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Media coverage of Gaza-Israel war since 7th October

The shifting narratives: A Discourse analysis of Washington Post and New York Times on the Gaza-Israel war.

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Made by:

Islom Askarov

Supervisor:

Danny Raymond

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Abstract

In recent months, the Palestine-Israel conflict has remained a focal point of global attention, marked by its complexity and continuous impact on regional stability. This master thesis takes on a journey to retrieve the evolving narratives presented by two influential media giants, The Washington Post (WP) and The New York Times (NYT), during the period spanning from October 7th, 2023, to May 2024. Through a detailed discourse analysis, this study seeks to unveil the big and visible shifts in their portrayal of the conflict, specifically exploring the transition from initial sympathy towards Israel to a progressively more obvious favoritism towards the Palestinian perspective for several reasons. The analysis delves into the textual and contextual elements of WP and NYT coverage, employing a detailed approach rooted in discourse analysis theory. By understanding language use, framing techniques, and thematic emphases within the editorials published by both outlets, this research seeks to showcase the underlying factors and agendas shaping their narratives. Furthermore, it aims to uncover the geo-political dynamics and external influences that contribute to the transformation of media discourse over time like the US's role in the conflict or Iran's influence. Central to this investigation is the identification of key turning points and pivotal events that cause significant shifts in the media's representation of the Palestine-Israel war. From the escalation of violence in October 2023 to the culmination of events in May 2024, this study traces the trajectory of WP and NYT coverage, highlighting moments of divergence and convergence in their portrayal of the fighting parties along with third parties. Through a critical discourse analysis, it seeks to collect patterns, trends, and differences in the framing of the conflict, highlighting the important factors driving these narrative changes. Ultimately, this master thesis seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role played by media in shaping public perceptions and influencing policy debates surrounding the Palestine-Israel conflict. By discovering the complexity of WP and NYT narratives, it aims to promote critical engagement with media representations of conflict and facilitate informed discourse on pathways to peace and reconciliation in the region.

Keywords: Oct 7th, death toll, humanitarian crisis, US's role, peace,

1. Introduction

1.1 Motivation

First and foremost, before starting to write it is quite crucial to point out that violence in any form should not be tolerated. I am strongly against using violence to solve problems between countries. From the beginning of the war, I started to watch daily on how things would take direction. After Hamas's attack on Israel, the world stood up against Hamas. After a few weeks into the conflict, there were civilians being bombed and the number grew daily. I engaged in conversations with colleagues, friends from various backgrounds, including Danes, and Americans, Asians who strongly condemned Hamas following the outbreak of the war, but a common sentiment emerged among them after a few months: a stark disconnect between the narratives portrayed in Western news outlets and the unfiltered reality depicted on social media platforms like TikTok, Facebook, and Telegram etc. Due to easy access to internet, it is now possible to follow live news within seconds. A lot of people including me experienced astonishment at the contrast between what they were seeing on their feeds, shorts, stories—images and videos of the devastation by Israeli bombings, including scenes of civilians going through rubble in search of loved ones—and information provided by some Western news platforms.

As an everyday observer of global events, I have been troubled by the disparity between different narratives presented in mainstream Western media outlets, especially in their coverage of conflicts involving the Middle East. The Gaza-Israel conflict, in particular, has been a focal point of contention, with divergent perspectives often shaping public discourse and policy debates.

However, as the war entered its 11th month in October 2023, I noticed many media platforms were also turning directions. They started to criticize Israel in their articles, editorials, videos. As a result, I got interested in knowing how media outlets would portray events on the ground and why they would change their discourse over time.

My motivation to delve into this topic is thus driven by a desire to unpack the underlying reasons behind the discourse change in Western media coverage of the Gaza-Israel war. I soon realized that by understanding the factors, including events such as steep death toll, international pressure, and global public opinion, the US's approach, volunteers and journalists killed, one can observe discourse change.

Furthermore, I am driven by a sense of responsibility to critically engage with media discourse and promote media literacy among the broader public. In an era marked by information overload and misinformation campaigns, the ability to understand the news platforms and analyzing their content is important. By conducting a rigorous analysis of media representations in this thesis, I hope to contribute to a more nuanced understanding of the challenges and implications of media coverage. Moreover, I am driven by a commitment to contribute meaningfully to academic discourse and to address pressing questions that have real-world implications like the one Palestine-Israel. By undertaking this study, I aim to bridge the gap between theory and practice, leveraging theoretical insights from media studies and discourse analysis to offer practical insights into the dynamics of media representation in conflict contexts.

Ultimately, my motivation is based on a commitment to encouraging a more informed, and just society, where media outlets uphold the principles of objectivity, integrity, and accountability in their reporting. By addressing the nuances of media discourse in the context of the Gaza-Israel war, I want to pioneer critical reflection and constructive dialogue towards a more balanced and responsible media environment.

1.2 The significance of analysis

Western media outlets have a significant influence on public opinion and perceptions of international conflicts, including the Israel-Palestine issue (Zelizer, 2010). Analyzing how these news articles frame the conflict can provide insights into how it is understood and interpreted by Western audiences, shaping their attitudes, beliefs, and policy preferences.

Besides, the Palestine-Israel conflict stands as a longstanding and highly contentious issue with important influences for regional stability and global security. As such, analyzing the portrayal of this conflict by prominent media outlets like WP and NYT offers a window into the complexities of the conflict itself, as well as broader dynamics within the Middle East. By tracing the evolution of media narratives over the specified timeframe, this research offers an understanding of the shifting geopolitical dynamics and their reflection in media representations. Media coverage of the Israel-Palestine issue often informs policy debates and decision-making processes in Western countries, particularly those with diplomatic, economic, and military interests to the region (Katz, 2003). By analyzing news articles, researchers can identify the discursive strategies and narratives used to justify or critique specific policies and interventions, explaining the dynamics of Western engagement with the conflict.

