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NORTH AFRICA, WEST ASIA

“The deal of the century”: how global media silenced the Palestinians

News media coverage of the “deal of the century” was deafening in its silence on international law and the Palestinian perspective.

[Abeer Alnajjar](#)

20 February 2020



Palestinian women take part in a protest against US President Donald Trump's "deal of the century" in Gaza city, on February 10, 2020. | Picture by Majdi Fathi/NurPhoto/PA Images. All rights reserved

The most recent instance of international news compliance with the Israeli occupation was the coverage of Donald Trump and Benjamin Netanyahu's latest piece of political theatre, which posed as a "peace plan." The coverage of the proposed American plan shows how many major, mainstream news media outlets are sensitized against any reference to Palestinian rights or international law, and any criticism of Israel or its policies.

The New York Times, *The Washington Post*, CNN, the BBC, Reuters, the Associated Press (AP), and others reported the "deal of the century" as a "peace plan," although many in the international community knew that no peace was expected from the proposed plan. Yet the term "peace plan" appeared in many headlines in major publications including *The New York Times*, the BBC, the AP, Reuters, and others.



Trump releases long-awaited Middle-East peace plan

29 January 2020



Peace Plan That Strongly Favors Israel

The plan would discard the longtime goal of granting the Palestinians a full-fledged state. President Trump called it “a win-win” for both sides; Palestinian leaders immediately rejected it.



Early reports included both “peace plan” and “deal of the century” in their headlines. In several news reports, journalists failed to consistently use quotation marks or any other mechanism to differentiate these politically loaded terms from the news or contextualize them as political speech. Along with *The New York Times*, the AP, and others, BBC World did not place quotation marks around “peace plan” but did place them around “deal of the century.”

Sky News was one of the very few outlets to use quotation marks around “peace plan,” a clear indication of good journalistic judgment and defense against political manipulation. This judgment shifted, however, as Sky News stopped using quotation marks with the term a few days later. The change perhaps followed a shift in the channel’s editorial policy as a result of monitoring how other channels phrased the headlines of their stories.

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Trump's peace plan has 'elements of apartheid', Palestinian official says

Saeb Erekat says the so-called “deal of the century” is a clear attempt to kill off the Oslo peace accords.

Mark Stone
Middle East correspondent @Stone_SkyNews

Wednesday 29 January 2020 21:12 UK

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Palestinians clash with Israeli police after 'peace plan' leak

Tensions spiked in Jerusalem as Donald Trump stated the contents for his “deal of the century” will be released by Tuesday.

Mark Stone
Middle East correspondent @Stone_SkyNews

Friday 24 January 2020 10:00 UK

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When political speech comes from Palestinian sources, or even the EU, news outlets including Sky News and Reuters carefully use quotation marks. Sky News reported that “The plan, announced last week, ‘departs from internationally

agreed parameters’ around a two-state solution,” while the EU said, “as if these parameters are not common knowledge about the conflict.” The same channel also ran the headline, “Trump’s peace plan has ‘elements of apartheid’, Palestinian official says,” with the subheadline, “Saeb Erekat says the so-called ‘deal of the century’ is a clear attempt to kill off the Oslo peace accords.”



Reuters and the BBC also fell into the trap of using tropes propagated by the Trump administration. Two of the tropes that have been highly circulated but rarely examined in the news media are that Palestinians reject any peace initiative and that Israel desires and is committed to peace. The internationally acknowledged rights of Palestinians in the pre-1967 borders have been referred to as Palestinian “claims,” “ambitions,” and “hopes.” Reuters’ main story on the American proposal reads, “Palestinians cut ties with Israel, U.S. after rejecting peace plan.” BBC World followed suit by giving prominence to headlines dictated by the political speech of Trump, Netanyahu, and Jared Kushner.

The New York Times’ main story on this event used ambiguous language: the lead of the report states that the plan would “give Israel most of what it sought ... while offering the Palestinians the possibility of a state with limited sovereignty.” The reporters later describe the Jordan River Valley, occupied in 1967, as “strategically important” to Israel. They refer to Israel’s intended annexation of the illegal

important” to Israel. They refer to Israel’s intended annexation of the illegal settlements in the occupied territory of the West Bank without mentioning the occupation or the 1967 borders.

Settlements are not described as “illegal” and the West Bank is not described as the “occupied territories.”

Context is rare in news coverage and analysis is limited, apart from rare occasions when keywords are hidden at the end of an article. Settlements are not described as “illegal” and the West Bank is not described as the “occupied territories.” The 1967 borders are not referenced, nor are Palestinian “refugees.” AP News describes the recommended four-year freeze in Israeli settlement expansion as a “concession,” and fails to mention that the West Bank is occupied or refer to the growth of the Israeli settlements or their impact on the proposed “Palestinian

entity” called the “state.” Even *The Washington Post* refers to the occupied territories as having been “captured” in 1967, rather than “occupied.”

