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## Executive Summary

The following conclusions were drawn from three roundtables of prominent Israeli, Palestinian and Italian journalists held in Jerusalem under the auspices of the **Palestine-Israel *Journal*** (**PIJ**) and the Veneto Region, in the context of the Peace Education through Media (PET-Med, www.pet-medproject.eu) project held with the support of the EU's "Partnership for Peace Project."

During periods of war and violent conflict, the function of the print and electronic media to narrate and disseminate information to the public is all the more crucial. The escalation or diminishing of violence, the very outcome of war and policy decisions, and the trends in public opinion, can be greatly influenced by the manner in which journalists report and present sides of the conflict. The outcome of the Israel-Palestine conflict is especially dependent on media shaping, because a majority of those with a stake in the conflict, both in the region and the world, depend on the media in order to understand, create policy, and react to what happens in this region.

Issues that arise concerning media conduct and coverage in conflict situations include the media's role as a reflection of reality and public opinion, the degree to which media is a conduit for government policy, the degree to which commercial considerations may influence coverage, media function within the context of Israeli or Palestinian narratives and, amid prevalent biases within each society, the possible degree to which media may exacerbate tendencies toward violence, and the extent to which the Internet and digital media tools have changed the rules of the game.

With the media's power to influence public opinion and policy decisions on a local and global scale, there exists the strong potential to contribute to conflict mitigation. Inherent in this critical role are serious questions. How plausible is it to accurately and effectively present the other side's narrative? How can the media present more critical views of government policies when those policies tend to maintain or exacerbate the conflict? When violence erupts, is there a way for the media to mitigate the tendency toward even greater violence within public opinion, and are there guidelines for language use or graphic imagery in doing so? What lessons can we take from conflicts in recent historical memory, like that of the Veneto Region's experience in the Balkans, and how can we apply them to the Israel-Palestine conflict?

In mitigating regional conflict, there may be a place for the concept of "peace journalism" to flourish. This paper will also explore the principles which may serve as guidelines for the media in promoting tolerance, mutual understanding, and non-violent conflict resolution, and both the advantages and limitations of the concept of "peace journalism".

The roundtables were held on June 8th, 2010 and on December 14th and 15th 2010 in Jerusalem, as part of a larger project called Peace Education through Media (PET-Med), carried out with the support of the EU's Partnership for Peace Program and the

European Union Commission and Technical Assistance office of the West Bank and Gaza. The project aims to strengthen the role of media in order to promote understanding and tolerance.

## Recommendations

1. **Reporter integrity always**: Maintain at all times ethical journalistic principles of professional reporting, foster a dispassionate stance toward any issue in a conflict while avoiding the status quo, ask tough questions of everyone despite discomfort, and push for access.
2. **Stand alone**: Do not be a disciple of any specific agenda. Work independent of government or outside interests or pressure, and be skeptical of government or sponsored agendas by serving the story that needs to be told.
3. **Facts first**: Use solid information as the basis of the story rather than an emotional peg. Operate on principle rather than prejudging the outcome, and avoid finding the point of coverage that fits only one side's narrative.
4. **Consult**: Editorial decisions should be wide-reaching in the newsroom. Everyone should be directly or indirectly involved in order to keep stories true to the organization, and headlines true to their stories.
5. **Seek context, give context**: Research the circumstances surrounding a story in order to give the reader a broader understanding of the issues at hand and allow for more meaningful dialogue. Present the bigger picture.
6. **Be there**: Reporting from the ground is always preferable in order to give accurate depictions of events, eyewitness accounts, and gather information that will put authorities in a position to speak directly to the issues at hand. Demand access.
7. **Don't be ruled by readership/viewership**: Strike a balance between giving the audience what they want and expect, and what they need to know.
8. **Involve more women**: Traditionally, reporting in conflict zones has been dominated by men, but women have easier access to women and women's issues in the region, which are an important element of war and conflict coverage. Representation in editorial decisions will also influence the accuracy of coverage.
9. **Do not oversimplify**: Offer a variety of coverage that can build the bigger picture. Avoid resorting to mostly human interest stories that rely on emotion to illustrate weighty issues, or using a zero-sum debt approach that ignores complexities of the situation.
10. **Separate opinion from coverage**: News presents information that allows the public to decide for it. Do not insert or package opinion into formal news coverage. Blurring this line can fuel distrust, misunderstanding, and resentment toward the media and between sides of the conflict.
11. **Find purpose**: Media must find its place in covering the conflict by reflecting on important questions. What role should the specific medium or organization play? Who is it aiming to educate or influence? What does it offer that its competitors don't offer? How is it adapting to change in the industry, and how can it turn challenges into advantages?
12. **Understand the other side**: Make a concerted effort to, as far as possible, give a comprehensive picture of counterparts in the conflict and accurately represent them

and their opinions, even if that entails stepping out of your comfort zone.

13. **Words make a difference**: Media should be aware of the critical language that they receive and disseminate. Media has the power to set the tone, coin phrases, legitimize or delegitimize, inject words into popular ethos, and influence opinion by the words they choose. Media should also be wary of language that they receive from bureaucrats and organizations.
14. **Different rules apply**: Journalists should ask to be treated as an entity apart from activists in a conflict. Their job as a neutral entity with the responsibility to inform public and private citizens should be respected by government and authorities.
15. **Keep up**: Media should understand and adapt to their changing role in the Internet age. Although formats and style may change, the task and principles of reporting will not. But new techniques should be discussed and utilized in the newsroom. As people are inundated with more information than ever before, they need the media to mediate.
16. **The current situation is not sustainable**: Although the media's job is to cover the conflict, the circumstances of the conflict are making it hard for the media to do their job. Crossing through checkpoints can take hours longer than necessary, entire regions are blocked off at times, and governments are not transparent with information. Certain limiting conditions caused by the conflict should be challenged.
17. **Peace may not necessarily be the objective**: The term is fluid. Whose peace are we talking about? What does it mean to each side? Also, peace as a calm in the region and contentment on both sides typically doesn't produce news, so how can the media serve both interests of facilitating peace and doing their job?
18. **Don't be ruled by economic interests**: Strike a balance between catering to advertisers and others that factor into the news organization's financial interests, and reporting with the highest journalistic integrity.
19. **Israel is in the position to change the situation**: As the side with the greater advantage, Israeli media and government should take responsibility for the realities of the conflict. Israeli media should ask more critical questions of the government and the actions it has taken during recent flare-ups.
20. **Translations from the Palestinian to the Israeli media**: The Israeli media should be encouraged to include translations from the Palestinian media in the Israeli press, as a parallel to the fact that the Palestinian press includes regular translations from the Israeli press.
21. **Co-operation is vital**: There has been a serious decline in the level of cooperation between Palestinian and Israeli journalists, when compared to the 1970s, 80s and 90s (before the second intifada), and a renewal of such contacts and cooperation is desirable.
22. **Take practical steps forward**: Through collaboration in projects and working groups, media on both sides of the conflict can revive and perhaps even surpass the previous level of contact.

