a reason not to have any context but it's just a reason why not every single piece includes it". This was echoed by Richard Sambrook, who told the researcher:

Daily news coverage tends to be driven by events and it is a constant struggle to build sufficient context into a 1'30 or 2'00 package or to repeat such context daily. (Interview, 1 September 2020)

Philo (2012), in his examination of the failures of British news coverage of the Gaza War 2008/9, offers a different explanation for the lack of historical contextualisation in Western coverage, and sees in it the effect of political considerations rather than time constraints:

It does not take long to include such information, but to do so in the climate which journalists currently work is to risk controversy. So, in practice what happened is that journalists stayed on the most secure ground by focusing on civilian casualties. (Philo, 2012: 159)

The content analysis findings revealed a marked sourcing imbalance in the BBC's coverage, with Israeli sources accounting for three times the number of lines given to Palestinian ones. As seen throughout this chapter, interviewees for this research offered several suggestions for this sourcing imbalance, such as the superiority of the Israeli Public Relations effort and the media access ban, but some also invoked logistical or cultural factors, such as Western Journalists being based in West Jerusalem and finding English-speaking Israeli sources easier to access and feature in their reporting — a constraint amplified by the lack of Arabic-language expertise. For instance, James Rodgers told the researcher:

The Israelis have got the advantage of having lots of people with excellent English language skills. When I was working in Gaza, I could always get an English-Speaking Army Spokesman 24 hours a day, which was sometimes useful. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

Asked to comment on the researcher's findings showing that Israeli sources were more frequently featured in the BBC's OCL coverage than Palestinian ones, Rodgers insisted there was no deliberate attempt on the part of the BBC to favour Israeli sources or perspectives, but that logistical and technical considerations can make it impossible to secure the same level of access to Palestinian sources:

Firstly, the Israeli government press officers are extremely efficient. Secondly, there are better broadcast facilities certainly for broadcasting news within Jerusalem, West Jerusalem particularly, than there are in the Palestinian territories. And I know that most of the BBC's critics don't agree with this but there is a scrupulous amount of effort that goes into this, but it is not possible. (Interview, 7 June 2018)

9.3 Conclusion

Based on the interview findings, the researcher has identified the following five production factors as the most significant in shaping BBC and AJE coverage of OCL:

- Production Factor 1: Superiority of Israel's Public Relations and Lobbying efforts
- Production Factor 2: Access to Gaza: The media ban and AJE's extensive presence
- Production Factor 3: Professional Assumptions and Self-conceptions
- Production Factor 4: Political & ideological context: Britain/West vs Qatar/Global South
- Production Factor 5: Logistical & Technical constraints

The interview findings show that how AJE and BBC journalists conceived of their journalistic roles, values and mission shaped their editorial approach. Both BBC and AJE interviewees placed great emphasis on the need to tell the story from 'all sides', and showed great awareness of the 'dual narratives' dimension of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. For both AJE and BBC interviewees, achieving objectivity, impartiality or balance was primarily a question of representing all sides and narratives in the conflict. However, there were significant differences in their conception of what this meant in practice. An important difference highlighted in the interview responses relates to institutional self-conception, namely how BBC and AJE journalists understood or interpreted the journalistic values and mission of their respective institutions, sometimes placing them in contrast to those of media rivals. Whereas BBC journalists framed their conception of journalism strictly in terms of professional values and norms, many of the AJE interviewee answers suggest a journalistic self-conception explicitly framed in terms of broader political and moral principles, as well as a sceptical attitude towards Western interpretations of journalistic values such as 'fairness' and 'impartiality'.

There were significant differences, too, with regards to how AJE and BBC interviewees viewed their journalistic mission. Whereas BBC journalists broadly eschewed references to moral and

ethical imperatives, AJE interviewees repeatedly framed their views of journalism within a wider moral and ethical framework rooted in conceptions such as “being the voice of the voiceless” and challenging dominant and powerful narratives. AJE’s Global South identity was presented as far more central to AJE journalists’ journalistic self-conception than was the case for the UK/Western identity of the BBC.

Overall, AJE interviewees viewed their journalistic mission as involving:

- Providing fair reporting by presenting all sides of the story (“the opinion and the other opinion”), especially marginalised perspectives — “the voice of the voiceless”.
- Presenting the “complete picture” by offering historical and political context.
- Providing objective reporting that reflects the realities on the ground, including the asymmetrical realities of the conflict.
- Scrutinising and holding to account elite and official narratives and ‘spin’ by providing on-the-ground, accurate reporting of “what is happening on the ground”.
- Countering the North-South information flow. “Telling the stories of the third world from within”.
- Indirectly contributing to positive societal and political change through greater public awareness and empowerment.

For BBC interviewees, their journalistic mission centred primarily around the following principles:

- To tell the story as well and as fairly as possible, by including context when possible.
- To tell “all sides” of the story.
- To provide balance and impartiality by representing all sides equally.
- To provide objective reporting by accurately establishing and conveying the facts on the ground.
- To operate within a framework of accountability.

In the next chapter, the findings of the empirical chapters are reviewed and discussed in the context of the research questions and the scholarly literature.

CHAPTER TEN: Discussion

10.1 Introduction

The previous two chapters presented the results of the two main empirical strands of this research: the content analysis (Chapter Eight) and the fieldwork interviews (Chapter Nine). These findings offer significant insights into the qualitative and quantitative similarities and differences between AJE and BBC's reporting of the Gaza War of 2008/9, as well as the main news production factors that have shaped them. The results also raise important questions in the context of the research aim and objectives, notably Research Questions 3, 4 and 5:

- How do the empirical findings relate to and inform the scholarly literature and theoretical debates underpinning this thesis?
- What role did the cultural and political context of BBC and AJE journalists, and their professional assumptions and self-conceptions regarding the values and mission of journalism, play in shaping their approach to the coverage of the 2008-9 Gaza War?
- How do the two categories of empirical findings — the content analysis and interview findings — inform and relate to one another?

Each of the above research questions will be addressed in turn in the course of this chapter.

10.2 How the empirical findings relate to the scholarly literature

The content analysis and interview findings confirm and extend many of those of previous studies (presented in Chapters Five and Six) which examined news reporting of the Gaza War of 2008/9, most notably the work of Philo and Berry (2011) and Figenschou (2014). They also come into conflict with other findings, notably those of Gilboa (2012) with regards to AJE's coverage. Whilst it is impossible to review in this chapter every single finding of the research against the scholarly literature, this section presents some of the most important insights produced by the examination.

10.2.1 Content Analysis findings

Sourcing

The content analysis revealed significant imbalances in the extent of BBC coverage — both in TV broadcasts and online — given to Israeli and Palestinian sources, respectively, with Israeli sources receiving three times the coverage given to their Palestinian counterparts in BBC bulletins. This pattern was seen across international broadcast media reporting during OCL,

with an Israeli Foreign Ministry assessment reporting a similar 1-to-3 ratio in favour of Israeli sources, as noted by Shabi (2009):

An Israeli foreign ministry assessment of eight hours of coverage across international broadcast media reported that Israeli representatives got 58 minutes of airtime while the Palestinians got only 19 minutes. (Shabi, *The Guardian* 2 January 2009)

This imbalance between Israeli and Palestinian sources in the BBC's output echoes similar findings in the literature, notably by Ibrahim (2009), Figenschou (2014), Batarfi (1997), Mousa (1984) and Suleiman (1988). The findings also align with those of Deprez and Raeymaeckers (2011) whose study found that the British media "still use Israeli sources more often" than Palestinian ones (Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2011:189).

The sourcing findings also show that the BBC's coverage relied significantly on governmental and official sources, whereas AJE broadly dedicated equal coverage to official and non-official sources. This confirms and extends the conclusions of Figenschou's (2014) 7-day comparative examination of BBC, AJE and CNN coverage of OCL, which found that "the BBC relied most heavily on government officials" while "AJE had greater source diversity" (Figenschou, 2014:133).

Reporting Israeli and Palestinian perspectives

The content analysis findings show that official Israeli perspectives, rationales and defences were well represented in both AJE and BBC coverage, but that they received significantly greater coverage than Palestinian ones in the BBC's output. This dominance of Israeli perspectives in the BBC's OCL reporting was noted by both Philo and Berry (2011) and Figenschou (2014), and broadly echoes the findings of a significant body of scholarly research on Western coverage of earlier conflicts, as reviewed in Chapter Five. The textual analysis conducted in Chapter Eight also shows that most of these qualitative disparities were in evidence across all thematic areas of BBC coverage of the conflict, notably:

- How the human impact of the war was reported.
- Which immediate causes of the conflict were highlighted.
- How the legality dimension was represented, and the extent to which its importance was emphasised to viewers.
- How the conflict was framed in terms of its geopolitical and global significance.
- Which implications of military developments were highlighted.

Across all of these thematic areas, the textual analysis findings show a consistent pattern of the BBC's reporting adopting Israeli themes and rationales (such as "this is an attack on Hamas targets" or "these are surgical strikes"), omitting Palestinian rationales, or adopting thematic or textual choices that were more aligned with official Israeli framings even when reporting both sides, such as by regularly reporting Palestinian casualties alongside Israeli defences of action but not the reverse.

Another finding of the content analysis is that the BBC's coverage was more likely to use declamatory statements to report the Palestinian perspective — such as references to "revenge" and "hellfire" — than it did for Israeli perspectives, which were generally presented in the form of rationales and defences of action. This aligns with similar findings in the literature, for instance those of Hafez (2000) and Shaheen (2014), and provides support for Zaharna's (1995) assertion that in Western reporting Palestinian and Arab statements are often "chosen for their dramatic effect, rather than for adding positive understanding of the Arab position" (Zaharna, 1995: 39).

Overall, these findings echo those of several scholarly examinations of Western news reporting of the Middle East, notably those by Ghareeb (1983), Kressel (1987), Zelizer et al. (2002), Deprez & Raeymaeckers (2011), and Philo & Berry (2004, 2011). They also align with Figenschou's (2014) conclusion, in her review of the scholarship on Western coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict over the past two decades, that "most news media have a tendency to systematically subscribe to the Israeli government's framing of the conflict" (Figenschou, 2014:123). The present research findings suggest this tendency was strongly in evidence in the BBC's coverage of the Gaza War of 2008-9, both online and in its TV bulletins.

At a more fundamental level, examining the research sourcing findings against those of the thematic and textual analyses shows that the thematic and textual patterns of the coverage can often be directly traced to differences in sourcing patterns and choices. The 3-to-1 disparity between Israeli and Palestinian perspectives in BBC bulletins, for instance, mirrors the 3-to-1 ratio of official Israeli and Palestinian sources (whether in terms of appearances or lines of coverage). Analysis of the BBC's online coverage shows a similar disparity, with Israeli officials being quoted or cited more than twice as often as their Palestinian counterparts.

As discussed in Chapter Four, the relationship between sourcing patterns and news output is extensively examined in the scholarly literature. As Hamilton and Lawrence (2010) note, "sourcing practices are prime elements in the construction of narratives and frames in the news"

(Hamilton & Lawrence, 2010: 684). This is especially the case in contexts of conflict reporting where, as Wolfsfeld (1997) argues, dominating the media narrative and the media space itself are the two key axes of winning political media contests.

Contextualisation

Another significant finding of the content analysis is the lack of historical and political contextualisation in the BBC's coverage — both in terms of long-standing themes such as the 1948/1967 wars, the occupation and the refugees, or the immediate causes of the conflict such as the Israeli blockade and the issue of rockets — as well as the dominance of elements of contextualisation favouring Israeli framings and rationales. BBC reporting of the causes of the conflict focused on the threat of tunnels and rockets whereas the Israeli blockade and humanitarian crisis were rarely mentioned. As the Chapter Eight findings show, this applied to both the BBC's TV bulletins and its online coverage.

These findings echo Deprez and Raeymaeckers's (2011) conclusion that Western media “provide only minimal background on the history of the conflict” and even when “contextual data are included in the media coverage, it is mainly the Israeli point of view that is reflected” (Deprez & Raeymaeckers, 2011:189). The findings also align with those of landmark studies by Ghareeb (1983), which found that US reporting offered “no information on the nature of Palestinian claims ... or their situation as refugees” (Ghareeb, 1983:4), and Zelizer et al. (2002), who found major US newspapers' coverage of the second Intifada systemically adopted framings that “simplified the complexities of the events they addressed” and tended to eschew “more complex broader contextual, historical or geo-political explanations” (Zelizer et al., 2002:293-294). Similarly, Ackerman (2001) found several “crucial issues of Israel's ongoing occupation” had been frequently ignored in US coverage of the Second Intifada.

Legality

As argued in Chapter Eight, the legal merits and implications of military action under domestic and international laws constitute an important aspect of understanding conflict, especially when the impact of military actions on civilians is high, as was the case in the Gaza War of 2008/9. As Zelizer (1998:10) notes, “public discussions on appropriate and legitimate war practices are intensified when the atrocities are directed towards civilians.” The content analysis shows that AJE's reporting placed great emphasis on international law as an important dimension for understanding the conflict, both in terms of the scale of coverage dedicated to it, but also in the explicit articulation of the importance of the topic by its reporters. This aligns with Figenschou's

(2014) observation that “AJE repeatedly questioned whether “Operation Cast Lead” was fought in accordance with international law” (Figenschou, 2014:137).

Thematic emphasis and framings

The content analysis findings also show that AJE’s reporting prominently covered military developments and the humanitarian impact, and largely adopted a “War on Gaza” framing which presented the conflict principally as a humanitarian crisis in which an entire civilian population was under attack. This aligns with Figenschou’s own conclusion that AJE’s coverage “primarily emphasized the political development and humanitarian consequences” of OCL, as well as her findings that what she terms “the social aspect of the war” (i.e. the humanitarian impact) and “military developments” were the most prioritised types of AJE coverage (Figenschou, 2014:130).

In contrast, the BBC’s coverage adopted what the researcher terms an “operational” framing, according to which the conflict was portrayed principally from the perspective of Israeli military and political aims and objectives. Within this framing, OCL was largely seen, and reported, as a mission in which Israeli leaders were in a race against time and mounting international pressure to “get the job done”. As shown in the textual analysis in Chapter Eight, the BBC’s reporting was often framed from within this perspective, presenting new developments — such as the prospect of a ground offensive, the escalating humanitarian crisis or international calls for a ceasefire — in terms of how they impacted Israel’s prospects of achieving its military and political aims and objectives.