Western media outlets are expected to adhere to ethical and professional standards in their coverage of international conflicts, including accuracy, objectivity, and balance (Hallin & Mancini, 2004). Analyzing news articles allows researchers to assess the extent to which these standards are upheld and to identify instances of bias, distortion, or misrepresentation in the reporting of the Israel-Palestine issue for example.

Moreover, this research has practical implications for policymakers, journalists, and advocacy groups, activists involved in efforts to promote peace in the region. By critically examining the framing strategies employed by WP and NYT, relevant groups can gain a deeper understanding of the narratives that shape public discourse and inform policy decisions. This, in turn, can facilitate more informed and constructive dialogue surrounding the Palestine-Israel conflict.

In conclusion, this research holds significant scholarly and practical importance, offering valuable insights into the role of media in shaping perceptions of conflict and influencing public discourse. By analyzing the evolving narratives of WP and NYT regarding the Gaza-Israel war, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of the complexities of the conflict itself.

1.3 Historical context

The Israel-Palestine conflict stands as one of the most discussed and contentious disputes in modern history, deeply rooted in a complex line of historical, religious, and geopolitical factors. The history of the problem can be traced by the evolution of the conflict through four distinct stages, examining its origins, key events, and enduring implications up to October 2023.

First stage.

The Emergence of Zionism and Palestinian Nationalism (Late 19th - Early 20th Century) The roots of the Israel-Palestine conflict can be traced back to the late 19th century with the rise of the Zionist movement, which advocated for the establishment of a Jewish homeland in Palestine. The Balfour Declaration of 1917, issued by the British government, lent official support to the Zionist aspirations, giving the foundation for the final establishment of the state of Israel in 1948. Parallely, Palestinian nationalism began to assert itself in response to Zionist immigration and land acquisition, setting the stage for decades of conflict over territory and sovereignty (Smith, 2017).

Stage Two.

War and Displacement (1948 - 1967) The year 1948 marked a important moment in the conflict with the declaration of Israeli independence and following Arab-Israeli War. This conflict resulted in the displacement of hundreds of thousands of Palestinians, laying the foundation for the refugee crisis that continuous to this day. The 1967 Six-Day War further worsened tensions, as Israel occupied the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem, igniting Palestinian resistance and leading to a environment of ongoing conflict and occupation (Morris, 2008).

Stage Three.

Peace Process and Oslo Accords (1980s - 1990s) Amidst increasing violence and international pressure, the 1980s witnessed the emergence of diplomatic efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict. The Oslo Accords of 1993, mediated by the United States, Israel, and the Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO), represented an important moment, giving mutual recognition and a strategy for Palestinian self-governance. However, subsequent setbacks, including the assassination of Israeli Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin and continued settlement expansion, reduced the chances for lasting peace (Quandt, 2005).

Stage Four.

Stagnation and Escalation (2000s - October 2023) The early 21st century witnessed a cycle of hope and despair, characterized by some peace talks, violent clashes, and unilateral actions. The breakdown of peace negotiations at Camp David in 2000 and the eruption of the Second Intifada underlined the deep-seated grievances and mistrust between the two sides. Efforts to revive the peace process, including the Annapolis Conference in 2007 and the Kerry Initiative in 2013, delayed midst deep-rooted obstacles and competing narratives. Meanwhile, the expansion of Israeli settlements in the occupied territories and the construction of the separation barrier further complicated the status quo, continuing a cycle of violence and dispossession (Gelvin, 2005).

1.4. Brief literature review

The Israel-Palestine conflict has long been a subject of intense scholarly inquiry, with researchers exploring various dimensions of media coverage, discourse, and representation. This literature review compresses key findings and insights from the most relevant past studies to provide an overview of the evolving area of academic inquiry into media portrayals of the conflict. In fact, there are many works done on this issue, but the scale of the project is not sufficient to grab more than a couple of them.

One of the seminal works in this field is Edward Said's "Covering Islam," which critically examines Western media representations of Islam and the Middle East, including the Israel-Palestine conflict. Said's analysis highlights the pervasive Orientalist discourse that fills media coverage, depicting the conflict through a lens of cultural essentialism and othering. He suggested that this Orientalist discourse served imperialist agendas by legitimizing Western dominance over the region (Said, 1981).

Another work on the issue is that Elmasry did a content analysis of The New York Times's portrayal of deaths in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The study aimed to discover any biases or disparities in coverage by examining the quantity and quality of coverage given to Israeli and Palestinian deaths. Elmasry found big discrepancies in the attention given to deaths on both sides, with Israeli deaths taking considerably more coverage than Palestinian deaths. This disparity raised questions about the fairness and balance of The New York Times's reporting on the conflict (Elmasry, 2010).

Ahmed, Abed, and Hussain also conducted a critical discourse analysis (CDA) of the Israeli-Palestinian struggle. Their study, published in the International Journal of Health Sciences, tried to analyze the language and discourse used in media representations of the conflict. The researchers employed CDA to uncover underlying power dynamics, ideologies, and biases present in the discourse surrounding the conflict. Through their analysis, Ahmed et al. showed how media representations lead to the perpetuation of the conflict by pushing dominant narratives and not giving room for alternative perspectives. They highlighted the significance of critically examining media discourse to comprehend its influence on changing public perceptions and attitudes towards the Israeli-Palestinian struggle (Ahmed et al. 2022).