## General Framework

The **Palestine-Israel *Journal*** held an expert roundtable on June 8th, 2010, to tackle the question of the role of the media in the conflict. The roundtable was the first in a series

of discussions and events that is part of the Peace Education through Media initiative, a project initiated by the Veneto Region in Italy with support from the European Union Partnership for Peace program, in partnership with the **Palestine-Israel *Journal***, part of whose role was to draft and finalize this Policy Paper, and the Netanya Academic College Media Department. Over the course of two years the project will produce a manual with guidelines for journalists and educate students and teachers about critical media consumption using multi-media platforms that will be broadcast in the region, and organize seminars and training sessions for schools in Israel and the Palestinian Authority.

The roundtable sought to (a) discuss the role of media in the narration of conflicts, positive and negative case studies of conflict coverage, the impact of language, how mass media can be used as a weapon by governments, the impact of technology and Internet on reporting, and the concept of peace journalism as a way to positively affect the conflict itself, and (b) offer a list of recommendations and measures for journalists and media organizations to work by when covering conflict in war and periods of high contrast conditions.

Participants from Israeli, Palestinian, and Italian news organizations discussed their personal experiences in covering the conflict, challenges of the current situation and as members of the media, and suggestions for moving forward. The discussion was divided into two sessions:

- Media and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict background
- Media's potential contribution toward conflict mitigation

The choice of media coverage in conflict situations, with this particular timing, was made in part by the PET-Med initiative and it was placed within the context of recent events, such as the Israeli confrontation with the international flotilla headed to Gaza during the blockade, tension between the United States and Israel with the announcement of more Israeli settlements in East Jerusalem, and continued evictions of residents from East Jerusalem neighborhoods, in which media coverage has highly influenced changes in public opinion, governmental stance, and policy. Social media websites, non-mainstream reporting such as blogs, and other Internet tools have also influenced and even magnified the impact of these events.

With this backdrop, this policy paper was produced with the goal of providing students, practitioners in the media and decision makers with a clearer understanding of the issues and challenges that reporters face while covering the conflict in this region. It offers constructive recommendations for how members of the media can work in a fair and critical manner.

This paper is divided into four parts. Part I deals with what the role of the media should be, especially in terms of the Israel-Palestine conflict. Part II presents the actual issues of this

conflict and how they pose challenges to the media. Part III discusses the dilemma of serving multiple interests in the field, and how to strike the right balance. Finally, Part IV provides a few issues surrounding ideas of peace journalism and peace as a concept in this region. Each part articulates the challenge, offers an anecdote or example, and elaborates on solutions which are more explicitly listed in the recommendations section. The names and bios of the experts who took part in the roundtable, and references to relevant publications can be found in the Annexes to the paper.

It is worth noting that the roundtable was convened under Chatham House Rule and, therefore, no specific statement is attributed to any particular expert. When a disagreement was identified and the conversation failed to yield any agreed-upon conclusion, the disagreement is noted in the text. When appropriate, minority and majority views are noted.

## Part I

### THE MEDIA'S ROLE IN COVERING CONFLICT

The media's universally accepted role is to inform the public at large. In situations of conflict, war or other tumultuous circumstances, this role entails more responsibilities. As with the Israel-Palestine conflict, there are ethnic and demographically, sometimes ideologically opposed sides to represent fairly. Governmental interests on both sides can create a lack of transparency, which needs to be challenged in order to report an accurate picture of the ground reality. Although advocacy is not in a reporter's job description, media can guide readers and policy makers toward peaceful solutions and diffuse conflict by working in ways that avoid incitement or emotional escalation.

The role of the media in conflict or war coverage can be best understood in two parts. First, journalists or news organizations should abide, unwaveringly, to certain professional and ethical principles in the field. This paper will describe those principles in theory and will illustrate them through anecdotes from participants of the roundtable. Second, every journalist, reporting team, and news organization should find its niche in the age of information. So much information is so readily available that readers and viewers are seeking consistent mediators to give them what they need to know. Finding this niche has proved to be the difference between success and failure for mainstream media.

The most basic and deep-rooted fundamental of journalism is to act as an independent-minded, dispassionate, and objective observer. Such a mindset ensures the most accurate and well-rounded account of an event because the story is served rather than other interests. Developing this stance is most akin to developing a good habit; it's a daily discipline.

One Israeli roundtable participant recalled his earlier days at the *Jerusalem Post*, a time its reporters referred to as their glory period. The paper was an axis around which the foreign coverage of the First Intifada took place. Palestinian press was also muted

at the time, not comparable to the type of independent press that the Israeli press viewed itself to be, he said. One young reporter at the *Jerusalem Post*, named Joel Greenberg, who later went on to work for *The New York Times* and *Chicago Tribune*, displayed a type of journalistic integrity that this reporter found to be exemplary. As a correspondent for Arab affairs, he primarily covered the Intifada. Greenberg's approach seemed to extend from his character rather than out of an ideology. It earned him awards, attention, and earned both him and the newspaper credibility. Every day Greenberg would write a step by step account of his days covering the Intifada, no matter how long the word count. It was a period where few lethal weapons were used on the Palestinian side, and Israeli troops used teargas and guns. He kept a record of occurrences, town by town, village by village, and then would come in around 4 p.m. or call with information from his sources. Each day the paper consistently recorded events of the Intifada without judgment. It was based on facts, figures, and observations. With events that could easily be crafted into dramatic news, such as Yitzhak Rabin's infamous command for soldiers to "go out and break the bones" of the Palestinians stone throwers, Greenberg remained dispassionate. The coverage had basis and was not sweeping. Over time, the impact of the Intifada spoke for itself. About a year into the Intifada, he covered another incident in which a four-month old infant was shot dead by an Israeli bullet, but wrote the story based on what actually happened, rather than from the angle of Israel's excuse for the tragedy. Greenberg received a lot of criticism for his style, that it lacked insight. Little to nothing was written about it the next day in other papers. Columnist Yoel Marcus wrote two days later for *Haaretz* resenting the fact that an infant had been killed for whatever reason as a result of conflict and the media for the most part had turned its head. The scope of Greenberg's coverage and his approach is what earned him the credibility.