The content analysis findings show that the BBC coverage of the Gaza War’s geopolitical significance, both in TV bulletins and online, adopted a “War on terror” framing which highlighted “the rise of extremism” in the region or the threat posed to Israel by Islamic countries and actors, notably Iran and Hezbollah. By deploying this ‘War on Terror’ framing, the BBC echoed a central element of the official Israeli Public Relations messaging. As noted by Younge (2009) who argues that “Israeli efforts to sell its bombardment and now invasion of Gaza as a straightforward extension of the war on terror have been fairly blatant” (Younge, *The Guardian*, 5 January 2009).

As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, a significant body of literature examining Western representations of the Middle East, and particularly coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, has highlighted the rise of the “War on Terror” framing as a dominant frame through which Western coverage approached the conflict. This includes notably studies by Norris et al. (2003,

2005), Dunsky (2008), and Deprez and Raeymaeckers (2010). It was also noted by Figenschou (2014):

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the Israeli–Palestinian conflict was increasingly framed as part of the broader struggle against terrorism, and the Israeli assertions of a “war against terror” was internalized and articulated by Western correspondents and anchors. (Figenschou, 2014:124)

World Reactions and Protests

The content analysis findings show that the BBC’s TV coverage of international protests, especially those taking place in the UK, often under-reported the protesters’ demands and grievances, or failed to provide elements of context that can help viewers understand them, and instead focused on the protests as ‘public disorder’ events. These findings echo those of several landmark examinations of protest reporting in the UK and the US, notably those by Gitlin (1980, 1992, 2003) and Halloran et al. (1970). The research findings also align with those of Figenschou (2014) who identifies an “Anglo-American news channels’ muting of popular protest” which, she notes, “corresponds with the systematic marginalization of protest movements by mainstream Western media” (Figenschou, 2014:131-132). As shown in the textual analysis in Chapter Eight, the BBC’s reporting of protests in the Middle East regularly invoked themes such as those of ‘Arab rage’ or ‘Islamic extremism’, a tendency frequently highlighted by Edward Said (1978, 1981, 2003) and others in examinations of Western coverage of the Middle East. Speaking in 1986 at a debate entitled ‘Scholars, Media, and the Middle East’, Said argued that Western reporting of the Middle East was largely restricted to “a small handful of essential thematic clusters”. The six clusters as identified by Said are:

- “The pervasive presence of generally Middle Eastern, more particularly Arab and/or Islamic, terrorism ... ‘Terrorism’ here is most often characterized as congenital, not as having any foundation in grievances, prior violence, or continuing conflicts.”
- “The rise of Islamic and Muslim fundamentalism ...”
- “The Middle East as a place whose violent and incomprehensible events are routinely referred back to a distant past full of “ancient” tribal, religious, or ethnic hatreds.”
- “The Middle East as a contested site in which “our” side is represented by the civilized and democratic West, the United States, and Israel...”

— “The Middle East as the locale for the re-emergence of a virulent quasi-European (i.e., Nazi) type of anti-Semitism.”

— “The Middle East as the *fons et origo*, the hatching ground, of the gratuitous evils of the PLO ... The basic message is that, if they exist at all, the Palestinians are both marginal and entirely to blame for their misfortunes.” (Said, 2004: 295) [Author’s italics]

By replacing the reference to the ‘PLO’ with ‘ Hamas’ in the sixth cluster, Edward Said’s list aligns remarkably well with many of the content analysis findings relating to the BBC’s coverage of OCL (as reviewed above and discussed in detail in Chapter Eight).

10.2.2 Interview findings

Superiority of Israeli PR and Lobbying

Most of the key production factors highlighted in the literature survey in Chapter Five (e.g. Ghareeb, 1983; Zelizer et al., 2002), such as the effectiveness of Israeli Lobbying and PR, the impact of Israeli military censorship, the logistical pressures of ‘ready-made scripts’ and ‘events-oriented journalism’, and the impact of political and cultural biases on journalistic approaches, have been invoked by the interviewees for this research, particularly in relation to the BBC’s coverage of OCL. They also align with Figenschou’s (2014) assessment that:

The Gaza War (2008–9) was a particularly challenging war to cover, due to the deep controversies; sensitivities and complexity that characterize the Israeli–Palestinian conflict; the active lobby groups and competing interests on national, regional and global stages; the asymmetry between the Israeli forces (the IDF) and Hamas; the journalists’ limited access to the battlefield and the political spin from Israel and Hamas officials. (Figenschou, 2014:136)

The Israeli government placed great importance on winning the media battle by seeking to shape the international media discourse around the conflict through the INID’s extensive public relations effort. As noted by Shabi (2009):

Israel’s war on Gaza was the first time we saw the “hasbara” directive in action. A body set up to spin (or “explain”, if you like) the country’s justifications for the war, it tightly coordinated key messages and worked on so many levels – mainstream media as well as diplomatic channels, friendship leagues, YouTube, Twitter and the blogosphere –

that the effect was epidemic. It got world media repeating the Israeli government's core messages practically verbatim. (Shabi, *The Guardian* 10 January 2009)

At a 2011 talk discussing the media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, Greg Philo described how the Israeli public relations effort sought to shape international media news coverage. Philo described the 'Israeli Project', a Public Relations manual used by Israeli representatives and supporters, which was designed:

... to provide and test the exact words that international audiences are to hear about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict... And what we found fascinating was that when you actually check the exact words which they have actually said ... "Now we want peace", " Hamas are the terrorists", exactly what you hear again and again and again in the news. And what's interesting is when we tested these ourselves, when we looked at the words in the news we found that the words in the TV mirrored exactly... the words in the Israel project... (Philo, *Media Coverage of the Israeli/Palestinian Conflict*, SOAS, London, 19/5/2011)

As discussed in the previous chapter, Israel's Public Relations superiority was highlighted by several interviewees for this research as being key to the dominance of Israeli perspectives and themes in international media coverage. The impact of the greater availability of Israeli officials to international media during OCL and the superiority of Israeli PR was noted by Figenschou (2014):

Overall, the Israeli officials were interviewed more frequently than their Palestinian counterparts, and they were also more frequently invited into the studio or interviewed at greater length, most probably reflecting the availability of official Israeli spokespeople, the resources devoted to influencing the international media, and the highly professional Israeli information campaign. (Figenschou, 2014:134-135)

The superiority of pro-Israel lobbying, and the absence or inadequacy of pro-Palestinian efforts, was also highlighted by interviewees for this research as a key factor explaining the dominance of Israeli perspectives and framings in Western coverage of the conflict. This echoes the findings of several scholarly examinations, notably those by Philo and Berry (2004, 2011) and Mearsheimer and Walt (2006). The latter's study of the Israel lobby in the US devoted considerable attention to the importance of the media in the battle to dominate public discourse. As they note:

... To discourage unfavourable reporting, the [pro-Israel] Lobby organises letter-writing campaigns, demonstrations and boycotts of news outlets whose content it considers anti-Israel. One CNN executive has said that he sometimes gets 6000 email messages in a single day complaining about a story. (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2006, 172)

In the UK, Pro-Israel lobbying efforts were examined by journalist Peter Osborne in his 2009 documentary, 'Britain's Israel Lobby', in which he noted how such lobbying sought to shape British political (and, by extension, media) discourse, including aspects such as terminological choices, around the Israel-Palestine conflict. For instance, Osborne highlights one such example of lobbying during the Gaza War 2008/9:

The director of CFI⁵⁸, Stewart Pollack, had a meeting with David Cameron at which it was understood that terms such as 'disproportionate' are not the sort that conservatives should use to describe Israeli military action. (Peter Osborne, Dispatches – 'Inside Britain's Israel Lobby', 2009, Channel 4)

Several of those interviewed for this research highlighted the weakness of Hamas's Public relations and communications efforts during OCL. This was also noted by Figenschou who found that "Hamas did not seem to have a well-organized information campaign" (Figenschou, 2014:134).

Israel's media ban and AJE's extensive presence in Gaza

The interview findings have also highlighted Israel's media ban on international media, including the BBC, as a key factor impacting international media coverage. AJE interviewees placed great emphasis on their own network's extensive presence in Gaza as a significant factor differentiating AJE's coverage from that of rival networks. This assessment is shared by Figenschou, who found that the media ban "complicated [the BBC's] access to Hamas' sources" (Figenschou, 2014:134), whilst also noting that "first and foremost, it was [AJE's] presence inside Gaza, in addition to its extensive presence in Israel, the West Bank and throughout the region that set the ground for a different coverage" (Figenschou, 2014:136). AJE's on the ground presence in Gaza was also highlighted by Bauer (2009) as crucial to its distinctive coverage:

⁵⁸ The Conservative Friends of Israel.

While others can only balance pundits with more pundits, Al Jazeera has been taking the viewer to the scene to weigh the words of politicians against the reality on the ground. (Bauer, 2009).

Several interviewees, notably the BBC's Middle East editor, Jeremy Bowen, commented on Israel's key motivations for imposing the media ban. Their responses largely echo those identified by Will Ward, managing editor of 'Arab Media & Society', who notes:

This throttling of the information supply was clearly designed to leave more space for Israel's government and media to supply the facts of the conflict. Also, no journalists means no journalist casualties, and thus one fewer pressure group arrayed against Israel in the court of world public opinion. In addition, holding reporters at bay just over the borders would leave them positioned to report stories favourable to Israeli framing – the smuggling tunnels under the Egyptian border and the steady stream of rockets falling on southern Israel. (Ward, 2009)

The content analysis findings suggest that the ban was effective to a significant extent in this regard. This conclusion echoes the assessment of Guardian Middle East correspondent Chris McGreal, who noted "... [the ban] has worked to Israel's advantage by forcing a greater focus on Israel's perspectives" (*The Guardian*, 10 January 2009). This view was shared by Israeli political and military leaders themselves during OCL. In his piece, McGreal quotes Danny Seaman, the head of Israel's government press office, who stated:

... for the first time, when Israel raised questions, journalists had to address these issues and not get caught in feeding frenzy of reporting the story. (*The Guardian*, 10 January 2009)

As discussed in the previous chapter, many interviewees for this research acknowledged the role political pressure played in shaping media coverage, yet none of them found their own reporting was affected by such political or institutional pressures or any kind of bias. Instead, both AJE and BBC interviewees strongly insisted that their own work, and institutions, enjoyed complete political editorial independence. This echoes similar findings by Barkho, who interviewed Al-Jazeera staff in the wake of the Gaza War 2008/9 and encountered similar responses:

During my 2-week stay at both AJA and AJE, editors would boast of their editorial independence and how the political order financing the network steers away from

meddling in their editorial business of dos and don'ts is theirs and the Qatari royals have nothing to do with it. (2010:109)

The findings also align with Ibrahim's (2009:52) assessment that Western journalists reporting on the Middle East were reluctant to admit to the presence of bias in their own institutions even when they admitted to its impact elsewhere.

10.3 AJE and BBC's coverage of OCL: Two journalistic philosophies?

Exploring AJE and BBC's journalistic self-conceptions

In conducting interviews with current and former AJE and BBC journalists, key differences emerged in how each viewed the function and values of journalism. While both BBC and AJE interviewees expressed strong beliefs in journalistic values and norms, notably 'objectivity', 'balance' and 'professionalism', there were differences in their conceptions of what these notions meant and how they were to be interpreted and applied in practice. There were also disagreements over what the function of journalists, and journalism, was in a context of reporting conflict — whether in general or in relation to the Gaza War of 2008/9. Notably, as shown in the previous chapter, AJE interviewees were far more likely to frame their journalistic work explicitly within broader moral and ethical terms, and to relate it to a wider political outlook and principles. In contrast, BBC journalists generally presented the role of journalism almost exclusively in abstract terms rooted in professional norms and standards which eschewed explicitly moral or ethical language.

As revealed in the previous chapter, a notable difference between AJE and BBC interviewees was the extent to which they viewed journalism, particularly conflict journalism, as an agent of societal and political change. While none of the BBC and AJE interviewees believed it was the role of journalists who report on situations of war, conflict and human suffering to help "change things" for the better, AJE interviewees were more willing to see their journalistic mission as part of a broader societal, civil and political endeavour, through the empowerment of ordinary people and raising public understanding of the world and its realities. However, as many of the responses made clear, AJE interviewees did not believe this meant their journalism should serve a partisan or campaigning function, and insisted on their professional commitment to values such as journalistic accuracy, fairness and objectivity.

From journalistic values to journalistic practices

Examining the research findings can also help reveal how different conceptions of the role and values of journalism can translate into very different interpretations of journalistic practices. For instance, while both BBC and AJE interviewees insisted on “presenting both sides” as being core to their journalistic mission, BBC interviewees saw this as principally being a matter of conveying to the viewers the claims of each side in a way that was ‘balanced’ and ‘impartial’. AJE journalists, however, articulated this ideal not as a passive act of transmitting information from sources to audiences, but as a process involving active scrutiny of, and engagement with, the claims of all sides, in which the journalist does not simply report what was being said but deploys their own access to the “reality on the ground”, as well as their understanding of the moral and political context, to test and contest these claims before presenting them to audiences. As such, for AJE interviewees what matters most is how the claims relate to “the reality on the ground” as they see it, including the political and moral context, whereas for BBC journalists the priority is that all competing views are presented to viewers ‘objectively’ by maintaining ‘balance’, ‘neutrality’ and ‘impartiality’.

AJE journalists’ adherence to values such as ‘neutrality’, ‘impartiality’ and ‘balance’ was thus often framed within broader moral and political imperatives. As a result, and as highlighted in the previous chapter, whilst all AJE interviewees endorsed these values in principle there was also strong criticism, articulated most notably by Sherin Tadros, of how these values were traditionally understood and applied in Western coverage. Indeed, Tadros explicitly places her criticism of the Western notion of ‘balance’ in the context of her belief that journalism should not be blind to moral and political realities, notably power disparities in situations of asymmetrical conflict. For Tadros and other AJE interviewees, values such as ‘neutrality’ and ‘balance’ could not be meaningfully understood or applied without taking into account the moral and political context of the reality being reported. This explicit articulation of a political and moral lens through which to understand, interpret and apply journalistic values is arguably the most significant difference between the journalistic self-conceptions of BBC and AJE journalists revealed by the interviews.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that this is not to suggest that BBC journalists did not apply moral or ethical lenses when interpreting and applying their own journalistic values. Just because a journalist does not explicitly reference moral or ethical considerations, or a broader political or ideological outlook, as shaping their journalistic self-conception, does not mean political, ideological, moral, or ethical assumptions do not influence their journalistic work. As the scholarly literature on news production reviewed in Chapter Four highlights, ideology —

defined as an “interest-linked perspective” (Philo, 2007:178) — is often central in shaping news output even when it operates in subtle, undeclared or even unconscious ways.