2. Methodology and Theoretical Framework

2.1 CDA

Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) offers a strong framework for understanding narrative change in media analysis by examining the interaction between language use, power relations, and socio-political context. Based in critical social theory, CDA seeks to discover the hidden ideologies and discursive strategies that shape media representations and influence public discourse on contentious issues such as conflicts and crises.

At the core of CDA there is the understanding that language is not a neutral tool of communication but rather a way of struggle where dominant ideologies are reproduced, argued, or subverted (Fairclough, 2003). Through the systematic analysis of linguistic features, discursive structures, and rhetorical devices, CDA discovers the underlying power dynamics and different forces that develop and change media narratives, pointing out how they evolve over time.

One key aspect of CDA is its focus on examining the role of language in constructing and disseminating ideologies. Media narratives are influenced with ideological biases that reflect the interests and perspectives of dominant social groups, influencing how conflicts are framed and interpreted by audiences (van Dijk, 1998). By deconstructing discursive practices and uncovering hidden meanings, CDA exposes the ways in which media discourses serve to legitimize or contest existing power relations, shaping public perceptions of conflicts and shaping policy responses.

Moreover, CDA emphasizes the importance of socio-political context in understanding narrative change in media discourse. Media representations are not static but are shaped by a multiple of factors, including shifting political dynamics, changing public opinion, and external events such as diplomatic initiatives or humanitarian crises. CDA tries to place media texts within their broader socio-political context, analyzing how contextual factors influence discursive strategies and narrative framing (Wodak & Meyer, 2009).

In the context of conflict coverage, CDA offers insights into how media narratives evolve in response to changing events and dynamics. For example, the escalation of violence, high death tolls, or attacks on humanitarian workers may trigger shifts in media framing, leading to increased scrutiny of hostile parties or calls for international intervention. Through a CDA lens,

researchers can trace these narrative changes, examining how language use, tone, and framing strategies adapt to reflect evolving realities on the ground.

Furthermore, CDA highlights the role of agency and resistance in media discourse, recognizing that marginalized voices and alternative perspectives often challenge dominant narratives and disrupt mainstream discourses. Public movements, social media activism, and public protests can give significant pressure on media outlets to reevaluate their coverage and move direction to an opposite side, leading to shifts in narrative framing and agenda-setting (Fairclough, 2003).

In sum, Critical Discourse Analysis provides a strong framework for understanding narrative change in media analysis by revealing the underlying power dynamics, ideological biases, and socio-political influences that shape media representations of conflicts and crises. By discovering the discursive strategies and rhetorical structures employed by media outlets, CDA enables researchers to keep track on the evolution of media narratives over time.

2.2 Data collection

Reading through NYT and WP, I realized that on both news platforms there have been over 4000 articles in total since the 7th of October. Due to time limit and the scale of the thesis being not too large, I analyzed editorials which are the articles that show the opinion and the stance of the platforms. Only for supporting and explaining the context around editorials, I used some articles from other sources, otherwise it would be impossible to see where the context of the analysis is coming from. Besides, I specifically focused on pivotal events that had the potential to shape the discourse surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict. Specifically, I chose editorials published around the key moments such as 7th of October, US's criticism of Israel, significant international gatherings, such as the International Court of Justice convening to discuss South Africa's claim for genocide or global protests, UN gatherings to pass ceasefire resolutions, and most importantly the increasing number of Palestinians's death toll over the eight months. By analyzing coverage before and after these events, I tried to outline how news outlets responded to and framed these critical moments.

Before going into the analysis, I organized the selected editorials chronologically, ensuring a balanced representation from both The Washington Post and The New York Times. Therefore, I chose three time periods: the beginning of the war (Oct-Dec), the middle of the war (Jan-Mar),

and the latest period (Apr-May). I then conducted a close reading of each editorials, paying careful attention to linguistic nuances, framing, and narrative structure.

2.3. Limitations

A notable constraint I encountered during discourse analysis is the decreasing frequency of editorial publications over time. Initially, both platforms showed a consistent output of editorials on a weekly basis; however, this frequency progressively declined, ultimately resulting in both WT and NYT publishing one editorial monthly. Such a decline in editorial numbers posed challenges to the analytical process by limiting the availability of data for comprehensive examination.

Additionally, as I concluded the writing the war in Rafah city was still on the way by Israeli army. It is important to see how NYT and WP would cover the latest period that would give conclusive insights into the discourse surrounding the event.

3. Analysis

3.1. Three periods of analysis

By analyzing editorials from news platforms I have decided to write three main stages of the war where there can be observed obvious changes in narratives.

The first stage is the war that started on October 7th witnessed a predominant focus on and sympathy towards the Israelis and its government, with widespread condemnation of Hamas across various platforms. This phase, I called as the "Victim Israel and its right to defend itself", Israel tried hard to fully eliminate Hamas during the initial weeks even months, receiving significant support from numerous Western nations towards Israel's action to conduct war in Gaza. The statement "right to defend itself" occurred in almost all the editorials I read and analyzed. This period includes time from October 2023 until December 2023. Although towards the end of this period, there was already little criticism about Israel's actions, it is after this period, one can observe a obvious shift in their narratives.