Media coverage should give accounts of all newsworthy events, especially when the population at large does not have access to the bigger picture. It should neither sensationalize nor downplay a particular event or issue. Accurate reporting will gain proper attention from the public, which allows for a proportional reaction to the conflict. This is a key to avoiding incitement of violence in conflicts. It is what some would call the formula for proper peace coverage; simply put, it is responsible journalism.

Since the May 31, 2010, Israeli deadly raid on an international flotilla bound for Gaza, the mainstream media has found itself in the critical spotlight. Narratives varied depending on the news organization's political leanings, or the leanings of the country in which it was based. In such cases, where events themselves are polarizing, it is important to talk to as many people as possible from both sides. The story does not necessarily have to encompass each conflicting narrative into a single one. But if there is more than one narrative, they must all be represented. Readers and viewers will come to their own conclusions, but they must be informed enough to do so. As Israelis expose to Israeli society, Palestinians to Palestinian society, and foreign correspondents to the world, truth and objectivity are the ideals. The most practical step in maintaining these standards is for reporters to find out what happened without being captives of propaganda, and dispassionately convey it to their audiences.

During flotilla coverage, one Palestinian journalist listened to an eye-witness report on the radio, recalling the experience that he said was very frightening to everyone on board. He noticed that once the soldiers had collected the makeshift weapons from the flotilla passengers, Israeli press rushed to the scene and only took pictures of the collected bars and knives. There is a great difference between covering and collecting. Covering a story entails talking to those involved, taking pictures of the entire scene, and learning what happened while there in person. Collection is a backward way of telling the story. It implies that the reporter already has the event as it happened written in his mind, and he is finding the evidence he needs in order to justify that story. It is made up of half-truths and leaves no room for discovery.

The flotilla event as a whole lacked the coverage as it was just described. On one hand, Israeli media for the most part defended Israel's actions. Palestinian media was timid at the outset of the raid, but soon after condemned Israel's disproportionate use of force and used labels such as massacre and crime in their coverage. Although, *al-Quds*, the largest daily Arabic newspaper in East Jerusalem, did not have a photo of the funeral for the nine killed activists on the day it took place in Istanbul. This type of editorial decision, which some criticized for lacking a sense of news judgment and even being out of touch with reality, highlights another critical issue. Editorial decisions, including page layout, headline wording and story ideas, should directly or indirectly touch everyone in the newsroom rather than a select few. A choice such as putting a photo of George Mitchell on the front page of a major Arabic paper rather than the subject of an internationally important story is a decision that most of the newsroom should be willing to stand by. The decisions themselves should be based on newsworthiness, the public's right to know, and be as true to the reality of the situation as it is possible to represent. Women should also be included more in the newsgathering and editorial processes. Traditionally, men have dominated conflict coverage and higher positions in newsrooms, but women's perspectives are imperative for accuracy and more well-rounded coverage.

During the 2008 attack on Gaza, one Israeli reporter called the chief editor of *Yediot Ahronot* on the morning the violence erupted. On the first day of that particular conflict, 220 Palestinians in Gaza were killed, and no Israelis were killed. *Yediot's* headline said that a quarter of a million Israelis are under attack, referring to the possible range of rockets from Gaza. The reporter argued that this was not the main story. The *Yediot* editor responded that maybe he was right, but the paper had already been printed. In this case, the headline did not serve the reality of the situation. The decision overlooked facts and figures and jumped to a conclusion that almost certainly would provoke fear and anger among readers.

**Access**

A major problem in conflict coverage occurs when access is limited by one or both sides. Media can be either self-limiting, or cut off in the most literal sense, from reporting

on site. In the Israel-Palestine conflict in particular, physical lack of access is arguably the biggest hindrance. This will be discussed further on in the section dealing with actual issues and results of the conflict. But in journalism, there comes a certain level of responsibility for the reporter himself to confront the problem of access.

In the shadow of the flotilla raid, some analysts say that Israeli media adopted a position comparable to the position that American media took during the U.S. war in Iraq. The argument is that Israeli and American media, respectively, covered the war in phases. The first is a full integration with the government, and the second is a kind of criticism about operational rather than core issues. In covering the international committees that will review Israel's actions against the flotilla, there is obvious support for the government. It is argued that the Americans did the same in the wake of September 11th and consequential wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. These are examples of abstract ways in which media were cut off from the ground reality; with a collective conscience, they cut themselves off. In more concrete ways, issues with press passes, checkpoints, and access in general has created even more problems. During the second Intifada, when access for local journalists became extremely difficult, there was a visible bias against foreign press from Israel. The bias altered the way reporters could do their jobs in terms of both safety and access to information. Covering the flotilla raid came with similar challenges. Israeli officials confiscated videos, laptops, notes, and other materials from journalists without explanation, for an indefinite period of time. The only footage being shown and distributed worldwide was attributed to the IDF. This unoriginal and altered material was shown by most major news channels, posted to YouTube, and sent through Twitter. It was a video of the Mavi Marmara as Israeli officials and ship passengers clashed. Circles, captions, and dramatic music were inserted into the video, which gave a narrative of the events like a play-by-play. The replacement of news coverage with propaganda, partly due to lack of access, contributed to an intense polarization of public opinion. It came in the form of riots, the breaking of political ties between nations, protests at embassies around the world and other violent or potentially violent expressions. With a lack of access, some reporters also fall into the rut of oversimplifying important issues into human-interest stories. In the case of Israel during the flotilla attack, some larger issues such as the blockade on Gaza were minimized into stories about the heroism of Israeli soldiers, Navy commandos, and military elite. When underlying issues are reduced to individual experiences and isolated occurrences, they can never fully be addressed. Oversimplifying also comes in the form of picking and choosing what to cover based on potential ratings. A criticism of Western media is that they have chased the stories that will get high ratings but do not follow up or give context. For example in the Gaza 2008 war, it seemed that Western media was there when bombs began to fall, but left during the suffering, when rockets were fired, or when there was a ceasefire and the dynamics of the conflict changed. The excuse that the region is too dangerous is invalid because there are bureaus in Iraq and Afghanistan. Along those lines, many times media opt to report from Jerusalem or from afar, saying that it's too costly to operate. However, they all rush to the scene when the story has shock value and

potential for high ratings. This self-limiting behavior is detrimental to the public's overall understanding of the conflict.