This is especially the case in contexts of journalistic institutions, such as the BBC and AJE, with an inherently close relationship with an official state apparatus and institutions. As Philo notes, there is always tension between the claims of objectivity and balance offered by broadcasters and journalists, and their tendency to produce output that is “skewed in favour of the powerful” (Philo, 2007:181). Whether at the BBC or AJE, therefore, it can be argued that how journalists viewed their journalistic norms, ideals and mission is inextricably linked to their broader political and moral outlook and principles, whether explicitly stated or otherwise.

The role of political and institutional self-conceptions:

As discussed in Chapter Four, there is a growing body of scholarly literature, including Harb (2008, 2011, 2017), Pintak (2011), Obijofor and Hanusch (2011), Weaver (1998a, 1998b, 2012) and others, concerned with how journalistic self-conceptions and editorial approaches may vary across cultural, political or geographical contexts. In particular, the research findings raise the question of how the political, cultural, organisational and institutional contexts of AJE and BBC impacted their respective journalists’ reporting of the Gaza War 2008/9. As highlighted throughout this thesis, notably in Chapters Four, Five and Six, institutional self-conceptions — how media organisations such as the BBC and AJE see their political and cultural status and role — play a crucial part in shaping how individual journalists view their own professional roles and values. As discussed in Chapter Six, both AJE and BBC have quite distinct institutional cultures that prize values such as institutional independence, professionalism and objectivity, yet both have also been shaped to a significant degree by the cultural, political and ideological context in which they operate. Headquartered in Qatar, and with a core audience based in the Middle East but also extending to the Global South, Al-Jazeera English’s editorial vision has been, from the outset, based around its status as a non-Western news organisation “reversing the flow” of news from the South to the North. For its part, the BBC’s editorial vision, which explicitly centres its political independence, nevertheless is inherently entwined with the ideological and political context of British official policies, as noted by Schlesinger (1978), Mills (2016) and others.

Both AJE and BBC interviewees often described their own understanding of journalism’s role and values by referring to the institutional values and mottos of their respective organisations. AJE interviewees thus referenced corporate mottos such as “voice of the global south”, while

BBC journalists frequently echoed key BBC values such as ‘impartiality’ and ‘balance’. As discussed in Chapter Six, the BBC’s cultural and institutional history, and its status as an official elite institution and an integral component of the British political and cultural establishment, have arguably led to its journalists seeing themselves as custodians of professional journalistic ethos and standards. The research findings suggest this self-conception may have manifested itself in a more deferential attitude towards official elite views and sources. This prioritisation of official views was not only noted in the literature (Aitken, 2007; Figenschou, 2014; Mills, 2016; Schlesinger, 1978, 1987) but was articulated explicitly by one of the BBC’s interviewees, Richard Sambrook, who stated that the BBC “tends to favour formal diplomatic and political perspectives”. The content analysis findings offer strong support for this, not only in terms of the dominance of official sources in the BBC’s coverage but also its adoption of official framings. For instance, the adoption of the official Israeli conception of the Gaza War as an operation, a mission, a “job to get done” throughout the BBC’s coverage, as discussed in Chapter Eight, could be understood in the context of a tendency to align with official or dominant parties and narratives. As such, it may be argued that in a confrontation pitting an official Israeli state, on the one hand, and a largely fragmented, informal and unstructured Palestinian polity, on the other, the BBC’s institutional instincts may have produced a more reflexive alignment with the former. As discussed in the previous chapter, the interview findings offer some support for the argument that this institutional self-conception may have also led to an insular and defensive approach to outside criticism within the BBC, especially from non-official or independent quarters.

For their part, AJE interviewees often saw and described themselves as outsiders operating outside the mainstream of Western coverage. This was often framed explicitly through references to AJE’s institutional mission as challenging and countering the hegemonic Western narrative of western political elites and media organisations. The findings of the content analysis suggest that this may have contributed to AJE reporters’ willingness to be regularly and explicitly sceptical of Israeli and Western sources in a way that was largely absent in the BBC’s reporting which rarely featured explicit scepticism or criticism of official Israeli or Western sources, and — as the content analysis findings show — often uncritically adopted official Israeli framings, rationales and terminologies.

In light of the above, how did the BBC and AJE’s distinct institutional and journalistic self-conceptions manifest themselves in their respective coverage of the Gaza War of 2008/9 as revealed by the content analysis findings? As discussed earlier in this chapter, the research

findings suggest that for BBC interviewees, the primary emphasis of their journalism was to report 'objectively' by ensuring 'balance', 'neutrality' and 'impartiality', whether for AJE journalists their mission was to report objectively on the 'reality on the ground' as they see it whilst taking into account the political and moral context as they understand it. These might seem like convergent rather than divergent approaches, but the research findings suggest they can lead to markedly different journalistic priorities and practices.

BBC coverage of the Gaza War: A case of 'Decontextualised Balance'?

Examining the content analysis and interview findings, the researcher argues that the BBC journalists' conception of journalistic values such as 'balance' and 'impartiality' significantly contributed to its adoption of what might be termed a "decontextualised balance" approach in its OCL coverage. In particular, the findings suggest that the BBC's emphasis on 'impartiality' and 'balance' resulted in its OCL reporting often prioritising the imperative of representing views and perspectives of 'all sides' at the expense of other journalistic ideals and considerations, such as providing essential contextualisation. Furthermore, the findings suggest that this 'decontextualised balance' approach, and the way in which the notion of 'neutrality' and 'balance' were applied in the BBC's coverage, largely favoured the Israeli narrative and framings. Broadly, this 'decontextualised balance' approach manifested itself through three main effects on the BBC's OCL coverage:

- The adoption of a 'Palestinian casualties-Israeli rationales' template leading to the dominance of Israeli perspectives and the omission or under-reporting of Palestinian ones.
- The absence or inadequacy of historical and political contextualisation, which disproportionately disadvantaged Palestinian perspectives.
- A reluctance to explicitly challenge official Israeli claims when these were contradicted by reality on the ground.

A key manifestation of the BBC's "decontextualised balance" approach is that it led to the adoption of a template by which Palestinian casualties were 'balanced' by Israeli rationales and defences of action. This led to one of the main failings in the BBC's reporting of OCL uncovered by the findings, namely the significant imbalance in the amount of coverage allocated to Israeli and Palestinian perspectives, rationales and defences of actions. Examining the thematic and textual analysis of the BBC's reporting in light of the interview findings shows that the prioritisation of 'balance' may itself be a significant factor behind this disparity. As the findings

in Chapter Eight show, when reporting Palestinian casualties and other examples of humanitarian impact, BBC journalists often accompanied this reporting with Israeli rationales and defences of action. Several BBC interviewees presented this as an attempt to provide editorial 'balance'. And yet, in pursuing this approach, BBC reports inevitably ended up adopting a template where the daily updates of Palestinian casualties were accompanied by Israeli rationales and defences of action but omitted the Palestinians' own arguments. Chapter Eight documents numerous instances of this pattern, but it is worth revisiting the following examples, where the reporting of Palestinian casualties implicitly endorses the Israeli defence of action:

BBC Newscaster, London: ... More than 400 people have now died in six days of attacks against Hamas targets. (BBC, 1 January 2009)

BBC Newscaster, London: ... Seven days after the start of the conflict, Israel has continued to bomb Hamas targets in Gaza. More than 400 Palestinians have been killed... (BBC, 2 January 2009)

Taking into account this template, and with Palestinian casualties during OCL outnumbering Israeli ones by a factor of more than a hundred to one, it is perhaps unsurprising that BBC reporting ended up with Israeli perspectives outnumbering Palestinian ones by a factor of three to one. In this regard, it is worth revisiting one of the interview responses, presented in the previous chapter, by Richard Sambrook, former BBC Head of Global Output:

... if anything I have observed a tendency to sympathise more with the Palestinian cause on humanitarian grounds. If there was any "rebalancing" of coverage required it was nearly always in my time attempting to put the Israeli case rather than the opposite simply because journalists, especially led by pictures, often favour the victims of violence. (Interview with Sambrook, 1 September 2020)

Sambrook's comment suggests a conception of journalistic balance that considers "putting the Israeli case" as being the counter-balancing counterpart to "sympathy with the Palestinian cause on Humanitarian grounds." This conception strongly aligns with the "Palestinian humanitarian impact - Israel rationales" template identified in the content analysis findings. It is of course possible that this is a much stronger interpretation of Sambrook's comment than he intended, but even when considered loosely, his pairing of 'the Israeli case' with 'sympathy for the Palestinian cause' seems significant in the context of the content analysis findings.

Another effect of the BBC's 'decontextualised balance' approach is the lack of contextualisation across all thematic areas of BBC coverage, as shown in the content analysis findings. As suggested by several interview responses, when the editorial choice is between providing historical or political context, or offering an Israeli defence of action to accompany a report of Palestinian casualties and suffering, the BBC's emphasis on 'balance' generally resulted in the latter option being adopted. Considering the average BBC News OCL segment is shorter than four minutes, the result is that historical and political context is often diluted or sacrificed altogether. As shown by the content analysis findings in Chapter Eight, this pattern was observed throughout all thematic areas of BBC coverage.

However, it is important to note that the content findings suggest this lack of contextualisation is not solely the result of logistical constraints, as some of the BBC interviewees suggest. This is most clearly evidenced by the BBC online coverage analysis findings, which show that historical and political contextualisation accounted for an even smaller proportion of the BBC's online coverage (6.6%) than it did in the TV coverage (8.8%). Out of the 76 BBC online articles published during the 22-day conflict, only 9 mentioned the issue of refugees, while only a single article referenced the 1948 war.

Moreover, when elements of context were provided in the BBC's online coverage, this tended to be in favour of the Israeli perspective. For instance, whereas rockets were mentioned in more than 90% of the articles, only a third carried any references to the Israeli blockade. Another notable example is underground tunnels, which were 15 times more likely to be mentioned in the BBC's online coverage in relation to weapons smuggling than as a lifeline for Gazans. Indeed, the BBC's online coverage featured more mentions of the word "Iran" (22) than the word "occupation" (18), and more mentions of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah (10) than the 1967 war (9).

It is important to note that this lack of contextualisation not only impacts the audience's understanding of the conflict, but disproportionately disadvantages the Palestinian perspective. This is because most of the key themes and rationales of the Palestinian narrative — such as the right to self-determination, the right to resist Israel's occupation, the impact of the blockade and the humanitarian crisis— are fundamentally based on an understanding of often decades-long historical and political grievances, such as the events of the 1948 'Nakba', the refugee problem, and Israel's military occupation of the West Bank and Gaza since 1967 (as presented in Chapters Two and Three).

A third main effect of the BBC's 'decontextualised balance' conception is a reluctance to explicitly articulate the contradictions between the realities on the ground, even those reported by BBC journalists themselves, on the one hand, and official Israeli claims and rationales. For instance, unlike their AJE counterparts, BBC reporters generally did not explicitly state that the high civilian toll of Israeli attacks undermined or contradicted Israel's official "surgical" strike claims.

As such, by significantly stripping away key elements of historical and political context, the conflict largely becomes a decontextualised 'cycle of violence' narrative, in which violence seems largely intractable and the roots and causes of the conflict become very hard to untangle for viewers. By adopting a template whereby Palestinian casualties and suffering are often 'balanced' with Israeli rationales and justifications, the Palestinian narrative is further disadvantaged, leading to reporting in which Israeli perspectives receive far greater coverage than Palestinian ones.

Some of the interviewees presented the BBC's emphasis on 'balance' as the result of institutional pressures within the organisation to protect the BBC 'brand', of which 'impartiality' is a key pillar. This analysis is echoed by McCurdy and Engelbert (2012), who argue that the DEC appeal decision during OCL primarily stemmed from a drive to protect what they term "the core of the BBC brand", namely "its journalistic impartiality":

[The BBC has] a track record of approving Disaster's Emergency Committee DEC appeals for victims of conflict yet, in this instance, maintaining the core of the BBC's brand, its journalistic impartiality (both real and perceived) took precedence. (McCurdy and Engelbert, 2012).

As noted in the previous chapter, many BBC interviewees also referenced the criticism the BBC receives from both Israelis and Palestinians, which they suggested was the result of adopting a position of 'impartiality'. As such, the BBC's "decontextualised balance" approach seems to be based on conceptions of "balance", "neutrality" and "impartiality" that effectively favour the framings of the dominant party, in this case the official Israeli narrative. This can be interpreted, as some interview responses suggest, as the result of external pressures translating into the organisation's internal, and internalised, interpretation of the journalistic mission. It is here important to revisit Schlesinger's criticism of the BBC's claims of impartiality:

The concept of impartiality summarizes the practical and cognitive limits faced by the BBC's personnel in producing news and current affairs programmes. Officially, the BBC's news output is value-free, which means that those who produce it, in their

capacities as producers must somehow appear to be free from the influence of values concerning matters in dispute. (Schlesinger, 1987:203-204)

Indeed, in light of the research findings, it is easy to see how an organisation facing constant and intensive lobbying would come to see “balance”, “neutrality” and “impartiality” as its most important editorial imperatives. As several interviewees have argued, when BBC reporters know that any reporting of Palestinian suffering and casualties is likely to elicit Israeli criticisms, this can translate into a tendency to seek to pre-empt such criticisms, in the name of ensuring ‘balance’, by routinely appending Israeli rationales and defences in their reporting of Palestinian casualties, even if it means that other important aspects of the coverage, such as the Palestinians’ own rationales or elements of historical contextualisation, end up being underrepresented or missing altogether.

This analysis, whereby Palestinian casualties and Israeli rationales are covered but Palestinian rationales and historical contextualisation are not, is echoed by Philo (2012) who, in his examination of the failures of British news coverage of the Gaza War, argues that the lack of historical contextualisation often reflects political considerations rather than logistical considerations:

It does not take long to include such information, but to do so in the climate which journalists currently work is to risk controversy. So, in practice what happened is that journalists stayed on the most secure ground by focusing on civilian casualties. (Philo, 2012:159)

Philo’s observation aligns with the findings of this research, including those of the BBC online coverage. If, as most BBC interviewees suggest, the principal reason for the absence or inadequacy of historical contextualisation in the BBC’s coverage is the severe time constraints imposed by the TV broadcast format, then one would expect the BBC’s online coverage, which does not face such constraints, to feature greater contextualisation. And yet, as the content analysis findings show, the reverse is true, and the BBC News online coverage dedicated an even smaller proportion of its coverage (6.6%) to historical and political contextualisation than that in its broadcast coverage (8.8%).