The second phase of analysis, I would name as the "Weakening global support for Israel" period, in which Israel continued its brutal military operations, resulting in a staggering death toll of over 20,000 Gazans according to Health Ministry of Gaza and the UN, predominantly comprising of

women and children. Despite mounting casualties, Israel asserted its right to self-defense and persisted with its assaults in densely populated Gaza strip. While support for Israel remained substantial in many parts of the world especially from the US, increasing fatalities gradually urged some nations to condemn Israel's actions and advocate for a ceasefire. Notably, South Africa changed international discourse by characterizing Israel's conduct as genocide during an ICJ assembly in December 2023. Also, some Western states started to condemn Israel's actions in this period (The New York Times, 2023). I chose the timeline from January until March 2024. The last third period, I called as "Isolated Israel", but not the final one because at the time of my writing Israel's assault still continue in Gaza, mostly in Rafah which is a small place between Gaza and Egypt where more than 1.5 millions displaced Gazans are surviving. This period would include from April to May 2024, has witnessed the continuation of Israel's deadly offensive in Gaza, with the death toll surpassing about 35,000 and over 79,000 individuals being injured, and not including those thousands of people under rubbles. Amidst this devastation, millions have sought refuge in the southern city of Rafah, claimed to be one of Gazans' last options for safety. International sentiment has undergone a notable shift, with numerous European and other nations calling for an immediate ceasefire. President Biden, echoing global concerns, warned Israel multiple times against the consequences of further escalation in Rafah, even by halting certain arms shipments to Israel. This period is marked by a growing global consensus against Israel's war actions, even evidenced by widespread protests across Ivy League universities in the United States. Although some close allies continue to support Israel like the US, it increasingly finds itself isolated on the international stage (The Washington Post, 2024).

3.2. A difference in numbers and factors that change media narrative.

In the first weeks of the war the publications written by New York Times, The Washington Post showed a lot of sympathy and grief towards 1200 Israelis killed by Hamas. It was natural and imminent from Western media outlets. Because the West and especially USA are closest allies of Israel, and this reflects in the media coverage as well.

For example, The New York Times has been super active in its coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict, with over 2000 articles published on the issue since the outbreak of the war on 7th of October, averaging nearly 11 articles per day.

However, the coverage of the conflict in The New York Times was largely absent from May 2021 to October 2023, almost two and a half years, with the last article addressing the issue published in 2021. Just as an example, Israel bombed Gaza three times in a row in September 2023 a few weeks prior to the Oct 7th (NPR, 2023). These bombings in Gaza did not appear in any article in New York Times and Washington Post.

This indicates a significant and a sudden shift in the newspaper's attention to the conflict. Similarly, The Washington Post's coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict prior to the October 7th was limited too, with the last article focusing on the sale of donkeys to Gaza a few days before the war (The Washington Post, 2023).

However, as the conflict progressed and the death toll, particularly among civilians, continued to mount, Israeli officials faced increasing difficulty and pressure from world leaders, international journalists, and organizations. For instance, journalists like Piers Morgan challenged Israeli spokespersons, IDF commanders on his show to provide specific figures regarding the number of Hamas members killed and civilians killed because of Israeli bombings, questioning the lack of transparency or accountability in Israel's military operations. Most of the time they were unable to provide exact numbers. It seems that as well impacted public opinion to change as these shows often were viewed by thousands if not millions of people. Secondly, there were global opposition against Israel's conduct of war. A clear example for this is South Africa's claim to International Court of Justice about Israel's genocide in Gaza. Thirdly, in some instances IDF soldiers killed Israeli hostages by mistake or bombed the truck of World Central Kitchen aid workers who had no connection with Hamas, they were voluntarily giving food for Gazans. They were Westerners, not Gazans. The fact that they were killed raised questions by many western allies of Israel, especially the US. Thirdly, pro-Palestine student protests in the US college campuses starting from the end of April have had a huge impact to shift the narrative in the news coverage as well. Following the those events, I observed notable shifts in the discourse surrounding the Israel-Palestine war. News outlets often responded to these events by adjusting their coverage to reflect the new developments. This included changes in framing, emphasis, and sourcing, as well as the incorporation of expert analysis and commentary to contextualize the significance of the events.

3.3. Statements of Israeli officials

Emotional and destructive statements have been echoed by Israeli officials from the start of the conflict, with some openly expressing a readiness to pursue the destruction of Gaza.

The statements stated by Israeli officials, including Israeli Defense Minister Yuav Gallant, President Isaac Herzog, prime minister Netanyahu, and Ariel Kallner, a member of the Israeli parliament, reflect a hardline stance towards the conflict with Hamas. As stated above, Yoav Gallant's tweet "there will be no food, no water, no fuel, no electricity, we are fighting human animals, we will act accordingly". If you notice the language he used, he did not differentiate civilians and militants, which outlines a severe approach towards Gazans, which he could have avoided by using unambiguous wording and would have written Hamas only. To which the editorial board said on their editorial, it was emotional war and it started with intense emotions but they did not challenge the statement (New York Times, 2023).

Similarly, President Herzog's remarks: "It's an entire nation out there that is responsible. This rhetoric about civilians not aware, not involved, it's absolutely not true. They could've risen up, they could have fought against that evil regime," said Herzog (The Guardian, 2023). It suggests a lack of differentiation between civilians and militants in Hamas-controlled areas, holding the entire population responsible for the actions of the militant group.

Kallner's statement "Right now, one goal: Nakba! A Nakba that will overshadow the Nakba of 1948," he said for a repeat of the mass expulsion of Arabs in 1948 reflects a more extreme viewpoint, calling for drastic measures in response to the ongoing conflict (The Guardian, 2023). These statements illustrate the feelings of emotion and desperate surrounding the situation but also highlight the complexities and challenges inherent in finding a long term solution to the issue.

From the beginning of the war, Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu himself issued stark warnings to his fellow citizens, indicating that the war would be prolonged and potentially devastating (New York Times, 2023). Furthermore, Netanyahu invoked biblical references, specifically mentioning the killings of the Amalekites, which he analogized to the situation in Gaza, suggesting a ruthless approach towards the Palestinians (NPR, 2023).