One roundtable participant, an Arab-American, who reports for *Al Jazeera* was assigned to Gaza in 2008. He was virtually the only foreign correspondent to live there since the Hamas takeover. His experience was eye opening not only in itself, but because he was able to recognize the disconnect between journalism on site versus from afar. At the time he left Gaza, there was an intense period of media coverage, which throughout the course of the war; he was not able to watch. Daily life within Gaza greatly differed from the perceptions of others from outside. One memory that struck him was when he had stood on a rooftop as Israeli military dropped leaflets on the people below, which read "Your area is going to be hit. If you know any hideouts, call this number. We will help you, we will give you aid." He remembered how much those papers had scared him, and scared every Palestinian. It became a tool of psychological warfare. Bombs were dropped, leaflets were dropped telling people to leave, but no one was told where to go. All of Gaza was being hit. Outside of Gaza, it was apparent that Israeli and American perceptions of the situation were much different. As all of Gaza remained swept up in fighting, American and Israeli media focused on humanitarian measures taken by Israel, namely, dropping leaflets on the civilians caught in warfare. The experience is endemic of not only the war in Gaza, but of everything tied to this conflict; the flotilla raid, the occupation of the West Bank, suffering in Gaza, fear in Israel. It's a continuum, a cycle of violence and misinformation leading to misunderstanding.

Although Israel presented serious obstacles and lack of access for journalists to deal with during the Gaza war and in general, a significant amount of responsibility falls on the media themselves to fight for the access that is so imperative to covering the conflict with accuracy and context. Roundtable members disagreed to a certain extent about how much blame the media should assume for their lack of coverage in Gaza at that time. The war broke out on a Saturday, and the border crossing was open on Thursday. With some foresight, journalists could have made it into Gaza in time to cover the war. One argument is that no one should expect the military to keep borders open during a full-fledged war, on a weekend, especially when the possibility of an American or foreign casualty would be a nightmare for Israel's image in the international spotlight. There was some dispute about when exactly media access was denied. For at least 45 days before the war began, access was either extremely limited or altogether denied for most reporters. The general point is that conflicts, especially when they involve thousands of civilian lives, ideally must be covered from the ground. In order to get there, foresight and persistence is absolutely necessary. Cooperation from governments and officials certainly helps, but it is rare and can't be expected. Media needs to be treated as a unique entity; the watchdog, apart from activists who are punished or denied access. But that treatment must come from within, starting as persistent behavior that can evolve into an ideal that is universally respected by the bureaucrats.

**Language**

While access is mostly dependent on authorities, one factor that media themselves can have power over is the language that they use and disseminate into the public sphere. One common tendency is for media to use a lexicon more or less imposed by their respective governments. The implications of doing so can be dangerous and far-reaching. As strongly as media can act as purveyors of truth, they can act as tools of propaganda. Journalists should ask themselves how limiting their word choice is to the reality of the situation. Is the word relevant to only one narrative? Is it offensive to the other narratives?

One Israeli journalist roundtable participant had come across the word "lynch" in his observation of Israeli media's description of attacks on Israeli soldiers during the flotilla attack. The word, used 10 years ago to describe the brutal deaths of two Israeli reservists who had crossed a Ramallah checkpoint, was being reused in the context of the Israeli offensive on the Mavi Marmara. The improper usage of the word "lynch" is what he called a rape of the English language. Not only were no Israelis killed in the raid, the attack was initiated by Israelis. Almost seven million people now absorbed that word into their ethos and will refer to this event as the "lynch on the high seas." Intentional or unintentional misuses of words unquestionably increase tension and widen the gap of misunderstanding. In this case, for example, while a majority of the world saw the flotilla attack as an illegal Israeli offensive, most of the Israeli population came to know it as an attack on Israel comparable to that of the lynch that took place at the beginning of the second Intifada. As investigations like the UN flotilla probe continue, discrepancies in perceptions of the actual event will only lead to further resentment and have already affected the atmosphere as peace talks proceed.

A Palestinian journalist recalled an experience as managing editor of *Al Fajr* in the late seventies/early eighties, more or less an unofficial mouthpiece of the Palestinian Liberation Organization. The paper was subject to complete censorship in content, advertisements, death notices and announcements. In one article there was a sentence that referred to Menachem Begin as a Zionist. The censor circled the word Zionist. The managing editor called and asked why Begin shouldn't be described as a Zionist and that not having this title might even upset him. The censor said that he agreed, and that for Israelis being a Zionist is indeed something to be proud of, but for Palestinians is an insult, which was why he thought that this paper most likely intended to insult Begin. Another example offered is the word 'martyr': should the word martyr be used, or not. For example, *Al Jazeera* used the word '*shahid*' (martyr) to describe a Palestinian killed by Israelis, but did not use the same word to describe an Iraqi killed by American troops. Words such as these are highly charged with meaning, therefore should words such as this be used at all, and in what context? One participant noted that in terms of objectivity, one person's terrorist is another person's *shahid*.

Another important aspect of language is the relative way in which Palestinian and Israeli casualties are described in a way which either humanizes or dehumanizes the losses. One participant noted that sometimes the human aspect of a story is deliberately obscured and only numerical data is provided, which is particularly the case in terms of Israeli media describing Palestinians. The participant noted that when an Israeli is killed in an attack by Palestinians, the newspapers write detailed stories of the human side: what he ate last night, what he said last month, what he was planning to do. On the other hand, when Palestinian casualties are given, it is only in numerical terms. This is an important way in which language can contribute to dehumanizing the other.

One suggestion is that news media have open discussions within their own newsrooms and with each other about legitimizing or delegitimizing through language, and what kind of language, both positive and negative, they are willing to accept in daily usage. This is important because the media have the power to create illusions of legitimacy through language. By default, they also have the power to affect reality. The perceptions of the public often times become reality.