Overall, the research findings show that because of this lack of historical and political contextualisation, substantive fundamental political questions at the heart of the conflict, from history to legality, are largely absent from the BBC’s day-to-day coverage. Instead, the coverage ended up largely offering a decontextualised account presenting a daily ‘cycle of

violence' that seems almost abstract and disconnected from any specific political or historical causes or grievances. Tim Llewellyn's comment in his interview that institutional pressures have led to the BBC favouring coverage of the conflict as a "sports event" is a highly resonant one in this regard.

AJE coverage of the Gaza War: An example of 'Contextual Objectivity' in action?

In his study of Al-Jazeera Arabic's coverage of OCL, Ayish (2010) highlights the distinction between AJA's moral and professional points of view — whereby moral opposition to Israeli oppression of the Palestinians is seen as operating in a separate realm from the professional adherence to objective and balanced coverage — as an example of 'contextual objectivity' in action. For Iskandar & El-Nawawy (2004), contextual objectivity addresses "the perpetual tension between the decontextualized message of the news deliverer and the nuanced and coloured perceptions of the receiver of news messages" (Iskandar & El-Nawawy, 2004:321). This approach is illustrated in the following statement by Ahmed Sheikh, Al Jazeera Arabic's editor-in-chief:

When it comes to the conflict in general, we are not so sensitive as they [the BBC and CNN] are because we are not afraid of the Israeli pressure ... [which] made them put that sort of list [special Middle East glossaries] down ... We are not neutral, I am telling you, because we cannot equate between the two, victims [Palestinians] and victimisers [Israel]. (Barkho, 2010:15)

Can Al-Jazeera English's reporting of the 2008-9 Gaza War, as examined in this research, be considered an example of such "contextual objectivity"? The researcher argues that this is not necessarily the case. The interview findings suggest a crucial difference between AJE and AJA's conceptions of journalistic neutrality and objectivity. Most notably, AJE interviewees did not articulate or endorse the delineation between moral and professional outlooks identified by Ayish (2010), and instead presented the two as completely consistent with one another and even mutually reinforcing. The articulation of professional and moral outlooks by AJE interviewees such as Tadros and Minty did not present the two as being in conflict or tension, but rather as informing and drawing upon one another. For instance, the awareness of the asymmetrical nature of the conflict, according to Tadros, informed her journalistic impulse to scrutinise and hold the dominant official public relations narratives to account. Another important articulation of contextual objectivity is offered by Harb (2011) in the following passage

in which she reflects on her experience as a TV news reporter covering the 1996 attack on Qana, Lebanon, by the Israeli military:

... looking back at my performance, I realize that my reporting was affected by the experiences I witnessed at the time. As a journalist I went 'native', in the anthropological and ethnographic sense, and, as anthropologists have come to understand, objectivity and distance are impossible in such a context, where the only truth is that which is positioned or contextual. Impartiality in such circumstances is more difficult to maintain. The 'contextual objectivity' that the Lebanese journalists adopted when covering military incursions by Israeli forces in South Lebanon could relate to war reporting in general – and can be generalized to that. (Harb, 2011:151-152)

Can AJE's reporting during the Gaza War 2008/9, notably that by Sherin Tadros, be seen in a similar light, i.e., as an example of reporters 'going native' and deploying 'contextual objectivity' in the sense Harb describes? Both in her OCL reporting and her interview with the researcher, Sherin Tadros refers to Israeli planes dropping warning leaflets on Gazan civilians who had nowhere to flee as 'psychological warfare', as well as her horrified reaction when she heard about the 'Samouni family' incident (also known as the 'Zeytoun district' incident), during which women and children were left without food or medical help for days by the IDF. This could be interpreted as an example of a reporter 'going native' in the way Harb describes. However, the researcher argues that despite the clear parallels, 'contextual objectivity' in the sense described above does not adequately describe AJE's OCL reporting. In particular, AJE interviewees never articulated the moral and political outlook informing their journalism in relation to their audiences' cultural and political contexts (which Iskandar & El-Nawawy argue is a central tenet of contextual objectivity). Nor did AJE interviewees place their journalistic ideals such as "being a voice for the voiceless" principally in terms of 'identifying' with the marginalised communities they reported on. Instead, AJE interviewees' invocations of their moral and political outlooks were often articulated independently of any notions of affiliation or belonging, aside from a broad "Global South" identity which, in their view, simply gave them greater insight into the realities they were reporting on.

As such, taking Tadros's interview responses and her OCL reporting as a whole, it seems more accurate to view her stance vis-à-vis the Gaza communities amongst whom she operated during the conflict as that of 'morally grounded' or 'morally informed' objectivity, according to which the journalist's professional commitment to objectivity is actively and knowingly interpreted and applied through the lens of moral and political values and principles. Tadros's

plea for a more context-aware conception of ‘fairness’ in the news production process can be seen as an endorsement of what Barkho refers to as a “discursive asymmetry” operating between the Israeli and Palestinian sides, an asymmetry which, both Barkho and Tadros suggest, must be taken into consideration by any reporting that seeks to be both ‘objective’ and ‘impartial’.

In order to illustrate how this ‘morally informed objectivity’ operated in practice during OCL, it is worth examining two of the journalistic ideals most invoked by AJE interviewees: “reporting all sides” and countering government ‘spin’ and official narratives, which place the professional commitment to balance and objectivity within the moral outlook of “holding the powerful to account”. The combination of the two principles can be seen in the content analysis findings, which show that while Israeli officials received equal amounts of coverage to their Palestinian counterparts, Israeli perspectives were often presented within an explicitly sceptical or critical framing, usually by explicitly contrasting them against the on-the-ground realities as reported by AJE correspondents in Gaza. This approach was also noted by Figenschou (2014):

This inclusive, yet critical, sourcing strategy echoed the channel’s aim of inviting “every angle, every side” on air [...] By frequently inviting officials to give interviews and make statements, while placing the official narrative in a very critical context, continuously repeating and reformulating the same critical questions to demonstrate that the officials avoided the issue, AJE’s editorial approach seemed determined to investigate and expose the perceived gap between the Israeli media campaign and the realities on the ground. (Figenschou, 2014:134-135):

Israeli journalist Amira Hass reached a similar conclusion with regards to AJE’s reporting of Israeli officials and perspectives:

As a journalist, I expect the media to pose difficult questions which are not pleasant to Power, and to relate to troubling internal social issues. Of course, during the onslaught on Gaza, the first priority as to show the reality of Gazans under fire, especially that—deliberately or not—Israel had made sure beforehand that hardly any journalists be there. In that sense, Al Jazeera English professionally challenged Israel’s attempts at portraying the attack as something it was not: a war of defense. It exposed the propaganda nature of Israeli electronic reporting. (cited in Merriman, 2012:128)

This “inclusive, yet critical” approach can especially be seen in the textual analysis findings, discussed in the previous chapter, which show for instance that AJE’s anchors and reporters

consistently challenged the public relation dimension of the Israeli official narrative, especially when highlighting the contrast between what official Israeli PR was presenting to western audiences and the reality on the ground. Furthermore, by seeing their mission as objectively reporting the realities of an asymmetrical conflict, and to do so informed by a political and moral outlook, AJE editors and journalists were far more likely to prioritise political, historical and legal contextualisation, and to foreground the humanitarian implications of military and political developments, which is precisely what the content analysis findings show.

AJE staff interviewed for this research rejected the notion of having an explicit “role” of bringing about political or societal change through their journalism, but nevertheless believed that such change would be welcome as an indirect consequence of increased awareness and empowerment elicited by their work. This suggests Pintak’s (2011) assessment that Al-Jazeera’s journalists “saw themselves as agents of democratic change in a region trapped in the grip of autocracies” should be seen in more nuanced terms (Pintak, 2011:40).

AJE vs BBC: Two approaches to journalistic objectivity?

Based on the discussion above, the researcher proposes two representations, illustrated in Figures 10.1 and Figures 10.2 below, to describe the processes through which AJE and BBC journalists’ professional self-conceptions, notably their conception of objectivity, shape their respective editorial approaches, as suggested by the research findings relating to their coverage of the Gaza War 2008-9:

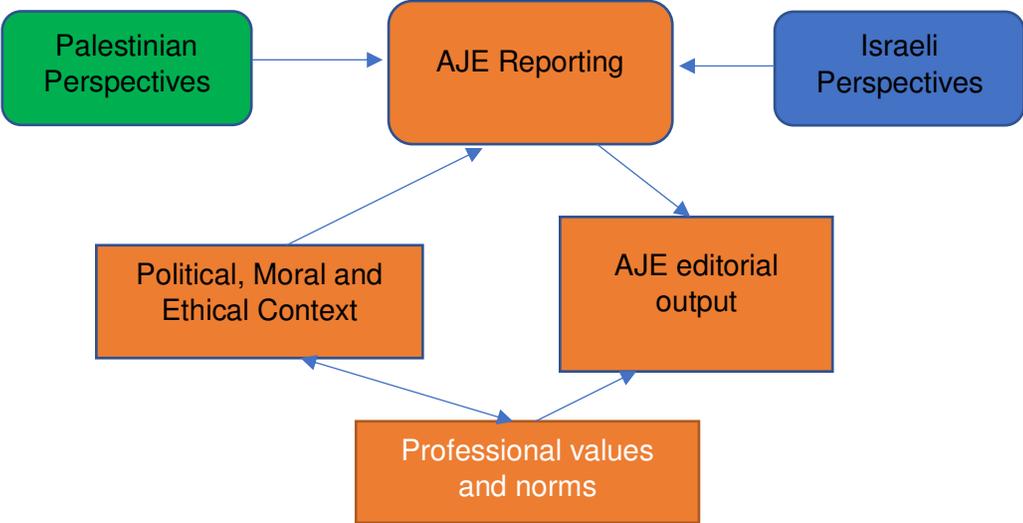


Figure 10. 1 AJE self-conception of the journalistic function

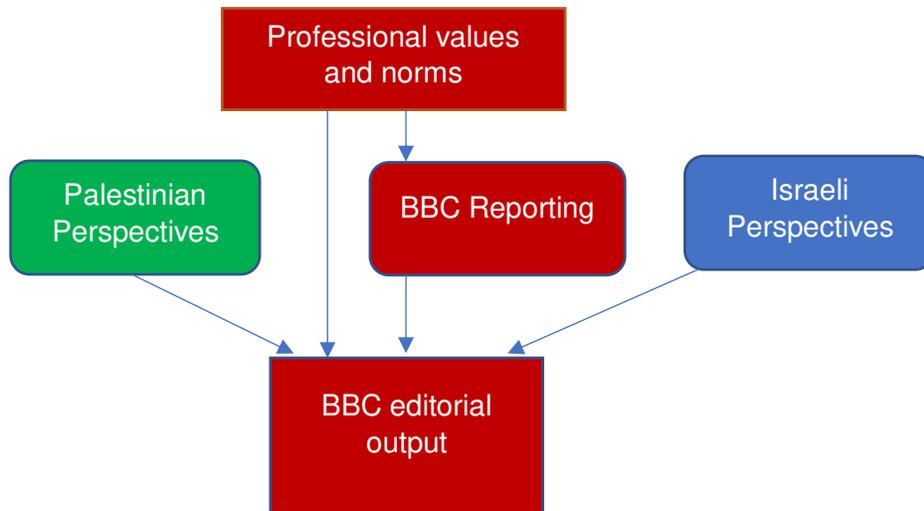


Figure 10. 2 BBC self-conception of the journalistic function

As suggested by the figures above, whilst both AJE and BBC reporting sought to “present all sides” in line with the realities as revealed by on-the-ground reporting, in the case of AJE there is a more explicit filtering of “what the evidence means” through the journalist’s understanding of the moral and political context, whereas in the BBC’s case the main filtering is that of adherence to professional norms and standards. The figures are not intended to suggest these are mechanistic, rigid or unchanging processes or dynamics, but rather to offer the researcher’s interpretation of how the relationship between journalistic self-conceptions and editorial policy can be conceptualised and interpreted in line with the empirical findings.

10.4 How do the content analysis and interview findings relate to one another?

Although the two empirical strands of this research – content analysis and fieldwork interviews – were undertaken to address a common set of research aims and objectives, they were largely carried out independently of one another. To fully understand the research findings, it is thus essential to explore how the content analysis findings inform and elucidate those of the interviews, and vice versa.

At the outset, it is clear that some direct links can be traced fairly easily between several aspects of the news production process uncovered by the interviews and the thematic and textual findings of the content analysis — for instance between Israel’s media ban during OCL and the disparity in the extent of on-the-ground reporting between BBC and AJE coverage. However, what the examination of the findings makes evident is that the relationship between news production factors, on the one hand, and the thematic and structural aspects of news output,

on the other, is far from being a one-to-one linear mapping according to which every production factor can be traced to a content analysis finding. Rather, it is clear that most production factors can be identified as contributing to several thematic and structural patterns of the coverage and, conversely, that every content analysis finding can be traced to several production factors.

In this context, Tables 10.1 and 10.2 below offer an overview of the mapping identified by the researcher between the key production factors revealed by the interviews and the content analysis findings. The tables are not meant to present an exact or comprehensive mapping, but rather an indicative guide to some of the key causal and thematic relationships that can help understand how specific news production factors led to some of the main content analysis findings.

As can be seen from the tables, each production factor is causally linked to several content analysis outcomes, while most content analysis findings can be traced back to more than one production factor.

BBC		
News Production Factor	Consequence	Key impact on BBC coverage (content analysis findings)
Effective Israeli Public Relations	<p>Easy access to Israeli sources.</p> <p>Easy access to Israeli narratives and perspectives (including aims, objectives).</p> <p>Limited access to Palestinian sources.</p>	<p>I/P sourcing imbalance: Much greater coverage dedicated to Israeli sources and perspectives than Palestinian ones.</p>

Weak Palestinian Public Relations	Limited access to Palestinian perspectives.	Emphasis on Israeli aims and objectives.
IDF Media Ban		
Effective Israeli Pressure & Lobbying		
Weak Palestinian Pressure & Lobbying	Criticism of Israel associated with flak.	Reporting OCL through an operational framing (as a “sports event”).
	Criticism of Hamas/Palestinians seen as cost-free.	
BBC Journalistic Self-conception	Prioritisation of reporting “both sides”.	Dominance of “Palestinian casualties + Israeli defences” template. Inadequate or absent historical contextualisation.
	Prioritisation of ‘balance’ and impartiality.	
	Prioritisation of official perspectives.	
Logistical constraints of TV format	Limited time for segments.	
	Weaker access to non-English resources-perspectives.	
Ideological context: Western	Identification with Israelis as Western, pro-democratic (“like us”).	Emphasis on declamatory Palestinian perspectives and underreporting of Palestinian rationales and defences of action.
	Perception of Palestinians and other Muslims as different/‘Other’.	