3.4. Analysis: First period

This period is mostly full of condemnation of Hamas and feelings of sympathy for Israel in both WP and NYT. We can observe this argument by looking at their coverage proportion. For example, WP wrote seven editorials and four of which one after another starting from on October 7th, 9th, 12th, 17th which is quite different in the following timeframe. Almost all these four initial editorials are full of condemnation of Hamas and description of the aftermath of the attack. Likewise, NYT published 6 editorials during the first period of the war (Oct-Dec). This number will reduce to four in the following period. Here, for the sake of showing the stance of news platforms I am only counting the number of editorials, but not articles or opinions of journalists. There more than hundred articles in the first period alone in both news platforms. We can see only about one editorial per month in the last period (Apr-May). This also shows the more times passes, the less they are interested in giving their stance on the war Israel is carrying in Gaza. Maybe there are other reasons for that.

New York Times on Oct 7th

The first editorial published on New York Times on 9th of October is shows a great deal of sympathy towards Israel, how hard the attack was to Israeli society. For example, the following wordings and emotional language used can demonstrate this:

“The attack by Hamas on Israel on October 7th, 2023, has caused immense tragedy and may have significant implications for the nation and the broader region as well. Israelis grappled with shock and grief as they mourn the loss of lives, injuries, and hostages taken during the attacks. The Hamas militants targeted military and civilians, including vulnerable people like older individuals, women, and children. With over 800 Israelis killed in coordinated rocket strikes and ongoing conflict, the scale of devastation is profound.

The board also thought that this attack made Israel even weaker in the context of global antisemitism. However, very soon they would never mention this phrase in the following months.

This attack serves as a distressing reminder of Israel's enduring vulnerability, particularly amidst rising global anti-Semitism” (The New York Times, 2023).

The name of the editorial is “the attack on Israel demands unity and resolve” which in short means that the board urged the allies of Israel need to stand behind and fully support Israel in the war which indeed they did from the very beginning. Especially they mentioned that the US

should be at the forefront of the helping countries. It is very important to pinpoint this narrative of the US's role, because both news platforms kept mentioning the role of the US throughout the whole period. Interestingly, while in the beginning they urged the US to help Israel immensely, in the later months they called the US to stop the war and reduce support for Israel. The board said the following:

“President Biden's backing of Israel during this difficult time is crucial and warranted. As Israel's closest ally, the United States holds significant responsibility. Moderate Israeli opposition figures have indicated their willingness to collaborate with Mr. Netanyahu in forming an emergency government. It is imperative for the Biden administration and all supporters of Israel to endorse and promote such a wide-ranging coalition” (The New York Times, 2023).

Besides, the newspaper's board makes the comparison of the attack to event of 9/11 in the US, by which it makes it even more obvious to feel the context by larger audience:

“ Hamas's assault, occurring on the Jewish Sabbath and a holiday, has even provoked comparisons to the traumatic events of 9/11 for many Israelis”.

The overall language used to describe the Hamas's attack and the comparison of the attack to the 9/11 and highlighting the significance of this one particularly, demonstrates the victimhood of Israel by the newspaper coverage:

“The timing also coincided with the anniversary of the 1973 Yom Kippur War, further underscoring the historical significance of the assault. Unlike previous conflicts involving Arab armies, this attack was orchestrated by militants from a Palestinian enclave, posing a new challenge to Israel's security. Armed groups, questioning Israel's right to exist, orchestrated the assault, heightening tensions in the region” (The New York Times, 2023).

Washington Post

Almost the same narrative and framing can be observed within the editorials by the Washington post published on 7th and 9th of October. The common theme between these editorials is the US's assistance to Israel which was the ground for Israel's beginning of a large-scale bombardment in Gaza. The first editorial highlighted the importance of the coalition between the West and Israel in eliminating Hamas as well as internal coalition between parties.

“Israel's internal disagreements, driven by extreme right-wing parties in Netanyahu's government and his problematic judicial reform plans, made a room an opportunity for

escalations of problems. However, in light of the emergency, leading politicians appear to be setting aside their differences to address the crisis collaboratively” (Washington Post, 2023). And the latter says that Israel has “the right to defend itself” which became one of the most repeated statements for editorials for the next couple of months but later this would disappear from discourse.

“Israel has the right to defend itself, which includes the right to confront Hamas in Gaza”.

The board described Israeli army as professional and outlines that it is moral as compared with Hamas. But later in the third period, we will discuss that the board would question this notion and condemned IDF for killing innocent civilians. This suggests that initial emotions after the attack also affected the board to make bold statements.

“The Israel Defense Forces now have the chance to not only present their military capability but also to showcase the ethical difference between a professional army and a terrorist group like Hamas by reducing large-scale damage” (Washington Post, 2023).

It is also important to note here, earlier the NYT’s board compared the Hamas’s attack to 9/11 but WP took this comparison a bit differently and signaled a possible backlash if Israel would go more than necessary. Like the US got full global support after 9/11, and America killed too many people in the Middle East and later that support disappeared. Israel was in the same situation after Oct 7th so the board warned Israel to learn lesson from the US. (Washington Post, 2023).

“In their current state of anger, Israelis would be wise to take lessons from the lesson of U.S. experience”.

New York Times on self defense

“Israel can defend itself and uphold its values” is the headline of another editorial published by New York Times board on 14th of October. In it, the board reminds the readers of two main points: the first is Israel’s inevitable response to Hamas and the second is it must protect civilians. The first argument which Israel’s government should take Hamas into responsibility is to respond to Hamas and take revenge for the attack (The New York Times, 2023).