For this reason media should always work by principles rather than make decisions based on the outcome they are likely to produce. This will help to reduce the prism-like effect of multiple realities that media tend to cast on the public. One way to implement such a decision making processes is to give maximum exposure and human exposure to the "other side." However, humanizing the other side means to present their reality, not to find the obscure examples and project them on a wider scale of importance. Portrayals of reality should also be proportionate.

**Technology and change**

While the principles of journalism remain foundational, changes in format, means of dissemination and reporting style as a result of technology present new issues. One major change in recent years has been increased horizontal communication. This implies that information is being shared across communities, unlike vertical communication of the past where the public's reference point was the presenter on TV, the voice on the radio, or the major local paper. With horizontal communication, people can gravitate to the source that looks to their community as the reference point. As a result, success and failure for a given media organization may rely on how well they serve a particular niche, as opposed to having the highest viewership and readership numbers.

Information is no longer the exclusive monopoly of news organizations, which has caused the relevance of the media to shift. With such an abundance of information available, people are looking for the media to mediate. This role makes researching and adding context to stories more important than ever. One roundtable participant gave an example from the flotilla raid. There is information about the Mavi Marmara vessel that with context, changes almost everything one would expect to happen in the aftermath of the event. The ship was flagged in the Camano islands. The significance of that information is that Camano is part of the statute of Rome, which allows it as a country to bring charges against Israel in the international criminal court. Turkey is not a member, so it can't bring

a case to the international criminal court. The point is that anyone can find out about the Camano, but no one would take the step to do so unless they knew the relevance of that information. Without context, even peace is irrelevant. A criticism of mainstream media, especially in the West, is that they talk about issues with a narrow focus and nothing comes out of it. The Israel-Palestine conflict is not exclusive to Israelis or Palestinians, so the discussions that take place in this region should also take place in the United States and Europe. More often than not, large issues have been reduced to the point that discussing them will not affect policy or influence any real change in the region. For example, Gaza has been reduced to a matter of aid. The siege on Gaza is about much more than how much food and cartons of milk are allowed to enter. A major, almost climatic, story some time after the flotilla raid and consequential protests was that Israel would alter its list of blockaded items to Gaza. This is obviously not a milestone for anyone familiar with the conflict. A Palestinian journalist roundtable participant who reported from Gaza in 2008 recalled an article by Italian journalist Lorenzo Cremenosi about the number of casualties in Gaza at the end of the war. With so many issues going on at the time, Cremenosi focused on trying to reduce the number of Palestinian casualties from 1400, as the Palestinians claimed, to 700. But the Israeli military itself made a statement that 1,100 Palestinians were killed. Regardless of the exact number, a staggering number of people were killed in a matter of three weeks. Going with the figure that the Palestinians claimed, the number of casualties is equivalent to nearly 200,000 Americans or Europeans, relative to the population. It seems absurd to have a debate about whether 100,000 Americans or 200,000 Americans were killed. To put these numbers into context, the United States went to war with two different countries after 9/11 over 3,000 civilians who were killed.

The core issues in this conflict will not even be touched without serious reporting that offers context. Real dialogue will begin with journalists push to have those debates about important issues, and seek to bring transparency to the conflict. The first step is for traditional media to find their place in this conflict and in the new media age. A Palestinian journalist suggested that perhaps there is fear among journalists, especially those who have been in the business for decades that their relevancy is diminishing. In a world where citizen journalists can share videos on YouTube that could get millions of hits in a few hours, traditional media are desperately forcing their relevance into issues. Rather than stay tuned for the evening news broadcast or wait for the morning paper, audiences may get information instantaneously, and seek traditional media to reaffirm their conclusions. They want traditional media to sort through the plethora of facts and figures and to articulate what they, the audience, are feeling inside. Unlike in the past, readers and viewers may not need traditional media to tell them the circumstances of an event, but rather, to assure them that their anger toward Israeli policy or the misconduct of Arab leaders is valid. Though it seems to challenge the traditional role of journalism, with smart adaptation, the shift in media relevance can take the role of informing the public to the next, more sophisticated level. It depends on a news organization's willingness, and perhaps financial resources, to embrace the Internet and re-evaluate its fit in local and global society.

## Part II

### THE SITUATION ON THE GROUND

More than anything, it is the circumstances of the conflict that make reporting it such a challenge. Regardless of journalistic skill and integrity, the situation in Israel and Palestine presents obstacles to reporting that can only be overcome with changes in actual policy and attitudes toward peace on both sides.

Many of the practical problems in the media stem from the inequality of resources. Palestinian newspapers and television rely on either Israeli stories to fill their space or outside sources like *Al Jazeera* for domestic coverage. There was general agreement at the roundtable that when compared to Israeli media, Palestinian media does not come close. One Palestinian journalist recalled that until nearly 8:30 a.m. on the morning of the flotilla raid, Palestinian television stations were playing music until somebody called and suggested they begin to show footage of the developments of the attack. In general, Palestinians are familiar with Israeli writers and presenters, but not the other way around. Although Palestinian media (as opposed to Arab media) is considered a new notion, it is mainly because of restrictions and a lack of resources that Palestinian voices are rarely represented in Israeli media.

One Israeli participant made a point about the access of both sides to each other's media outlets. The participant noted that far fewer Israelis speak Arabic than Palestinians speak Hebrew. Therefore there is limited access to Palestinian media in order to see what is going on in the Palestinian debate. The participant recommended that there should be an increased effort to translate daily Palestinian media into Hebrew for an Israeli audience, in order to present them with an alternative side of the debate which may not be found in Israeli or international media. A Palestinian journalist also commented that every Arab newspaper has at least two pages every day of opinion and translated social and political news from Israel. On the Israeli side, however, Palestinian news is not given any space or coverage. An Israeli journalist noted that they have attempted to persuade editors to translate at least a page a month from Palestinian newspapers, but the suggestion has not been acted upon.

The most repeated and pressing issue that plagues journalists covering this conflict is lack of access. The problem of access was discussed in Part I in terms of journalist responsibility, but to a large extent, lack of access and therefore lack of adequate reporting this conflict will continue without visible changes in Israeli policy. During the Gaza war, it was extremely difficult for journalists to get inside Gaza, but it was impossible for Israeli journalists.