	Perception of Palestinian-Arab anger/violence as irrational, rooted in hatred/ideology rather than grievances	'War on Terror' framing
Political Context: UK	Foregrounding of UK and US role and views.	

Table 10. 1 A mapping of production factors and content analysis findings for BBC coverage

AJE		
News Production Factor	Consequence	Key impact on AJE coverage (content analysis findings)
Effective Israeli Public Relations Weak Palestinian Public Relations Extensive AJ network in Gaza Hamas in hiding	Easy access to Israeli sources and perspectives. Extensive access to Palestinian sources and perspectives.	Equally strong presence of Israeli and Palestinian sources and perspectives.
Ineffective Israeli Pressure & Lobbying Ineffective Palestinian Pressure & Lobbying	Free to scrutinise and criticise Israeli claims and perspectives. Free to scrutinise and criticise Palestinian	

	claims and perspectives.	Humanitarian crisis framing
AJE Journalistic self-conception	Reporting “Both sides”. Prioritisation of ‘reality’ over balance. Holding official narratives to account. “Using accurate reporting to counter Israeli PR.”	Explicitly sceptical coverage of official Israeli narrative. Resistance framing.
Ideological context: Counter-Western	Perception of OCL as resistance/liberation struggle. Palestinian violence as rooted in legitimate and specific political grievances.	
Political Context: Qatar	Scepticism of role of US, West and Arab states.	Critical framing of US and Arab States.
Logistical considerations	Extensive access to Arabic, Hebrew and English sources and resources.	Significant use of Arabic, Hebrew and English sources.

Table 10. 2 A mapping of production factors and content analysis findings for AJE coverage

10.5 Concluding remarks: Journalistic values and conflict reporting

Engaging with the research findings in the context of the theoretical framework of this research elicits a number of observations. As highlighted throughout this thesis, notably in Chapter Four, the notion of objectivity is central to any understanding of what journalism is and does. It is here useful to recall Street’s (2001) definition of the aims of news reporting, presented in Chapter Four:

News reporting aspires to objectivity, to stating the fact, or it aspires to balance and impartiality in recording competing interpretations of an event, without favouring one view over another. (Street, 2001:18)

Many of the interview responses have highlighted the fundamental tension, epitomised in Street's definition, between ensuring a balanced representation of all parties and viewpoints, on the one hand, and ensuring the coverage adheres to an ideal of objective representation of the world, on the other — a tension which the interviewees have shown is often at the heart of the editorial choices and the dilemmas and complexities they give rise to. It could be argued that AJE and BBC's respective approaches to covering the Gaza War of 2008-9 fall on either side of the two conceptions of news reporting delineated by Street's definition. Whereas AJE journalists prioritised the objectivity of "stating the facts" as they witnessed them on the ground, the BBC's approach prioritised the quest for 'balance', 'impartiality' and 'neutrality', even when this meant "counter-balancing" every report of Palestinian casualties with an Israeli defence of action. Tadros's problematising of 'neutrality', or more precisely, the Western conceptions of the term as she understood them, is highly resonant in this regard, as it sharply delineates the difference between the two approaches. It also evokes a similar comment by AJE's news chief, Ahmed Sheikh, as reported by Pintak (2011), that "reality cannot be neutral". What the findings seem to suggest is that both BBC and AJE journalists agree that "reality is not neutral" but disagree on what the journalistic response should be to this. Whereas AJE journalists suggest that the disparities they observe in their reporting, notably between the powerful and the powerless, should not only be acknowledged and understood from a political and moral perspective but highlighted to viewers, the BBC approach seems to pursue the opposite response: namely that disparities in the observed realities — for instance significant asymmetries in the human toll — need to be "counter-balanced" when presented to viewers in order to ensure the 'balance', 'neutrality' and 'impartiality' of the coverage.

In the context of conflict reporting, especially in asymmetrical conflicts such as the Gaza War of 2008-9, invoking values such as 'neutrality', 'fairness', 'impartiality', and 'balance', should thus prompt important questions for scholars and practitioners alike. Is it "neutral" or "fair" when, as Tadros puts it in her interview, a broadcaster gives 5 minutes each to an Israeli spokesman with perfect English and media training, and a Palestinian official who has neither? And is it the responsibility of the journalist if one of the sides in a conflict is not as capable or well-equipped — for whatever reason — to present its case as others are? In her examination of AJE, BBC

and CNN's editorial approach to their interviews with Israeli and Palestinian officials during OCL, Figenschou notes that:

All three channels asked critical, solid, well-prepared questions addressing the situation for the civilian population. Still, this critical approach only partially challenged the official line simply because most interviewers followed the interview script closely and moved on to the next question, even though the officials frequently circumvented the critical questions. Consequently, professional high-profiled officials were able to talk around the issue rather than addressing the criticism. (Figenschou, 2014:134-135)

As such, Figenschou's observation gives credence to Tadros's scepticism about the merits of a conception of 'neutrality' that gives equal time without taking into consideration the power asymmetries of the context within which the news production and selection processes are taking place. A similar question arises with regard to the notion of journalistic 'balance' and how journalists should interpret it in practice. If, as Richard Sambrook suggests, the BBC has to "counter-balance" a reporter's "humanitarian" sympathy for the "victims of violence" by presenting "the Israeli case", is this interpretation of "impartiality" in the service of the viewer or, as Llewellyn and others suggest, primarily intended to shield the BBC from Israeli criticisms?

What the survey of the literature and the empirical findings of this research both show, however, is that any act of news reporting is, above all, an act of interpretation and, as such, objectivity is not an abstract ideal independent from the realities of the context being reported on. As Anderson et al. (2016) point out:

The reporter can and to some extent must think through, analyze, frame, and interpret—regardless of his or her own wishes about what the evidence should mean. The reporter's first question is what does the evidence actually mean? (Anderson et al., 2016:55-56)

In this context, "what the evidence actually means" to a particular journalist will inherently be linked to their sense of what is significant and, in consequence, is deeply entwined not only with their professional self-conceptions — their understanding of journalism's mission, norms and ideals — but also with their broader moral, ethical and political outlook. Pursuing 'neutrality' and 'balance' in the abstract, the findings of this research seem to suggest, often produces the very imbalances in reporting that these journalistic ideals are intended to address.

Overall, the findings of the research also suggest that many of the issues diagnosed by Ghareeb (1983) and others with regards to Western journalism, as highlighted in Chapters Four and Five, remain relevant and apt more than 40 years later. One example of this is the practice of 'parachute journalism' and the use of Western journalists instead of local ones to report on non-Western locations. As Jeremy Bowen observed in his interview with the researcher, when Israel launched OCL most international correspondents were away for their Christmas holidays, and thus found themselves locked out of Gaza by Israel's media ban. While it seems clear, from the interviews and the wider literature, that Israel sought to use its media restrictions to control the media space and narrative around the conflict, the media ban could arguably have also been an opportunity for the BBC's local team of correspondents, stringers and producers to feature prominently in the BBC's coverage. And yet, as the sourcing findings show, this was not the case. As Figenschou (2014) notes:

The Gaza team published one package from Gaza for World News Today daily but , for reasons unknown to the author, the channel's Gaza team was not profiled in the BBC coverage and not featured as authoritative internal experts, nor was their presence on the ground used extensively in the coverage. (Figenschou, 2014:129-130)

This is a reminder that Western media organisations remain reluctant to fully trust local journalistic knowledge, expertise and professionalism, and suggests the persistence of some of the very practices that were at the centre of the UNESCO debates and the North-South information flow discussed in Chapter Four. It is important to highlight that, in the absence of significant access to details of internal editorial decision making, any attempts to investigate the intellectual, ideological and political contexts within which news coverage is produced are inevitably speculative to an extent. However, the discussion undertaken in this chapter has attempted to highlight some of the key insights revealed or suggested by the empirical findings, in the context of the wider scholarly literature.

For any journalist, reporting on the Middle East is one of the hardest jobs in the profession. It is, as many of the interviewees alluded to, often an impossible task. All of the journalists interviewed for this research are professionals who believe in their mission and try to fulfil it with integrity and honesty. As such, the research suggests that disparities in coverage cannot solely or mainly be ascribed to the practices or views of individual journalists but should be primarily traced to the political, cultural and journalistic spheres and systems they operate within.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: Conclusion

“We are there to observe, to tell, and to give context, and if we do that correctly that is our job done.” — Shereen Tadros, former AJE Gaza correspondent

“We tell a story as best as we can.” — James Rodgers, former BBC Gaza correspondent

This research conducted a comparative examination of news reporting of the Gaza War of 2008/9 (Operation ‘Cast Lead’) by BBC News and Al-Jazeera English, and explored the role of key production factors in shaping the sourcing, thematic, textual and framing patterns of the two channels’ respective coverage. For both AJE and the BBC, reporting the events of the Gaza conflict of 2008/9 has involved navigating a tricky path between the competing claims, narratives and perspectives of Israelis and Palestinians, as well as considerable logistical, political and other pressures and constraints.

The empirical investigation operated along two fronts: on the one hand, by conducting a content analysis of AJE and BBC reporting and, on the other, through fieldwork interviews, in Qatar and Britain, with media professionals and scholars with first-hand knowledge or experience of BBC/AJE media coverage of the Middle East, including of the Gaza War of 2008/9. This chapter offers an overview of the main empirical findings followed by a set of concluding remarks and recommendations.

Content analysis findings: An overview

The research findings revealed notable quantitative and qualitative differences between AJE and BBC’s respective coverage of the conflict — including differences in sourcing choices, thematic emphasis and overall framing. A key finding is the dominance of Israeli sources and themes in the BBC’s reporting, both in its TV bulletins and its online coverage, accounting for three times the amount of coverage given to Palestinian ones. In marked contrast, the content analysis shows that AJE dedicated relatively equal amounts of coverage to Israeli and Palestinian sources and perspectives.

In contrast to AJE, the BBC’s coverage relied significantly more on Governmental sources than non-Governmental ones. Israeli officials were the most represented category of outside sources featured in the BBC’s coverage, whereas the most prominent category on AJE was UN, NGO and international spokespeople and experts.

Another significant finding is that core elements of political and historical contextualisation, such as the occupation and the refugee question, as well as those relating to the causes of the conflict — most crucially the 18-month Israeli blockade and humanitarian crisis — all received significant AJE coverage but were largely absent from the BBC's bulletins as well as its online coverage. When the reporting mentioned historical references, it often lacked the necessary level of detail that would allow viewers to fully understand their significance. Furthermore, when the BBC coverage addressed the causes of the conflict, it did so largely from an Israeli perspective by focusing almost exclusively on the themes of rockets and tunnels as a threat to Israel's security. A further notable finding of the textual analysis is that unlike their BBC counterparts, AJE reporters explicitly articulated to their viewers the significance of the legal, political and historical context as an important part of understanding the conflict and its developments.

The content analysis findings also revealed key differences in overall framing between the two networks, with BBC coverage largely adopting an 'operational' framing which centred Israeli military and political aims and objectives, whereas AJE adopted a 'War on Gaza' or 'humanitarian crisis' framing that placed great emphasis on the humanitarian impact and implications of military developments. When reporting the global or geopolitical dimensions of the conflict, the BBC largely adopted a 'War on Terror' framing that portrayed OCL as part of a wider conflict pitting the West against the forces of radical Islam. Indeed, the BBC's online coverage featured more mentions of the word "Iran" (22) than the word "occupation" (18), and more mentions of the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah (10) than the 1967 war (9). In doing so, the BBC's reporting echoed to a significant degree official Israeli framings, including Israeli themes such as "Israel is fighting a War on Terror" and "Israeli is surrounded by enemies".

For its part, AJE adopted a 'resistance/liberation' framing that presented the conflict as part of an ongoing Palestinian liberation struggle against a decades-long Israeli occupation. Both the BBC and AJE highlighted the role of the international community, particularly the US, as significant players in the conflict. However, AJE was much more explicitly critical of the US and of Arab leaders, echoing to a certain extent the Palestinian narrative. When covering protests, AJE placed great significance on explaining the grievances underpinning the protests, whereas the BBC's reporting often emphasised their 'public disorder' dimension.

Overall, the content analysis findings have highlighted the systemic nature of the disparities affecting the BBC's reporting of OCL, by showing they applied both to its TV and online coverage as well as across all thematic areas of reporting — including reporting of the historical

context, the humanitarian impact, the legal dimension, official world reactions, protests, and military developments. Across every one of these thematic areas, the content analysis findings show, the BBC's reporting, both in TV broadcasts and online, consistently adopted or favoured Israeli framings and perspectives and under-reported Palestinian ones or presented them inadequately. For instance, Israeli perspectives were seven times more likely to be presented in BBC bulletins on their own, without counter-perspectives, than the reverse. Furthermore, Palestinian perspectives were much more likely to be presented in the form of declamatory statements than Israeli ones.

While the content analysis findings show that AJE allocated similar amounts of coverage to Israeli and Palestinian perspectives across all thematic areas of coverage, they also show that AJE generally presented the Israeli perspective within a much more explicitly sceptical framing than their BBC counterparts did, deploying the Al-Jazeera Network's extensive on-the-ground presence in Gaza to question and challenge Israeli official claims, both in its reporting of developments and during interviews with Israeli officials. Although AJE's coverage often endorsed Palestinian themes and terminologies, including terms such as 'resistance' and 'liberation' in its reporting, AJE anchors and reporters also questioned Palestinian actions and claims, notably the moral and political merits of Hamas's military tactics, albeit to a lesser extent than they did Israeli ones.

Interview Findings: Journalism in a global context

The interview findings revealed a number of key production factors as playing a significant part in shaping BBC and AJE coverage of the Gaza War of 2008-9. In particular, interviewees noted the superiority of Israeli PR and lobbying efforts, which contrasted markedly with the absence or weakness of Palestinian ones. In the context of OCL, the impact of the Israeli Information Directorate (INID) was especially highlighted. Another factor noted by interviewees was the restrictions imposed by Israel on international media access to Gaza, which forced the BBC to rely to a greater extent on official Israeli sources, and the significant advantage this gave AJE due to its existing extensive presence in the territory. Other highlighted factors included logistical limitations imposed by the broadcast TV format, as well as other constraints such as the lack of linguistic, cultural or historical expertise.