“Israel has a responsibility to its citizens to hold accountable the perpetrators of this violence”.

What it also emphasized was that Israeli army values human life as in WP mentioned above, and do not harm civilians and do not attack entire city block to fight militants.

“The Israeli Army maintains a commitment to avoid targeting civilians and to prevent disproportionate harm. They aim to avoid large-scale destruction, such as demolishing an entire city block, when more precise targeting of fighters is possible.”

The editorial warned however that Israel indeed should be very careful with journalists and humanitarian workers. If Israel’s army kill these people, later it may be held accountable by the world and by its citizens. It was the first time the board spoke out to warn Israel about consequence of the killing innocent people. This would get stronger and stronger over time as we go through the editorials.

“Israel should prioritize the safety of journalists and humanitarian workers in conflict areas. These individuals play a crucial role by documenting events, which enables accountability for all parties involved, both domestically and internationally.”

According to Committee to Protect Journalist as of May 17, 2024, Israel have killed more than 100 Palestinian journalists, media workers since October 7th. The CPJ also wrote the names and workplace of them on the article they published.

“Journalists have paid the ultimate price—their lives—since the start of the Israel-Gaza war, defending our right to the truth,” stated CPJ Program Director Carlos Martínez (Committee to Protect Journalists, 2024).

He also said:

“With each journalist’s death or injury, we lose a piece of that truth. As civilians, journalists are protected by international humanitarian law during conflicts. Those accountable for their deaths will face judgment both under international law and in the unforgiving court of history.”

From this time onwards, slowly but surely both boards started giving warnings to Israel on civilian casualties and that America should be helping to do so. Otherwise, the first goal of eliminating Hamas would become something big and that would make Israel more insecure than safe place.

“By eliminating the Hamas, Israel can be safer, but by killing more civilians it will not”

Washington Post

The editorial published on 17th of October by the platform focuses on the visit of Biden to Israel to discuss helping with humanitarian aid for 2.4 million Gazans and to talk about reducing casualties. The editorial also highlights the number of people killed in Gaza has exceeded the death toll of five previous clashes between Israel and Hamas and they called it “monumental crisis” in Gaza.

“The number of Palestinians killed and displaced in the current conflict has surpassed the totals from any of the five previous Israel-Hamas conflicts since 2008”.

This war could kill even more civilians if Israel’s army do not take necessary measures to protect civilian casualties and abide by international laws (Washington Post, 2023).

Here, the post pressures as well as challenges Israeli army.

“If Israel continuous with a ground battle, as expected, it will probably result in more loss of life. This conflict will severely test the professionalism of the Israeli military.

That above-mentioned statement, that Israeli army is professional and moral, has been one of the most repeated statements and notice the word ”test the professionalism”, but in the previous editorial NYT’s board was sure that Israel’s army is moral and professional and would not kill civilians. The discourse has a bit shifted on this matter after a couple of weeks of the war. They constantly would remind the Israel of civilian’s casualties and innocent lives including children, women and elderly. The fact of the matter is despite all these warnings the death toll has increased gradually. Also, they called Israeli officials to calm down from their emotions and do not let emotions weaponize them otherwise the outcome would be both illegal and immoral.

In light of this, remarks from some current and former Israeli officials have highlighted the danger of letting emotions dictate actions. Such an approach is inconsistent with the principles of proportionality and precision mandated by the laws of war”.

It is clear that the Washington post shows some signs of concerns about Israel’s actions in Gaza and that it should be very careful with the conduct of war. Because Gaza was already in a dire situation before the war and majority of its population were living under poverty and did not have enough clean water to drink.

“Even prior to the current crisis, Gaza faced a land, sea, and air blockade that had devastating effects: 81.5 percent of the population lived in poverty, and 63 percent relied on

humanitarian assistance. Additionally, the majority of drinking water was unsafe for human consumption” (Washington Post, 2023).

New York Times

Another editorial by the New York Times board published on 3rd of November 2023, demonstrated large support for Israeli government by saying the same rethoric which was Israel has a right to defend itself and that the US should stand with it.

“Israel has a right to defend itself against this threat at its border, and the United States, its closest ally, has rightly pledged to stand by its side until that sense of security is restored”.

This statement was very strong in the beginning and got weakened significantly over time due to extremely large numbers of people killed bombardments of Israel.

New York Times once again reminds readers of Israel being the only liberal democracy in the Middle East and that it cares about international law to protect civilians and fight its enemy.

“As the sole liberal democracy in the Middle East, Israel is obligated under international law to safeguard Palestinian civilians while achieving its military goals”.

By this time over 9000 people including 3000 children were killed by brutal Israeli bombardment. However, from this time around Israel slowly started to get pressure from the world, including its closest ally the US as well because of the sheer number of people killed. Also later when the death toll reached to the unbearable point then both boards stepped back and strongly criticized Israel’s war conducts.

October gave time Israel to get full support from the world, but from November onwards even Biden and its administration got involved into the killings of civilians and their pressure escalated more.

“President Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken have advocated for a temporary humanitarian halt to address the urgent needs of civilians”.

Although Netanyahu declined humanitarian stop, calls for temporary pause have grown because the international pressure around the globe against killings of civilians simultaneously grew.