Palestinian journalists in general can't come to see Israeli society in order to report or criticize with any first-hand experience. Good reporting makes room for spontaneity, but there is no room for spontaneity whatsoever with the current state of affairs. One Palestinian roundtable participant, a veteran journalist for *ABC News*, recalled traveling daily to Jerusalem with his daughter and wife from the West Bank. While both his wife and daughter had Jerusalem IDs enabling them to enter Jerusalem, he did not and had to use a permit and was obliged to

enter through Qalandia military check point. The hours-long ordeal of stopping at the Qalandia checkpoint made simply getting to work a struggle.

This type of treatment is one-sided. If the Israelis were subject to the same treatment and stress, at least both sides would have something to gain from peace. From the Palestinian perspective, many see Israel as completely self-obscured. One journalist put it in the terms that Israel has its own problems, its own economy, police, villages, and circles. The Palestinians, many of whom now support a one-state solution, are forced behind a wall that by its very nature de-legitimizes them as a people. And they ideologically de-legitimize Israel in return. Their collective plea is: Israel is the stronger side, so Israel can decide how this conflict will turn out. Geographically, politically divided Palestine does not function as a state, and will never function as a state if the current situation is continued. The international community is asking of the Palestinians what they cannot offer because they don't have the metaphorical currency to bargain with, and they need Israel in a way that Israel does not need them. The international community's dream of bringing Fatah back to Gaza is not realistic. If Fatah wants real presence in Gaza, it will mean war with Hamas. As this conflict grows into something affecting the entire world, a major question is, whose responsibility is it to fix this situation? It is hard to imagine solutions generated from within taking flight. International involvement is required, but until now, effective means for generating progress have not been found.

Resentment from the past also is hard to wash away with memories of 1948 and 1967 still fresh in mind. One Palestinian journalist described the situation of Gaza refugees using this analogy; that for more than 1.5 million refugees, it's as if someone threw them in jail and took their house. Finally the occupiers said with reluctance, we'll disengage from Gaza Strip, we'll get out of your house, but will stay in the backyard. But just because the house was given back to the owners, it doesn't mean the owners won't cause some trouble for the former occupiers. They may throw things from the window into the yard. The example at least gives the psychological reason why Palestinians are not satisfied with the Israeli disengagement and pulling out of Gaza Strip, let alone the hellish condition of Gaza at present. The argument is that if Israel really wanted to make peace, it would initiate a meeting with President Mahmoud Abbas, and not leave without a peace treaty. International involvement could help, but in reality, the United States has continued to back Israel unwaveringly, Turkey has been interested in winning favor with the U.S., and the leaders of the Arab moderate states, which had little influence to begin with (before the Arab Spring – ed.), have only used the conflict for leverage rather than taking a vested interest in peace.

These are only some of the issues that prevent comprehensive coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict, yet they are the very core issues that need to surface in each story that comes out of the region.

## Part III

### COMPETING INTERESTS

There are two forces that may stand in the way of fair, comprehensive journalism: financial interests and government propaganda. Neither can be so easily ignored. Concerns about competition and revenue in the media business are tied to survival. And without money, resources dwindle and good reporting becomes more than just a matter of good will. In many countries, especially in regions of war or conflict, governments are either wary of media or manipulate media to their own advantage. Coverage can become a matter of "Do it our way, or no way." These forces must be met with balance, so that at the end of the day, journalistic integrity is not compromised.

#### Financial

There is a common thought that audiences seek chaos, that "If it bleeds, it leads," and that bad news for everyone else is good news for newspapers. This type of thinking either over or underestimates what the public wants.

A major point raised was that publishers, not journalists, have the final word on what to be published or not and in which shape or form. They behave out of institutional or personal interests or considerations, or even financial revenue. Journalists themselves seek stories of all kinds, but may not have the final say in what gets printed. In the view of the publisher, there is no money in peace. So in order to gain short term monetary profit, they seek the negative, and as a result, contribute to the failure of the peace process in the long term. Because of the experiences negotiators have had with these self-fulfilling prophets in the media business, they do what they can to restrict media access, which makes covering the conflict even more of a struggle than it was to begin with.

For a visual representation of the extent to which money influences media, look at the front page of the free right-wing daily *Yisrael Hayom* ("Israel Today"), the most widely distributed paper in Israel. The entire front page of a recent issue was devoted to an advertisement. The example reflects enormous changes in Israeli media in the last 50 years. Until the 1980s, Israeli media was generally controlled by political and ideological, rather than commercial entities. Today, no party has a newspaper. The motive is profit. The second largest paper in circulation, *Yediot Ahronot*, devoted most of its pages in a recent issue to crime and other issues. Only on page six did the paper have a story on Netanyahu, where the text was only a fraction of the layout. In the op-ed section, a majority of articles dealt with the conflict in the context of the Jewish nation-state. There's an argument that to much of the world, the conflict is an on-going non-issue. But in Israel, there seems to be a deeper problem, namely, that the media represents the collective sentiment of the population of Israel. Besides the obvious implications of this conduct, a danger is that nothing will change, as long is there is profit in the status quo.

**Propaganda**

Media by definition can only play a role in a democracy. Without the possibility of different views, no information being disseminated can truly be called media. In Palestine, media needs more time to develop because of the current state of affairs. Palestine is under occupation, so in terms of living conditions alone, its people have not seen the benefits of democratic society. But it is worrisome that Israel claims to be a democracy, yet there is apparently a full mobilization of media. In other words, media in Israel is so influenced by the state, that it challenges the authenticity of Israeli democracy. Palestinian media will improve when democracy improves, and Israel has the choice to play a role in that process. One interesting characteristic about Palestinian media, despite its room for improvement, is that it does allow itself to criticize the government, unlike many other Arab nations.

In Israel, *Haaretz* has a relatively large readership at about seven percent, which is significantly higher than it was 60 years ago. However, influence is not necessarily linked to readership, but to how the paper is perceived by policy-making circles. According to one Israeli journalist, *Haaretz* is what the prime minister of the day regards as the enemy. *Haaretz*, which takes a Left position on the conflict and a Right position on social issues, is a case in point of the polarization within Israeli society. The left-liberal element of society is increasingly marginalized and alienated. It's what this journalist describes as the whipping dog that is so necessary for the establishment, rather than a reference point by which the leadership can measure itself for positive development. The latter is what the role of a traditional heavyweight newspaper always was in society. It was not a matter of readership, but of influence. A major worry is that in Israeli society, such an attitude is increasingly viewed as worthless. One journalist recalled Knesset debate coverage during the Gaza war as uncritical of the right wing, apparent even in their choice of pictures used. The danger in this is that television has a good sense of smell; it can smell public opinion, but not the other way around. More often than not, the public takes what it sees on television as justified. Balanced coverage is crucial, especially when directly reporting the affairs of the state. This is where decisions are made that may bring about tangible changes in the conflict.