The interview findings have also revealed important differences in the professional assumptions, and journalistic and institutional self-conceptions, adopted by BBC and AJE journalists, and suggest these significantly shaped their respective coverage of the Gaza War

of 2008-9. While all interviewees explicitly espoused values such as ‘honesty’, ‘fairness’, ‘accuracy’, ‘neutrality’, ‘balance’, ‘objectivity’, ‘impartiality’, and ‘telling all sides’ of the story, the findings suggest clear differences in how these notions were conceptualised and understood to operate in practice by AJE and BBC journalists. Most notably, AJE journalists were much more likely to articulate their conception of journalistic values, norms and mission explicitly within a broader moral or political outlook, whereas BBC journalists generally framed journalistic values strictly in terms of professional or regulatory norms and standards. As discussed in the previous chapter, these differences have been central to the markedly different editorial approaches adopted by the BBC and AJE’s reporting of the Gaza War of 2008/9, and have directly contributed to many of the sourcing, thematic and framing patterns and disparities revealed by the content analysis findings.

For AJE journalists, awareness and acknowledgment of power disparities was an essential condition of objective reporting and should inform the reporter’s editorial approach. In this perspective, “presenting all sides” of the story was not a passive act of ‘neutrally’ reporting to the viewers what each side has said but primarily an exercise in active scrutiny of, and critical engagement with, the rival narratives, especially the official views and ‘spin’ from the parties enjoying dominance in situations of asymmetrical conflict, as was the case in OCL, and deploying the critical and investigatory resources of journalism — above all, first-hand reporting of “what is happening on the ground” — to that purpose.

Concluding Remarks

The researcher argues that AJE’s coverage of OCL was not a strict case of ‘Contextual Objectivity’ as generally defined in the scholarship (Iskander & El-Nawawy, 2004) but more akin to what the researcher terms a “morally informed objectivity”, according to which journalists, whilst adhering to professional norms and standards in reporting facts and perspectives, nevertheless operate within an editorial framework that is explicitly, and at times formally, informed by a specific moral and political outlook rooted in the network’s Global South identity and origins — such as the notion that journalism should hold the powerful to account, should reveal and take into account power asymmetries, and should “give voice to the voiceless” and the marginalised.

For its part, the BBC’s reporting of OCL adopted what the researcher terms a ‘Decontextualised Balance’ approach, according to which the journalistic imperative to adhere to ‘balance’, ‘impartiality’ and ‘neutrality’ was fundamentally in tension with reporting the asymmetrical

aspects of the conflict — such as large disparities in casualties. This ‘decontextualised balance’ approach often translated into editorial choices that placed “presenting both sides” as being a higher journalistic priority than, for instance, that of providing adequate historical or political contextualisation. As the content analysis findings suggest, this approach also manifested itself in the BBC’s reporting regularly defaulting to a ‘Palestinian casualties-Israeli explanatory themes’ template, in which the daily reporting of the human impact on Palestinians was “counter-balanced” with Israeli rationales and defences of action. As the findings show, this resulted in Palestinians’ own rationales and arguments, as well as key elements of historical, political, legal contextualisation, either being absent or significantly under-represented in the BBC’s coverage, whether in its TV bulletins or its online coverage. While the 2006 Thomas panel report found the BBC’s coverage of the Middle East conflict was at times ‘incomplete’ and ‘misleading’, the findings of this research suggest many of the issues it diagnosed were still present, to a significant degree in some cases, in the BBC’s reporting of the Gaza War of 2008/9 three years later.

By confirming or extending a wide array of findings of the scholarly literature, the present research seeks to offer a significant contribution to the scholarship on media reporting and representations of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to the comparative journalism literature, particularly examinations of Western and Non-Western approaches to news reporting. In particular, the findings of the research have highlighted the crucial importance of professional, cultural, and political assumptions and self-conceptions — both at the institutional and individual levels — to media organisations’ editorial approaches. They also highlight the growing challenge to the Western conceptions of journalistic ideals such as ‘objectivity’, ‘balance’, ‘neutrality’ and ‘impartiality’ in non-Western news organisations. As such, the findings add valuable insights to the scholarship on news selection and production in cross-cultural comparative contexts. The findings also confirm the enduring importance of political and logistical production factors such as official public relations efforts, political lobbying and logistical access, language and time constraints, in reporting of conflict. The findings thus contribute to the literature on conflict reporting by showcasing the extent to which attempts by dominant parties to control ‘the information space’ during conflicts can be effective in shaping news coverage.

Recommendations

The findings and conclusions of the present thesis offer numerous opportunities for future research avenues. Most notably, adding an audience survey component to the empirical

research, in line with the classical GMG methodology, which was beyond the scope of this research, could represent a significant addition to the present research findings. Another dimension of analysis that can extend the present research findings is a comparative examination of BBC and AJE online coverage.

One of the key differences between BBC and AJE coverage of the Gaza War was in their deployment of images of the conflict and other visual components. Whilst Al-Jazeera's reporting often featured graphic and uncensored reporting of the casualties, this was deliberately eschewed by BBC reporters (as highlighted in the interviews). Furthermore, the provision of extensive audio-visual content to international media outlets was an important element of Israel's public relations strategy during the conflict. As such, an important direction for extending the present research would be to integrate the visual dimension of the coverage into the analytical framework. An examination of the uses of visual language and framings in the coverage is likely to shed important insights for the scholarship on mediated conflict, especially in the context of Israel's restrictions on international media access to Gaza during OCL.

One of the key frustrations in conducting this research has been the difficulty of accessing BBC material and interviewees. A notable proportion of BBC journalists approached for interviews declined or expressed reluctance to comment publicly on the BBC's reporting. More constructive cooperation between media institutions, especially those with a public service mission, and academic researchers is essential, and there is perhaps a duty on both media scholars and media organisations to find ways of working together more cooperatively. This would produce not only more robust and insightful scholarship but also more informative journalism.

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Appendices

Appendix A: List of Explanatory Themes

The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict		
List of explanatory themes		
	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives
Histories and origins of the conflict	101 Israel achieved independence in 1948	201 Most Palestinians lost their lands/homes in 1948
	102 Israel has been a democracy since 1948	202 Palestinians have been under occupation since 1948/67
	103 Israel ended its occupation of Gaza in 2005	203 Israel still de-facto occupier, controls air, borders, sea
Characterisation of conflict	104 This is a conflict between two armies	204 This is an unequal fight between a state and a population
	105 Western values vs Radical Islam	205 Military power vs human rights
	106 Israeli actions are retaliatory only	206 Israel has been attacking/occupying Gaza for years
	107 Israel's use of force is always in self-defense only	207 Israel's use of force is aggressive/expansionist
Describing Israel	108 Israel is under threat/surrounded by enemies	208 Israel is a regional superpower
	109 Israel is a respectable member of int. community	209 Israel is a rogue state which flouts UN/international law
	110 Israel seeks peace	210 Israel seeks territorial expansion and domination
	111 Israel is fighting a war on terror	211 Israel engages in state terrorism
	112 Israel is a democracy	212 Israel is a discriminatory/apartheid state
Describing Hamas	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives
	113 Hamas is a terror organisation	213 Hamas is a resistance movement
	114 Hamas is an illegitimate political actor	214 Hamas is a democratically-elected legitimate political actor
	115 Hamas's charter makes peace impossible	215 Hamas is moving towards reforms/pragmatism
	116 Hamas is an extension of Iran/Hezbollah/MB	216 Hamas pursues Palestinian interests
	117 Hamas overthrew Fatah by force in 2007	217 Hamas defeated a coup attempt by Fatah
	118 Hamas commit war crimes	
119 Hamas is a threat to Israel's survival		
Describing Palestinians	120 Pal/Hamas actions are terrorism	218 Palestinian actions are resistance/liberation struggle
	121 Pal/Hamas use of force is illegitimate	219 Palestinians have a right to resist Israeli occupation/violence
	122 Pal/Hamas actions motivated by hatred/ideology	220 Palestinian actions motivated by dispossession/injustice
	123 Palestinians harbour an irrational/inherent rage	221 Palestinians have political, economic, humanitarian grievances
Demands	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives
	124 Hamas must stop firing rockets	222 Israel must stop its attack & withdraw its troops
	125 The world must support Israel in its fight	223 The international community must act
Threats	126 We will destroy Hamas	224 The Arab/Muslim states must act
	127 We are achieving our aims/determined to finish	225 We will make Israel pay
Military Claims	128 A ceasefire is premature	226 We are steadfast/resisting/coping with the attack
Ceasefire/peace prospects	129 The world must let us finish the job	227 Yes to a ceasefire but with conditions
The international community		228 International community is doing nothing/it must act
US/West		229 Arabs are doing nothing/The must act
		230 The US is a staunch supporter/enabler of Israel
		231 The US/West shares blame for Israeli actions
Causes of OCL	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives
	301 Israel had no choice	401 Israel declined opportunities for ceasefires
	302 OCL is a war on Hamas	402 OCL is a massacre/collective punishment of Gaza's population
	303 Israel is targeting the infrastructure of terror	403 Israel seeks to destroy Gazan civilian life/infrastructure
	304 Israel seeks to stop the rockets	404 The rockets can stop if blockade is lifted
	305 Israel seeks to stop tunnel weapon-smuggling	405 Gazans rely on tunnels for food, medicine and fuel
	306 Israel seeks to free Gilad Shalit	406 Israel had other options for securing Shalit's release
307 Israel seeks to restore security	407 Israel can restore security by seriously pursuing peace	
Rockets	308 Rockets are a serious threat to Israel	408 Rockets are very crude and ineffective
	309 Crudeness of rockets makes them indiscriminate	409 Palestinians do not have many options
Tunnels	310 Tunnels are used to smuggle weapons	410 Tunnels are largely used for food, fuel and supplies
	311 Tunnels are used to attack Israel	411 Tunnels are a necessary lifeline under the blockade/siege
Israeli defences of OCL actions	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives
	501 Israel has a right to defend itself	601 OCL is an act of aggression
	502 Heavy civilian toll is not intended	602 Heavy civilian toll is deliberate
	503 Israel only strikes military/terror targets	603 Israel routinely attacks civilian targets
	504 Israel tries hard to minimise casualties	604 Israel's priority is minimising risk to its soldiers
	505 Any civilian casualties are mistakes	605 Israel deliberately targets civilians
	506 Israel uses leaflets/SMS to warn civilians	606 Civilians have nowhere to flee
	507 Police stations are military targets	607 Police stations are civilian buildings
	508 Civilian locations are used to launch attacks	608 Hamas does not use civilian locations
	509 Hamas uses human shields	609 Hamas does not use human shields
	510 Hamas places military targets next to civilians	610 Densely-populated civilian areas should not be targeted
	511 Israel's strikes are 'surgical'	611 These strikes often hit civilian targets
	512 Hamas actions to blame for heavy civilian toll	612 Israel is to blame for heavy civilian toll
	513 Israel is a very moral army	613 Israeli soldiers often breach international law
514 Israel is acting within international law	614 Israel is breaching international law	
Immediate causes	Israeli Perspectives	Palestinian Perspectives
	701 Hamas to blame for starting the conflict	702 Israel to blame for starting the conflict
	703 Hamas broke the 2008 ceasefire	704 Israel broke the 2008 ceasefire by Nov 4 attack
	705 Rockets continued during the truce	706 Rockets were reduced by 90% during the truce
	707 Rockets were launched by Hamas during truce	708 Rival groups responsible for rockets during truce
709 Hamas should've stopped rockets to restore truce	710 Israel should've lifted siege to restore truce	
Siege/Blockade	711 The siege is motivated by security concerns	712 The siege is a collective punishment measure
	713 The siege is preventing terrorism	714 The siege is causing a humanitarian crisis/catastrophe