UNICEF also involved after Israel attacked Jabaliya camp and said about the damage as:

“horrific and appalling”(The New York Times, 2023)

Washington Post

The editorial WP published on 5th of November pointed out that Israel has already put itself in a difficult situation by attacking Jabalia refugee camp and killing hundreds of people, it can be

seen by the language they used to criticize Israel and sympathized with Palestinians (Washington Post, 2023). Compared to New York Times which at this time did not condemn Israel like the WP, the WP's narrative already started to move towards negative perspective. Normally the first paragraph would start with the plight of Israelis and condemning Hamas, but this editorial started with describing extreme situation in Gaza:

"There is growing urgency for a cease-fire in the conflict between Israel and Hamas, as people worldwide are understandably horrified by the civilian casualties resulting from Israeli airstrikes".

As observed in almost all previous editorials, the statement "the right to defend itself" would not allow Israel to have ceasefire in Gaza because they thought Hamas might attack again if not eliminated, said the board:

"A unilateral or unconditional ceasefire by Israel would conflict with its right to defend itself against those responsible for the massacre".

One of the most important parts of this editorial is to remind Israel of keeping world support as much as possible which it was losing slowly. The board itself acknowledged this reality and from that time it would be difficult for Israel to keep the initial global support.

"Israel's support partly is dependent on keeping a high level of world's sympathy".

Yet, it is notable that after two months into the war, news platforms still allocated most of the editorial to condemn Hamas or its actions as hiding behind civilians, while the other half for Israelis and Gazans killed. In the beginning though, the majority of editorial's texts would consist of condemnation of Hamas and sorrowing for the people killed on October 7th. But as time went by, this proportion would flip and the scale/amount of writing for Israelis' actions and criticism increased and the boards mostly focused on brutal killings of Gazans and humanitarian crisis there (Washington Post, 2023).

Washington Post

The editorial published on 10th of November under the headline "for universities, the less said about controversial issues, the better" gave the post's view on student movements in prominent US campuses. This was a crucial moment in the war because its scale and wave affected distant places and hit the US campuses as well, it appears that the board had to react to this. When the students in some US schools showed solidarity towards Gazans, the Washington Post criticized

them for getting involved in such protests and for not condemning Hamas enough. The board pointed that the US's college students showed solidarity to "black lives matter" movement or Ukrainian flag was risen in Harvard campus when Russia invaded Ukraine. They believed that being silent is the best option in secular universities and the role of universities is not to teach what is right and wrong rather it is to teach how to think (The Washington Post, 2023).

"In secular institutions dedicated to free and open debate, remaining neutral is essential. Colleges and universities should not dictate students' thoughts or share the administration's views. Instead, their role is to teach students how to think critically".

After sometime in April 2024 when the protests grew higher due to immense killings in Gaza, the NYT editorial board stepped into and defended these activists to speak out in campuses on their dedicated publication which criticized government and politicians who would seek to silence the protestors. As we can observe the discourse in the editorials were dynamic and were prone to change based on specific events.

New York Times

The next editorial by the New York Times board published on 25th of November 2023 was called "the only way forward" to a large extent supported Israel's right to defend itself and at the same time criticized it too. It discussed the core of issue: peace process. The editorial board thought that there is still a hope for a peace. But it requires steadfastness, commitment and being open to discussions from both sides. While many opportunities have been missed so far, they should come together again to find a solution for a long term peace deal. It is good for Israel's security and Palestinians too. According to the board, for a successful peace process to begin, Netanyahu should go and PA should be reformed, this is the first time NYT began to call Netanyahu's resignation, in the upcoming editorials this appears more (New York Times, 2023).

"Netanyahu is incapable of guiding Israel toward peace. His actions have consistently focused on expanding settlements in the West Bank and obstructing the peace process. His approach has been to weaken the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank. The Palestinian Authority itself requires significant changes, including new leadership and institutional reforms."

The more casualties in Gaza, the more critical of Israel the New York Times became. I discussed about how WP's narrative moved from Israel to Gazans in the previous paragraph. As we can notice the language of the New York Times changed its language a lot too by this time, now the

editorial started to speak up against Israel, and sympathizing with Gazans more. In the next publication, which was published on 8th of December, 2023, its language, framing and criticism of Israel got even worse. While discussing about 14.3\$ billion arms aid to Israel and 9\$ billion humanitarian aid package from the US to both sides, the board said:

“This aid should not be understood as unlimited support for Israel's war in Gaza. There are genuine worries regarding the civilian casualties in this conflict, and the Biden administration has rightly expressed these concerns”.

American support to Israel slowly started to crumble at this point because Israel killed way too many civilians many of whom are children and women. According to the editorial:

“Publicly, both President Biden and Secretary of State Antony Blinken have called on Israel to minimize civilian casualties. Additionally, administration officials have taken a stronger stance, expressing their concerns both in public statements and in private discussions with Israeli leaders. Mr. Blinken stated that there is still a "discrepancy" between the intention to safeguard civilians and the outcomes being observed on the ground”.

Washington Post

The last editorial in 2023 published on 15th of December discussed the day after which is quite important because of several reasons. First and foremost, its narrative moved from being much soft in terms of Israel conducting war in Gaza towards addressing the foundational question, a Palestinian state, by Israel and other parties (New York Times, 2023).

“The United States and Arab nations ought to start thinking immediately for the day after of the conflict. They need to establish the foundation for resuming the creation of two states, Israel and Palestine, that can coexist without ongoing conflict”.

Secondly, the closest ally of Israel, the US, gave serious warnings to Israel regarding the plans for a day after. In the later months, we observe that Netanyahu did not care about Palestinian state and rejected many warnings from the US.

“To his credit, President Biden has begun urging Mr. Netanyahu in his Tuesday remarks to accept a future plan that would lead the Palestinian territories towards eventual statehood”.