When analyzing media coverage of this conflict, a major question that arises is whether or not anyone follows the "Publish what ought to be published" mantra of the past. If you have created an emotional tie between the reader or viewer with the media, you have met success. The goal is to get people talking about something, to give them something to relate to. The problem with this is that the purpose of the news media is not to please, but to give the public the information that they "ought" to know, because it's for their own good.

There is nothing inherently wrong with readers seeking an emotional connection to a story, or for an Israeli newspaper to report about Jewish nation-statehood. But when news judgment is dictated by financial or political interests, media does a huge disservice to

the public. With rapid technological changes taking place in an increasingly globalized world, media do keep financial concerns at the forefront. For example, the most widely distributed newspaper in Israel, *Yisrael Hayom*, is printed on the financially struggling *Haaretz* printing press, despite the fact that the *Haaretz* editors disagree with the right-wing positions that the free daily takes editorially. If *Haaretz* didn't have this revenue, they would sink. Another example is that in an attempt to gain a willing workforce for little pay, many Israeli media outlets get new recruits from the radio station of the Israeli Army, which also explains a decline in quality of journalism. These and similar circumstances affect media not only in this region, but around the world. Looking to the future, there is uncertainty about advertising, format, and maintaining revenue. But the role of news media should not be compromised out of desperation.

## Part IV

### ISSUES OF PEACE

The question is not only how journalists can cover a conflict without incitement, but whether or not peace journalism is an applicable concept. Peace journalism aims to be a corrective for the conventions of journalism that tend to focus on negative rather than positive circumstances, analyze events in a zero-sum debt perspective, and consider only physical rather than abstract effects of conflict. It is a response to the idea that media negatively impacts conflict or war situations.

The general consensus is that peace journalism has not succeeded professionally, other than as a nice idea. It is not backed by empirical evidence. From analyses, it seems there is some small inclination toward accepting the concept, but it needs rethinking. One Israeli journalist who analyzed media as it related to the Canadian press and Israeli press in 2006 during the Lebanon war found that although there were inclinations toward peace journalism, the need for war journalists in order to sell papers was greater.

Part of the problem may be that there is no clear idea of what "peace" represents in the conflict, as opposed to the clarity that comes with terms like "advocacy journalism," "civic journalism," or "preventative journalism." Peace might not be the objective. To some, peace means the cessation of war, or a resolution to the conflict in which the international community feels at ease, or a resolution in which a majority of the citizens on both sides feel a sense of normalcy. To some Israelis it could mean a state that is exclusively a Jewish state, and to some Palestinians it could mean absolute right of return. One journalist described a definition of peace as people coming and going from airports, zipping up their jackets, sitting in chairs with legs crossed, not speaking to one another. The monotonous buzz of daily life with no interaction hardly seems like something worth fighting for.

Peace journalism could be reconsidered with more explicit suggestions. Some include developing optimum word choice relative to a specific situation. What works for some

might not work for others depending on their cultural and historical collective experience. Another way is to understand that the human psychological response to fear is to attack back, rather than to appease. Another suggestion is to change the dynamic of polarized narratives by researching for context and including context in all reporting.

Israeli journalist Yoram Binar wrote a revealing book in the 1980s called "My Enemy, My Self," in which he describes his six-month experience of dressing and adopting the mannerisms of a Palestinian. Binar's approach, although extreme, is a good example of the approach that journalists should take when reporting the conflict. Go to the other side, see what they see, understand their fears and objectives, and gain an all-encompassing perspective of the people whose stories that you are trying to convey. Dialogue will only go so far, and it's not far enough, according to public opinion. The media can act as the eyes and ears of everyone touched by this conflict, bringing to light common fears, common suffering, and common hope for resolution.

## ANNEX I – EXPERT NAMES AND BIOGRAPHIES

### CLOSED-DOOR ONE-DAY ROUNDTABLE DISCUSSION - June 8, 2010

#### Israeli Experts

**Jerrold Kessel** – Longtime CNN correspondent from Jerusalem bureau who also writes for *Haaretz* and *The Jerusalem Post*.

**David Landau** – Former editor of *Haaretz*, Former managing editor and diplomatic correspondent for *The Jerusalem Post*.

**Uri Misgav** – *Yediot Ahronot* correspondent and feature story writer on the Israel-Palestine conflict.

**Didi Remez** – Founder of *Coteret: News, analysis and opinion from the Israeli Hebrew print and electronic media* website blog. Expert in policy-change-oriented strategic planning as senior partner at Ben Or Consulting.

#### Palestinian Experts

**Osama Qutteneh** – FTV journalist, Falastiniya TV Program Editor, Former TV producer and program editor at ATV , Dubai, and Abu Dabi TV, Former News Editor at *al-Quds* and *al-Fajir* Arabic daily newspapers.

**Maher Alami** – Columnist and Senior Editor, *Al Quds* Arabic daily newspaper.

**Khalil Asali** – Senior reporter and news editor Sawa Radio (formerly known as Voice of America)

**Nasser Atta** – Regional TV producer, ABC, Atta covered several regional events such as the War in Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen, and traveled frequently in the Arab World. He was the deputy spokesman of the Palestinian Delegation to Madrid Peace Conference 1993.

## Regional Experts

**Ayman Mohyeldin** – *Al Jazeera* International (English) senior correspondent. He was the only international correspondent who covered the Gaza War from inside Gaza. Ayman is an US citizen born to an Egyptian father and Palestinian mother.

## Italian Experts

**Stefano Lamorgese** – Journalist, expert technologist and multimedia designer, experienced in multi-platform publishing, television writer, teaches publishing, market and convergence journalism.

**Zohuir Louassini** – Italian-Moroccan journalist working for Italian Radio and Television (RAI). Editor for several Arab and Italian newspapers teaches Arabic at the University of Roma III.