The Washington Post invoked the Palestinian perspective in their headline, “In the West Bank, Trump’s plan has validated settlers’ dreams — and crushed the hopes of Palestinians,” which ran two days after Trump and Netanyahu’s announcement. Even this story’s lead, however, is dedicated to an Israeli settler in the Occupied

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News media enabled Trump, Netanyahu, and Kushner to delegitimize the Palestinians as an emotional group with no strategic vision and to silence them by using imperial discourse that presents them as an irrational group of people who need both guidance and anger management. *The New York Times* stated that the Israeli annexation of the Jordan Valley and Israel’s illegal settlements are “sure to

further inflame the Palestinians.” The Associated Press similarly reported that “Trump peace plan delights Israelis, enrages Palestinians.” *The Washington Post* used similar language.

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The Washington Post
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Middle East

Israel rushes to capitalize on peace plan as Palestinians express anger

Unpacking Trump's 'deal of the century' for the Middle East



Several news sources, including *The Washington Post* and *The New York Times*, reported the AP story titled “Angry Palestinians face dilemma in responding to Trump Plan.” *The New York Times* later deleted the story from its website.



On the day of the announcement of Trump’s plan, BBC host Emily Maitlis interrupted Husam Zomlat, the chief Palestinian diplomat to the UK, several times in an interview to ask whether he read the eighty-page proposal. She was not even being patient to listen to his view, at least for what he represents. Similarly, Christiane Amanpour questioned Palestinian Prime Minister Mohammad Shtayyeh on corruption in the Palestinian Authority, political disunity of Palestinians, and the “rejectionist approach” to all peace proposals.

Journalists also refrained from any criticism of Israel, its occupation, or its withstanding discriminatory policies

On the other hand, Trump, Netanyahu, and Kushner’s statements dominated the news media with little interruption, context, or critique. Journalists did not challenge them on dictating a humiliating proposal to the Palestinians or on

claiming that the plight of the Palestinians is economic when playing the card of the economic section of the “deal of the century.” Journalists also refrained from any criticism of Israel, its occupation, or its withstanding discriminatory policies to subjugate the Palestinians, or from questioning its absolute acceptance of the

deal.

Pro-Israel groups have consistently worked to conflate Judaism with Israel and delegitimize political actors and journalists who question or criticize its discriminatory policies against the Palestinians or its occupation as “anti-Semitic.” The idea that criticizing Israel can be anything but anti-Semitic is one of the most common arguments disseminated in the Israeli media.

The Israeli media also equates Zionism with Semitism, meaning that any criticism of Zionists is anti-Semitic. Recently, veteran BBC Middle East correspondent Orla Guerin referred to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in her Holocaust report. Near the end of her report, as it showed Israeli soldiers entering the Memorial Hall, Guerin said, “Young soldiers troop in to share the binding tragedy of the Jewish people. The state of Israel is now a regional power. For decades it has occupied Palestinian territories. But some here will always see their nation through the prism of persecution and survival.” A campaign against the BBC and this journalist was launched by The Board of Deputies of British Jews, The Campaign Against Anti-Semitism, and others, to discredit the reporter and claim bias and anti-Semitic reporting. They complained to the BBC and threatened to bring the matter to the British regulatory body, Ofcom.

Bias against Palestinians infects Arab news

There is a good chance that Arab media coverage is orchestrated by the American administration, its allies, and its agents in the region through state control or direct contact with media organizations. Earlier this year, news reports appeared about a US data operation designed to advance its ranking of influential Arab media sources and improve sentiments towards the US administration and regional policy.

Arab journalists failed to ask questions about the rights of refugees, the borders, East Jerusalem, and which kind of “state” would the Palestinians have

Much of the pan-Arab news media failed to accurately report on the Palestinian view of the plan, as many Arabic-speaking outlets featured orchestrated coverage of the deal even when criticizing it. News spread about a WhatsApp group of Egyptian editors who received directions from an Egyptian state agency on their reporting: do not use “deal of the century,” use “peace plan”; refrain from involving Al Azhar (the Egyptian religious authority) in the coverage; and, of course, praise the historical role of Egypt in supporting the Palestinians. Sky News Arabia, the pan-Arab news channel, reported Trump’s proposal as a “peace plan” with no quotation marks and refrained from using the phrase “deal of the century.”

In all interviews with Jared Kushner, Arab journalists failed to ask questions about the rights of refugees, the borders, East Jerusalem, and which kind of “state” would the Palestinians have. Al Jazeera (English and Arabic) and Al-Arabiya gave Kushner unchallenged airtime on the day of the announcement. MBC gave him extended airtime to explain his plan to Arab audiences. News media coverage of the “deal of the century” was deafening in its silence on international law and the Palestinian perspective, their rights, and the absence of their internationally endorsed rights from the proposed plan.

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