B.2. Coding Manual/Book

Coding manual	
1	IEX Hit Hamas/destroy Hamas infrastructure/security installations
2	ID Protect Israeli citizens from Hamas threat
3	3-hr-lul Allow medical aid & supplies into Gaza /allow foreign nationals leave Gaza
4	WarnC Warn civilians /drop leaflets
5	HumanShields Hamas use civilians as human shields/Hamas hide among civilians
6	RKTS End rockets/restore security/time to fight
7	TNLS Tunnels used for smuggling weapons
8	OBJECT Near to achieving objectives/goals
9	CSFR Reject new ceasefire
10	TEROR Fighting terror/will not allow terror or harm/terror supported by Iran
11	DISVOIC Israeli dissident voices/against Government decision to attack/ believe attack will not bring end to Hamas rockets
12	O Other Israeli statements
13	PEX Israel must stop attack/withdraw its troops/ lift siege to restore truce/duty to defend people
14	PD There is nowhere safe in Gaza
15	Resistance Right to resist the Israeli occupation/rockets will stop when Israel ends its 41-year long occupation
16	OCU People are under occupation/Israel continue to occupy
17	SIE/BLK End siege/blockade/open crossings
18	Liberation Defend their rights to liberation/national cause of liberation and freedom
19	ISFailObj Israeli failed objectives: Israel is defeated/Hamas still able to fire rockets
20	CSFR Ceasefire proposal
21	Conspiracy Arab-Palestinian Authority against Hamas/Arab leaders colluding with Israel against Hamas
22	Decalortory Vow revenge/Israel opened the door of revenge/will face dark destiny/will weep tears of blood
23	DisVoic Palestinian dissident voices: Do not believe rocket attack/solution to occupation
24	O Other Palestinian statements
25	CSFR Egyptian-brokered ceasefire of June 2008/Israel raid of Nov 4th 2008
26	BLKD Siege and blockade imposed by Israel since 2006/07/Israel did not lift the siege during the truce
27	RKTS Increased rocket attacks into Southern Israel in the second half of 2008
28	TNLS Tunnels under Israeli siege provide much needed food and supplies
29	CRISIS Months of commercial and humanitarian embargo resulted in no supplies of food/medicine/running critically low on vital medicines/humanitarian crisis/catastrophe
30	I Elect Israel Elections: Electoral calculations/ Ministers hoping to face the electorate victorious/ bolster their positions ahead of election
31	NewUS New US President: Timing of attack coincides with a new incoming US administration
32	PlanAtk Planned attack: Israel planning for an operation for months
33	ISolHam Hamas not included in peace dialogues/not invited to negotiation tables
34	PalDivi Palestinian Division: deepened divisions among Palestinian factions preventing Palestinians to push for an effective national and international standing
35	Conspiracy Collusion and partnership by certain Arab leaders with the Americans and Israelis against Hamas
36	USdrpPC US dropped peace plan: Peace negotiations ended/failed/George Bush failed/ Israel continued building settlements
37	DetrPow Deterrent power: Israel wants to erase black mark against army's competence in 2006 Lebanon war/ Israelis call that restoring the army's deterrent power
38	FailedDip Failed Diplomacy: Failed Arab/western diplomacy/ineffective Arab position/Arab divide/Arabs not adopting same position/unable to put pressure on the west/little effort by Arab states to stand behind the Palestinians and try push the peace process forward.
39	I-CAS Israeli casualties/injuries
40	RKTS Impact Impact of rockets/destruction/suffering/psychological impact
41	Other Other unspecified
42	P-CAS Palestinian casualties/injuries
43	Pal Imp Humanitarian impact - Damage/destruction to civilian infrastructure/psychological impact
44	PolSt Humanitarian impact - Police station incident
45	SamFam Humanitarian impact - Sammouni Family incident
46	UNCentr Humanitarian impact - UN center incident
47	UNscho Humanitarian impact - UN School
48	WP Humanitarian impact - White Phosphorus incident
49	Mosque Humanitarian impact - Mosque incident
50	MediaBl Humanitarian impact - Media building incident
51	Hospital Humanitarian impact - Hospital incident
52	Other Other unspecified
53	Blm-I Blame Israel/criticise Israeli actions for heavy civilian toll/must stop attack
54	Blm-P Blame Hamas/criticise Hamas actions/must stop rockets
55	BlmBth Blame/criticise both Hamas and Israel actions/both must stop the violence
56	BlmUS Blame/criticise US/staunch supporter, enabler of Israel
57	BlmArb Blame Arab/unhelpful/standing by/too slow to act/not willing to help/ the Arab Muslim states must act
58	Blm Wrld Blame/criticise world leaders for not doing more / International community must act
59	BlmUN Blame/criticise UN/not doing enough/resolutions ineffective as proven in the past
60	CSFR International mediation (Quartet members/France/Arab Governments)/US-Israel MoU
61	PeaCal Reaction to conflict/calls to end violence/end of bloodshed
62	UN Reso UN diplomacy efforts/Draft UN resolution
63	USAbstain US abstained from voting on the UN resolution/declined resolution
64	HmConc UN/world leaders concerned about Humanitarian situation in Gaza/Densley populated areas should not be targeted
65	IgnrUNR UN Security Council resolution calling for a ceasefire ignored
66	Other Other international reaction
67	Why Protests -in support (Palestinians/Gazans)/Condemnation of (Israel/OCL)/Condemning others (International Community, Arab World)/Demanding end of Israeli attack/Support, demands for International Law/Calls to end bloodshed
68	Violence Protests - Violence/Rage of protesters/No explanation of aim or demands of protest
69	OCCP the 1967 and 1973 Arab-Israeli conflicts and Israel's subsequent occupation of the West Bank and Gaza/building illegal settlements
70	BLKD Israel still de-factor occupier, controls air,border,sea/Attacking occupying Gaza for years
71	RKTS Rockets fired into Southern Israel for years
72	RFGS The refugee question
73	1948/67/UN 1948/1967 war/ 1947 UN resolution/lost land/homes in 1948/under occupation since 1948/67
74	Hamas E Hamas democratically-elected legitimate political actor
75	US Peace Initiatives Bill Clinton/ George W. Bush Administration peace initiatives - towards the Arab -Israeli collict
76	Other Other historical accounts
77	OCL Legality of OCL
78	SamFam Samouny Family incident/war crime/investigation
79	UNSch UN school incident/war crime/investigation
80	PlcSts Police station incident/illegal target
81	WP White Phosphorus/illegal weapon
82	Dispr Disproportionate use of force/artillery
83	RKTS rockets fired into Southern Israel/legality
84	HamasWCr Hamas commit war crimes
85	IsraelWCr Israel commit war crimes
86	Other Other accusations/legal arguments/dicussions/commentary
87	Troops Military actions and planning/troop movements/description of operational and logistical aspects/
88	CSFR Prospects of a ceasefire
89	Maccess Israel's media ban on journalists/no access to Gaza/ AJE only broadcaster on the ground
90	WP reporting/analysis and commentary of white phosphorus falling/Israeli military using white phosphorus
91	HPCFSR Commentary about Hamas reacting to ceasefire/conditions
92	IRCSFR Commentary about Israel reacting to ceasefire/conditions
93	Other Other updates
94	M Aid Israel recipient of direct American military aid
95	F Aid US economic aid for Israeli refugee settlements
96	I Lobby Israeli lobby role in US politics/Israeli lobby (gives money/funds) representatives in Capitol Hill
97	USRCSFR US support to Israel/not putting pressure on Israel to accept ceasefire/Israel has the right to protect its people against rockets

Appendix C: Researcher's Sample Interview Questions

The following selection of questions was used to conduct interviews with media scholars and professionals. The list was used as a starting point for interviews rather than a strict template. Not every interviewee received all the questions, due to differences in profile and areas of expertise. In most of the interviews the researcher asked follow-up questions based on the answers and direction of the interview.

1) Questions about production factors and constraints

- Israel imposed a ban on international journalists accessing Gaza for much of the conflict, how much of an impact do you think this has on your coverage?
- What are in your experience the most common challenges of reporting from Israel/Palestine and especially during the Gaza conflict (OCL) in 2008-2009?
- What obstacles, restrictions or constraints did you face in your reporting of Cast Lead?
- In your view, how significant is political lobbying/flak as a factor impacting coverage of the I/P conflict?
- Do you think news coverage can be constrained by a nation's foreign policy and if so can you give me examples?

2) Questions about journalistic self-conception and values

- What, in your view, is the 'role' of journalism?
- What are in your view the most important journalistic values?
- What, in your view/experience, are the main concerns, aims and priorities of news producers/journalists when producing a news story on the Palestinian-Israeli conflict? And what are the principal challenges?
- Do you believe there are key differences in the way western and non-western media organisations report on issues such as the I/P conflict? If so, can you elaborate on what some of these might be?
- Do you think there are significant differences in how western and non-western journalists view their professional roles/missions?

3) Questions about the content analysis findings:

- My analysis shows Israeli sources and perspectives dominated BBC coverage of OCL, why do you think this is the case?
- How important do you think historical context is in reporting the I/P conflict? My research shows that historical and political contextualisation was often lacking from BBC bulletins, what do you think the reasons for this might be?
- My findings show that AJE and BBC adopted different overall framings in their coverage of OCL, why do you think this is?

Appendix D: List of people appearing in BBC and AJE's OCL coverage

List of people appearing in AJE's OCL coverage (per source category)					
AJE reporters	Appearances	Palestinian Spox	Appearances	Palestinian civilian	Appearances
Sherine Tadros	17	Tahir Al-Noono	1	Mohamed Al Katib	1
Ayman Mohyeldin	22	Yasser Abed Rabou	3	Dr Medhat Abbas	1
Jackie Rowland	6	Osama Hamdan	4	Um Mohamed	1
Amr El-Kahky	4	Mahmoud Abbas	2	Hana Baloushy	1
Hoda Abdel Hamid	2	Mona Mansour	1	Dr Raed Al-Alili	1
Dorsa Al-Jabbari	2	Azzam Al-Ahmed	1	Mustafa Othman	1
Noor Odeh	7	Abu Obeida	1	Rema	3
Rula Amin	2	Abu Ahmed	1	Maysoon	2
Imran Khan	3	Abdallah Abdallah	1	Moren Abu Saman	1
Alan Fisher	14	Ahmed Youssef	1	Heba	1
James Bays	5	Medhat Abbas	1	Raed al-ramle	1
Roger Wilkinson	1	Ismail Haniyeh	1	Wafaa al-ramle	1
Marwan Bishara	1	Khalid Mashal	1	Aya	1
Nick Walsh	1	Salah Al Bardawil	1	Mohamed Rawdy	1
Roza Ibragimova	1	Mousa Al Marzouk	1	Natalie Abu Shakre	1
Ghida Fakhry	1	Rafiq Al-Husseini	1	Noha-Gazan	1
Mark Seddon	1	Medhat Abbas	1	Sobhi-Gazan	1
Charles Stradford	1	Total	23	Amal-Gazan	1
John Terret	1	Arab/Pro-Palestinian Spox		Samori Gaza	1
Journalist	2	Hassan Nasrallah	2	Dr Eid	2
Mike Hanna	2	Ahmed Abu Gheit	1	Gazan	1
Hashem Ahelbarra	1	Ramadan Abdullah	1	Gazan	1
Rob Reynolds	1	Abdullah Al Ashal	1	Gazan	1
Mark Kirsch	1	Amr Mousa	1	Gazan	1
Nisreen Al Shamayl	1	Arab Official	1	Gazan Paramedic	1
Total	100	Hosni Mubarak	2	Gazan Widow	1
Experts		Libyan Representative	1	Abu Jihad-Ambula	1
Janet McMahon	1	Total	10	Gazan Paramedic	1
Alastaire Crooke	1	Protesters		Nasra Abdullah	1
Michael Abdel-Masi	1	Demonstrator	1	Nisreen El Madhoc	1
Fares Braizat	1	Omar Odeh	1	Manwan Dian	1
Talal Nizameddin	1	Lubna Al-Ghoul	1	Gazan	1
Hirsh Goodman	1	Palestinian Protester	1	Gazan	1
Dureid Mahasneh	1	Palestinian Protester	1	Imam	1
Curtis Doebbler	1	Total	5	Abu Mohamed	1
Total	8	US voices		Gazan	1
US Spox	Appearances	Mark Baker	1	Gazan	1
Gordon Johndroe	3	Alex Scholes	1	Gazan	1
Hillary Mann	1	Jitters Morgan	1	Gazan	1
Condoleezza Rice	1	Robert Johnston	1	Gazan	1
Michael Bloomberg	1	Total	4	Gazan	1
Robert Serry	1	Israeli civilians		Gazan	1
Aaron Miller	1	Total	9	Gazan Child	1
George Bush	1	Israel Spox	Appearances	Gazan Child	1
Condoleezza Rice	2	Ehud Olmert	2	Gazan aid driver	1
Total	11	Ehud Barak	2	Gazan	1
UK/EU/Quartet		Tzipi Livni	6	Gazan Child	1
Qatar Emir	1	Yair Edri	1	Mohamed	1
International Commr	1	Benjamin Netanyahu	1	Ahmed Samouni	1
Nicola Sarkozy	2	Shimon Peres	2	Mohamed Parame	1
Tony Blair	1	Israeli Official	2	Gazan	1
Evo Morales	1	Avital Leibovich	2	Gazan	1
Total	6	Dan Gillerman	1	Gazan child	1
UN/NGOs spox	Appearances	Daniel Taub	1	Gazan	1
Ban Ki-Moon	4	Mark Regev	1	Jamila Al-Hayashi	1
Maxwell Gaylard	1	Isaac Herzog	1	Dr at Al Shifa Hosp	1
Patricia McPhillips	1	Total	22	Safaa	1
Eric Frosse	2			Gazan	1
UN Representative	1			Patient	1
John Ging	5			Patient	1
Chris Gunnes	3			Maysa Al Khatib	1
Marc Gralasco	1			Gazan	1
Peter Splinter	1			Gazan	1
Hillel Neuer	1			Gazan	1
Miguel D'escoto Brc	2			Gazan	1
Tony Laurence	1			Fares Akram	1
Sigrid Kaag	1			Leila	1
Mads Gilbert	1			Total	71
Sharon - Aid worker	1				
Total	26				

List of people appearing in BBC's OCL coverage (per source category)

BBC reporters	Appearances	Israel Spox	Appearances
Jeremy Bowen	18	Mark Regev	7
Paul Wood	11	Ehud Barak	2
Christian Frazer	4	Tzipi Livni	5
Rushdi Abu-Alouf	4	Meir Sheetrit	1
Katya Adler	3	Ran Gidor	1
Matthew Price	2	Shimon Peres	1
Justin Webb	1	David Siegel	1
Frank Gardner	1	Major Avital Leibovich	1
Barney Chaudry	1	Ehud Olmert	2
John Leyne	1	TOTAL	21
Rob Hall	1	Palestinian Spox	Appearances
Warren Nettleford	1	Khaled Mashal	2
TOTAL	48	Ehab AL Hosein	1
UN/NGOs		Hanan Ashrawi	1
Ban Ki-Moon	2	Mahmud Zahar	1
Mads Gilbert	2	Fauzi Barhoum	1
John Ging	2	Salam Fayyad	1
Katarina Ritz	1	Osama Hamdan	1
TOTAL	7	TOTAL	8
US Spox		Palestinian voices	
Barack Obama	2	Eyewitness	1
George W Bush	1	Palestinian woman	1
Dick Cheney	1	Jawahir Haggi	1
TOTAL	4	Palestinian Resident	1
UK/EU/Quartet		Khaled, Gaza Resident	1
Gordon Brown	2	Palestnian Resident, Gaza	1
TOTAL	2	Bedouin Guide	1
Protesters		Palestinian Woman	1
Tony Benn	2	Miriam Fairs	1
Brian Eno	1	Gaza Civilian	1
Ken Livingstone	1	Ayman Al Hady	1
London Protester	1	Head of Neurosurgery	1
TOTAL	5	Gaza Resident	1
Arab leaders		Mahmud	1
Mohammad Shafiq	1	Dr at Gaza hospital	1
Hassan Nasrallah	1	TOTAL	15
Bashar Al-Assad	1	Israeli voices	
TOTAL	3	Israeli resident	1
		Israeli soldier	1
		Israeli civilian	1
		Israeli soldier	1
		Israeli captain	1
		TOTAL	5

Appendix E: The archival material collection process

AJE archival material content

In July 2011, the researcher emailed Ezzeddine Abdelmoula, Head of Publishing at Al Jazeera Centre for Studies (abdelmoulae@aljazeera.net), to request access to archival material of AJE's coverage of the 2008-09 Gaza Attack. Also included in the email was a request for interviews with AJE journalists and media professionals with direct or close involvement of the coverage. The researcher sent several follow-up emails, but received no response. On 21 September 2011, the researcher posted the requests using AJE's online contact form (available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/contactus/>). A first response was received on 27 November 2011 from Bilal Randeree, a journalist at AJE (creativecommons@aljazeera.net). On 14 December 2011, Bilal Randeree sent an introductory email to Christina Aivaliotis, the Head of Communications & International Relations at Al Jazeera Network (christina.aivaliotis@aljazeera.net), with a request to assist the researcher in obtaining access to AJE footage and interviewees. The researcher sent a follow-up email to Christina Aivaliotis in December 2011, and received a response in January 2012, redirecting the researcher to Ezzeddine Abdelmoula, Head of Publishing. Finally, in February 2012, an email response was received from Ezzeddine Abdelmoula confirming agreement to provide archival material and interview access to AJE journalists and staff. In May 2012, the researcher received an email from Dr. Jamal M. Abdullah, Head of Publishing, Distribution and Relations, at Al Jazeera Centre for Studies (AbdullahJ@aljazeera.net), requesting a copy of the passport to issue the researcher with a gate pass to access AJE offices during the field visit to Qatar. Dr. Jamal also asked the researcher to provide them with a supporting letter from the academic supervisor, Dr Mike Berry, to confirm the academic purpose of the field visit. The researcher subsequently received a second email from Dr. Jamal M. Abdullah requesting a copy of the researcher's CV and student card, which the researcher provided along with a letter from Dr Berry confirming the research topic and the need to collect archival material and conduct interviews with AJE staff. The researcher conducted a field visit the AJE News Centre in Doha, Qatar, between the 20th and 24th May 2012. The research trip was primarily organised for the purpose of obtaining archival video material of AJE's coverage of Operation *Cast Lead*, as well as an opportunity to conduct a number of interviews with key media professionals at AJE.