**Maurizio Cerruti** – Editor of the II *Gazzettino*, special correspondent and commentator, specialized in foreign policy, has written about geo-strategic transformation, development of the European Union, conflicts in the Middle East and the Balkans.

**Giuliano Battiston** – Giuliano Battiston – Freelance journalist, collaborates with *Il Manifesto*, *Liberazione*, and *Il Riformista*, *Lo Straniero*, *Lettera Internazionale*, *Sbilanciamoci.info*, and has written from Afghanistan, Iraq, Oman, Xinjiang, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan.

## PET-Med Project Partners

**Nicoletta Bortoluzzi** – PET-Med Project manager on behalf Veneto Region

**Marco Pasini** – EU projects expert of the Veneto Region

**Prof. Dov Shinar** – Professor and Graduate Studies Coordinator, School of Communication and Head, FAIR MEDIA: Center for the Study of Conflict, War and Peace Coverage, Netanya Academic College. He is the author of books and articles on Peace Journalism and on the media and the conflict.

**Mossi Raz** – Co-Director of Radio All For Peace. He is a former Member of Knesset (Meretz) and former secretary general of Peace Now.

## Moderators

**Ziad AbuZayyad** – An attorney-at-law, he is co-editor of the **Palestine-Israel *Journal***, Regular Columnist at *al-Quds* Arabic Daily, and former Managing Editor of *al-Fajir* Arabic Daily. He is a former Palestinian Authority Minister and Member of the Palestinian Legislative Council.

**Hillel Schenker** – Co-editor of the **Palestine-Israel *Journal***. He is a former editor of *New Outlook*, a journalist who writes for the local and international press, and was a co-founder of Peace Now.

* We thank **Nona de Jonge** and **Laura Smith** for the transcription of the discussion, **Najat Hirbawi**, **Pierre Klochendler** and **Marwan Bazbaz** for the administrative and logistical support they have provided.

**CLOSED-DOOR TWO-DAY VALIDATION WORKSHOP - December 14–15, 2010**

## Israeli Journalists

**Uri Misgav** – Feature story writer and op-ed, *Yediot Ahronot* daily newspaper.

**Didi Remez** - Blogger at *Coteret*, web-based news analysis and opinion from the Israeli Hebrew print and electronic media.

**Yizhar Be'er** – Executive Director, *Keshev* - Center for Protection of Democracy, former journalist.

**Danny Rubinstein** – Arab affairs correspondent at *Haaretz* & *Davar*, now at *Calcalist.*

**Avi Hoffman** – Managing Editor, *Jerusalem Report*, former managing editor *Jerusalem Post*.

*We remember our journalistic colleague* **Jerrold Kessel***, who participated in the first roundtable, and express our sorrow to his family and friends about his loss.*

## Palestinian Journalists

**Osama Qutteneh** – TV journalist, Falastina TV Program editor, former TV producer and program editor ATV, Dubai & Abu-Dabi TV, former news editor at *al-Quds* & *Al-Fajr* daily newspapers

**Maher Alami** – *al-Quds* daily newspaper

**Khalil Assali** – Senior reporter & news editor Sawa Radio (formerly known as Voice of America)

**Nasser Atta** – Regional TV producer, ABC, covered war in Iraq & Lebanon, Deputy Spokesperson of PLO delegation at the Madrid Conference in 1991

**Abdul Raouf Arnaout** – Senior Editor and reporter of *Al-Ayyam* Daily Newspaper

## Regional Journalist

**Walid Omary**– Bureau Chief, Al–Jazeera TV in Palestine & Israel

## Italian Journalists

**Stefano Lamorgese** – Journalist, expert technologist and multimedia designer, experienced in multi-platform publishing, television writer, teaches publishing, market and convergence journalism

**Zohuir Louassini** – Italian-Moroccan journalist working for Italian Radio and Television (RAI). Editor for several Arab and Italian newspapers, teaches Arabic at the University of Roma II.

**Maurizio Cerruti** – Editor of the *II Gazzettino*, special correspondent and commentator, specialized in foreign policy, has written about geo-strategic transformation, development of the European Union, conflicts in the Middle East and the Balkans.

**Giuliano Battiston** – Freelance journalist, deputy editor of *Transeuropa*, collaborates with *Il Manifesto*, *Liberazione*, and *Il Riformista*, *Lo Straneiero*, *Lettera Internazionale*, *Sbilanciamoci.info*, and has written from Afghanistan, Iraq, Oman, Xinjiang, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

## Moderators

**Ziad AbuZayyad** – Co-Editor, **Palestine-Israel *Journal.***

**Hillel Schenker** – Co-Editor **Palestine-Israel *Journal.***

## Palestinian Professor

**Prof. Munther Dajani** – Dept. of Political Science and Area Studies (American and European Studies), Al Quds University; Director, The Issam Sartawi Center for the Advancement of Peace and Democracy; Dean of the Faculty of Arts.

## Israeli Professor

**Prof. Gadi Wolfsfeld** – Dept. of Political Science and Dept. of Communication and Journalism, The Hebrew University of Jerusalem; Director, The Levi Eshkol Institute for Social, Economic, and Political Research in Israel.

## Students in Journalism & Communication

Five Palestinian students from Al Quds University, East Jerusalem, were invited to attend the proceedings on Day 1 of the Validation Workshop; five Israeli students from Hebrew University, Jerusalem, were invited on Day 2. The student groups were accompanied by their respective teachers and were given the opportunity to put questions to the speakers.

## Palestine-Israel Journal Staff

**Pierre Klochendler** – Development, M&E Officer

**Marwan Bazbaz** – Office Manager

**Najat Hirbawi** – Production and Circulation Manager

**Simon Schmitt** – Intern

**David Helfand** – Intern

## Regione Veneto Observers

**Nicolleta Bortoluzzi**

## EU Partnership for Peace Observers

**Beatrice Campodonico** – Task Manager, Middle East Peace Projects, European Commission Technical Assistance Office, West Bank & Gaza Strip

**Sharon Offenberger** – Task Manager, Peace Gender and Cultural Programmes, Delegation of the European Union to the State of Israel

*We thank Palestine-Israel Journal Editorial Assistant **Emily Lawrence** for her help in finalizing this paper.*

## ANNEX II – RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING AND WEBSITES

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