While the research trip was a week-long, preparations for it took almost an entire calendar year, and involved extensive communication and exchanges to secure the necessary clearances

with AJE management and arranging a suitable timetable for interviews with key relevant AJE media staff and journalists. The researcher spent the first day of the research trip at the Al Jazeera English's Centre for Studies, where Jamal Abdallah, Head of Publishing, Distribution and Relations, introduced the researcher to all working staff at the centre and later provided the researcher with the archival AJE media coverage for the 22-day period of OCL.

Amer Al-Qudah, AJE's Acting Head of Coordination and Follow-up, issued the researcher with a permit to access Al Jazeera English's newsrooms for the duration of the stay. Throughout this period, the researcher was encouraged to move freely within and between departments as well as approach media professionals for informal chats or to arrange formal interviews.

BBC archival material collection

The researcher's preference was to examine the World News Today programme on the BBC News channel for this research, which runs at an hour per edition, as this would have provided a closer comparative equivalent to AJE's NewsHour. Although the researcher was able to secure a handful of the relevant daily editions of World News Today from BBC contacts, requests for digital copies of the programme for the entire 22-day period of OCL were unsuccessful as the content was no longer available on the BBC's online archive. The researcher contacted BBC Studios, the BBC's commercial subsidiary, at bbcstudioslearning@bbc.com with a request for the material. However, commercially purchasing the content proved prohibitively expensive. The researcher asked whether screener copies could be made available for academic purposes but received the following response: "Unfortunately, we do not have any readily available screeners of that content. There may be options on YouTube." However, the researcher was not able to locate any usable copies of World News Today bulletins on YouTube or any other similar platforms (this remains the case as of August 2021).

In this context, the researcher decided to use the BBC's News at Ten bulletins for the comparative content analysis. The archival material for all 22 BBC's *News at Ten* bulletins was requested and obtained from the BBC Motion Gallery. On January 4th, 2013, the researcher emailed the UK sales manager at the BBC Motion Gallery and requested audio-visual recordings of BBC coverage over the 22-day duration of 'Operation Cast Lead'. On 7 January 2013, the researcher received a response from Robin James, BBC UK Sales Manager, who offered to help arrange viewing DVDs of the requested BBC News Bulletins to be loaned to the researcher from the BBC Archive. The loan would involve 22 DVDs, at a cost of £22.50 per

disk. To finally obtain the BBC material the researcher made a payment, through Katherine Fort, of a total of £467.50 + VAT. The DVDs were prepared on 27 February 2013 and were directly delivered to the researcher's home address on 4 March 2013. Three DVDs (representing three days of the BBC's coverage) out of the 22 DVDs did not arrive. On 17 April 2013, the researcher was informed that the missing DVDs were still on loan to another customer. On 26 April 2013, the researcher was informed that new copies of the three missing DVDs will be made and sent directly to the researcher's home address.

The researcher also made queries about interviewing BBC News reporters, and was informed that they would need to write to Mr Jonathan Baker (jonathan.baker@bbc.co.uk) at BBC News for permission. The researcher wrote to Mr Baker who advised to contact the journalists directly, providing email addresses for Jeremy Bowen and Paul Wood, both of whom were directly involved in the coverage of the Gaza War of 2008-9.

Appendix F: Other Interview Requests

Table F.1. below presents a list of potential interviewees approached by the researcher who declined or were not able to take part in the interviews for logistical or other reasons.

Potential Interviewee	Title/Role
James Stephenson	News Editor, BBC News & Current Affairs
Professor Richard Tait	Professor of Journalism, Cardiff University
Dr Aidan O'Donnell	Lecturer Data Journalism (Teaching and Scholarship), Cardiff University
Dr Janet Harris	Senior Lecturer, Cardiff University and former TV Producer/Director at the BBC
Anthony O'Shaughnessy	Course Director MA Broadcast Journalism, Cardiff University
Paul Wood	BBC Middle East Correspondent during OCL
Al Anstey	Managing Director, AJE
Ayman Al-Shehabi	Gaza Spokesman for the International Committee of the Red Cross during OCL
Ayman Mohyeldin	AJE Correspondent in Gaza during OCL

Table F. 1 Other Interview Requests

On 21 May 2012, during a visit to AJE Headquarters the researcher requested an interview with AJE's Managing Director, Al Anstey. To secure permission for the interview, the researcher placed a formal request in an email to Osama Hamza, Senior News Coordinator. Unfortunately, Al Anstey was called to Egypt because of the sudden and urgent political developments in the country. The researcher made a subsequent request for a telephone interview but that, too, proved not feasible.

During the Gaza War of 2008-9, a significant aspect of the news coverage related to the humanitarian situation, both in terms of casualties and the wider humanitarian crisis. With this in mind, the interviewer sought to include among the interviewees NGO representatives with first-hand knowledge of the humanitarian situation in Gaza during the conflict. On 20 November 2012, the researcher contacted Ayman Al-Shehabi, Gaza Spokesman for the International Committee of the Red Cross via the LinkedIn professional networking website, requesting an interview. Al-Shehabi agreed to be interviewed via email, and the email interview was conducted on 13/12/2012. However, Al-Shehabi later requested for the interview not to be published due to the sensitivity of the information provided in his answers. The researcher also

tried to interview the Director of the Human Rights Centre in Gaza, Raji Sourani, but the request proved unsuccessful due to logistical and other constraints.

In August 2020, the researcher contacted Professor Richard Sambrook, Deputy Head of School and Director - Centre for Journalism, Cardiff University, and former Director of Global News at the BBC, with a list of questions broadly based on the empirical findings of the research. Mr Sambrook responded to most of the researcher's interview questions and recommended contacting James Stephenson, former Middle East Bureau Chief in Jerusalem at the time of OCL (2007-09), which the researcher later did.

The researcher contacted BBC News Watch at newswatch@bbc.co.uk on August 13th 2020 with interview questions seeking to shed further light on the researcher's findings but received no response.

All of the above listed potential interviewees were contacted via email due to logistical constraints (most notably travel restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic).

Appendix G: BBC Online Coverage of OCL/Gaza War 2008-9

Table G.1 below provides the list of all articles published on the BBC News website relating to the Gaza War 2008-9/OCL during the 22-day duration of the conflict.

	Publication Date	Title	Byline/Author	Web Link
1	27 Dec 2008	Massive Israeli air raid on Gaza	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7800985.stm
2	27 Dec 2008	Israel's mixed motives for strikes	Katya Adler BBC News, Jerusalem	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7801657.stm
3	28 Dec 2008	Israeli jets target Gaza tunnels	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7801662.stm
4	8 Dec 2008	Grief and fear in Gaza	BBC journalist and Gaza resident Hamada Abu Qammar	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7801973.stm
5	28 Dec 2008	Israelis look for knockout blow	Jeremy Bowen BBC Middle East editor	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7802477.stm
6	29 Dec 2008	Israel strikes key Hamas offices	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7802515.stm
7	29 Dec 2008	West Bank anger at Gaza strikes	Heather Sharp BBC News, Ramallah	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7803598.stm
8	30 Dec 2008	Israel vows war on Hamas in Gaza	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7803711.stm
9	30 Dec 2008	Israel pounds Gaza for fourth day	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7804051.stm
10	30 Dec 2008	Battle plans in Gaza conflict	Jeremy Bowen Middle East editor, BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7804113.stm
11	30 Dec 2008	Gaza: Humanitarian situation	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7845428.stm
12	30 Dec 2008	Grieving Palestinians struggle on	Hamada Abu Qammar BBC News, Gaza City	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7804875.stm
13	30 Dec 2008	Miliband urges ceasefire pressure	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7804373.stm
14	30 Dec 2008	Gaza aid boat 'rammed by Israel'	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7805075.stm
15	30 Dec 2008	Gaza air campaign 'a first stage'	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7804218.stm
16	30 Dec 2008	Taking cover on Sderot front line	Paul Wood BBC News, Sderot	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7805464.stm

17	30 Dec 2008	Growing calls for Gaza ceasefire	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7805386.stm
18	31 Dec 2008	Gaza rockets hit deep into Israel	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7805834.stm
19	31 Dec 2008	Gaza hospitals under huge pressure	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7806053.stm
20	31 Dec 2008	Brown warns of 'crisis' in Gaza	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/7806542.stm
21	31 Dec 2008	Israel rejects Gaza truce calls	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7805558.stm
22	1 Jan 2009	UN fails to make progress on Gaza	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7806684.stm
23	1 Jan 2009	Gaza violence goes into sixth day	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7806844.stm
24	1 Jan 2009	Hamas leader killed in air strike	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7807124.stm
25	2 Jan 2009	West Bank anger over Gaza raids	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7808257.stm
26	3 Jan 2009	World protests at Gaza conflict	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7809676.stm
27	3 Jan 2009	Israel steps up offensive on Gaza	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7809699.stm
28	3 Jan 2009	Angry protests at Israeli embassy	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7809656.stm
29	4 Jan 2009	Israeli troops enter Gaza Strip	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7809959.stm
30	4 Jan 2009	Israeli troops clash with Hamas	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7810270.stm
31	5 Jan 2009	Envoys race to halt Gaza violence	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7810945.stm
32	5 Jan 2009	Gaza conflict: Who is a civilian?	Heather Sharp BBC News, Jerusalem	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7811386.stm
33	5 Jan 2009	Israel vows no let-up over Gaza	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7811301.stm
34	5 Jan 2009	Propaganda war: trusting what we see?	Paul Reynolds World affairs correspondent, BBC News website	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7809371.stm

35	6 Jan 2009	Casualties rise in Gaza Offensive	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7812286.stm
36	6 Jan 2009	Gaza crisis: key maps and timeline	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/5122404.stm
37	6 Jan 2009	Gaza clashes spark 'major crisis'	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7813671.stm
38	6 Jan 2009	Reporting from Gaza	BBC News/The Editors James Stephenson, chief of the Jerusalem bureau	https://www.bbc.co.uk/blogs/theeditors/2009/01/reporting_from_gaza.html
39	7 Jan 2009	Frenetic UN diplomacy over Gaza	By Laura Trevelyan BBC UN Correspondent	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7814918.stm
40	7 Jan 2009	Strike at Gaza school 'kills 40'	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7814054.stm
41	7 Jan 2009	Pressure grows for Gaza ceasefire	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7814772.stm
42	7 Jan 2009	Israel briefly halts Gaza attacks	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7815266.stm
43	8 Jan 2009	Iran takes advantage of Gaza crisis	Jon Leyne BBC News, Tehran	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7817995.stm
44	8 Jan 2009	Israel accused over Gaza wounded	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7817926.stm
45	8 Jan 2009	The language of Hamas	Paul Reynolds World affairs correspondent, BBC News website	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7815630.stm
46	8 Jan 2009	UN suspends Gazan aid operation	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7818577.stm
47	9 Jan 2009	Gaza survivors' four days without water	By Rushdie Aboualaf BBC News, Gaza City	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7819261.stm
48	9 Jan 2009	Bombs hit Gaza as UN urges truce	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7819371.stm
49	9 Jan 2009	UN ceasefire call goes unheeded	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7820027.stm
50	10 Jan 2009	Analysis: Where is Israel heading?	Paul Adams Diplomatic correspondent, BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7821512.stm
51	10 Jan 2009	Gaza conflict enters third week	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7821646.stm

52	10 Jan 2009	Rally demands end of Gaza strife	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/northern_ireland/7822138.stm
53	10 Jan 2009	UK protesters call for Gaza peace	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/7821928.stm
54	11 Jan 2009	Israel warns Gaza of escalation	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7822049.stm
55	11 Jan 2009	Gaza hit by new Israeli strikes	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7822623.stm
56	11 Jan 2009	'Stray mortar' hit UN Gaza school	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7823204.stm
57	11 Jan 2009	Israel denies banned weapons use	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7823078.stm
58	12 Jan 2009	Israel seeks airwave supremacy	Paul Reynolds World affairs correspondent, BBC News website	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7823887.stm
59	12 Jan 2009	Israelis 'edge into urban Gaza'	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7824288.stm
60	13 Jan 2009	UN chief wants Gaza conflict halt	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7825480.stm
61	13 Jan 2009	Gaza clinic destroyed in strike	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7825215.stm
62	13 Jan 2009	Israelis strike 60 Gaza targets	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7825684.stm
63	13 Jan 2009	Israelis 'push on into Gaza City'	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7826968.stm
64	14 Jan 2009	UN head set for talks on Gaza	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7827776.stm
65	14 Jan 2009	Israel pursues its Gaza offensive	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7827919.stm
66	14 Jan 2009	'More than 1,000 killed in Gaza'	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7828884.stm
67	15 Jan 2009	Gaza pounded amid push for truce	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7829912.stm
68	15 Jan 2009	UN accuses Israel over phosphorus	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7831424.stm
69	15 Jan 2009	UN human rights body challenged	Paul Burnell The Investigation	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/7826929.stm

70	15 Jan 2009	Key Hamas leader killed in Gaza	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7831870.stm
71	16 Jan 2009	Media reflect Arab rifts over Gaza	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7833510.stm
72	16 Jan 2009	Gaza hospital comes under fire	Heather Sharp BBC News, Jerusalem	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7833919.stm
73	16 Jan 2009	Urgent drive for Gaza ceasefire	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7832406.stm
74	17 Jan 2009	Gaza strikes ahead of truce vote	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7834255.stm
75	17 Jan 2009	Israel 'to announce Gaza truce'	BBC News	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7835364.stm
76	17 Jan 2009	Survivors count losses in Rafah	Christian Fraser BBC News, Rafah	http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/7835804.stm

Table G. 1 List of all articles published on the BBC News website relating to Gaza War 2008-9