Thirdly, just as New York Times, the WP's board openly criticized B.Netanyahu for multiple reasons. Mainly, they believed he failed to protect Israelis in the first place.

“Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was unable to shield Israelis from the atrocities committed by Hamas”.

Additionally, when Biden pushed Netanyahu to offer plausible plans for a post-war Gaza and finally for a Palestinian state, Netanyahu criticized his opinions and Oslo accords on top of that.

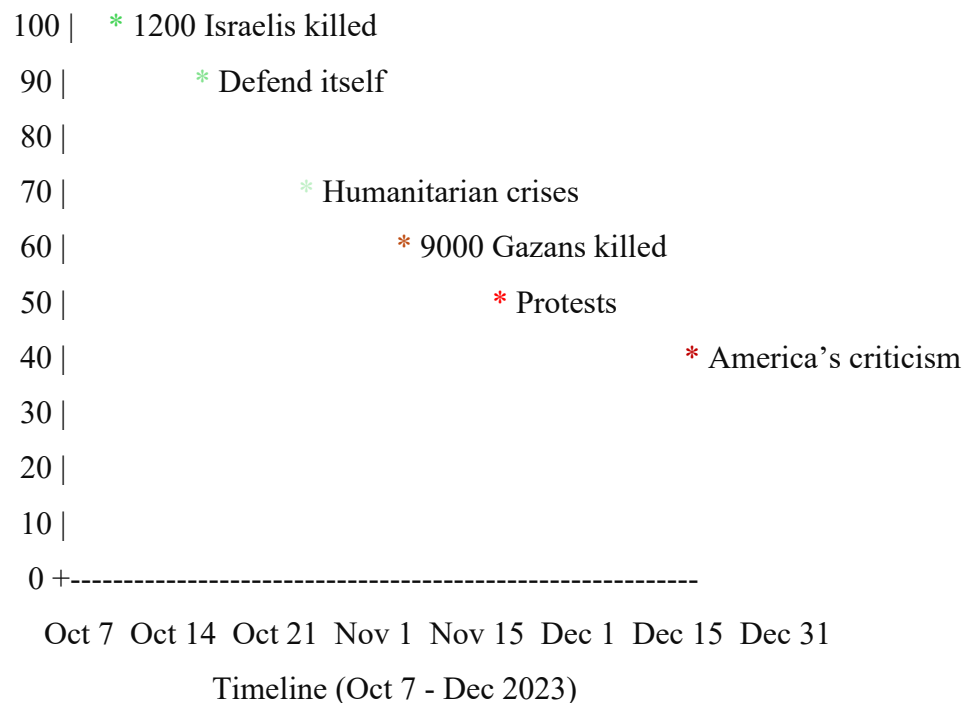
“Netanyahu criticized the U.S. stance, condemning the Oslo peace process that aimed at a two-state solution. While this rhetoric may appeal to his right-wing supporters in the short term, it demonstrates once more that he prioritizes political maneuvering over Israel’s long-term security and peace prospects”.

And also his political power has declined significantly in the country to the point that if there would be an election, his party would lose it.

“If elections were held tomorrow, Netanyahu's right-wing coalition would see a decline from 64 seats to only 45”.

It is also obvious after the first period that once America started criticizing Israel, the boards also started doing so. The beginning of the war all the efforts were given to condemn Hamas both by the US and as a result by the boards. As discussed in the methodology part, the context of discourse may change in relation with broader political factors (Wodak & Meyer, 2009). This is where we can see how to align theory with reality on the ground.

Support for Israel (Relative Scale)



3.5. Second period: January-March

In this period, there are four editorials from WP and three from New York Times which is much less than the first period (it was 7 and 5 respectively in the first period). This is one of the limitations for analysis because for the whole three months, a total of seven editorials would not be sufficient to fully discover detailed shift in their framing or narratives of coverage but still as I read those limited numbers of editorials a stark shift in terms of criticism of Israel and promotion of Palestinian statehood from both news platforms can be observed. Also, the main topics they wrote about also demonstrate this moving direction. Out of four editorials written by NYT, two of them are about catastrophe in Gaza, one is about hostages and one is on worsening US-Israel relations. Similarly, WP wrote three editorials out of which one is also about increasing death toll and humanitarian crisis in Gaza, the other shorter one is about hostages and the last is about freedom expression around the Israel-Palestine issue. So, the proportion of writing is also telling their discourse shift: i.e. they were by this time more concerned about Gazans and hostages as compared to other topics such as Hamas's initial attack or Israeli retaliation as a defense. They mentioned the expression "Oct 7" much less as compared in the first period where in majority of editorials the basic point was about the attack by Hamas and sorrow of Israelis afterwards. This shows their discourse changed to a direction which is more sceptical and critical towards Israel than the first months of the war. Last but not least, the shift of discourse got more evident after South Africa's claim to ICJ about genocide of Israel in Gaza in December 2023 (New York Times, 2023). All factors combined, death toll, humanitarian crisis, hostage deal and South Africa's case in this period seem to highly impact the editorials to look at the issue from different perspective.

NYT on S.Africa's genocide case

South Africa made a statement in ICJ accusing Israel of genocide in December 2023, for the reasons of killing massive people in Gaza, establishing apartheid, attacking hospitals, schools, civilian buildings. The case submitted was rejected by Israel and the US but got massive praise within pro-Palestinians around the world. Although, it takes the court long time to rule the actual conclusion if Israel was actually committing a genocide in Gaza, it was still a big negative sentiment towards Israel in the global arena (New York Times, 2024).

NYT fighting for freedom of speech

As a reaction to the war in Gaza, many students, professors at American universities started protesting against Israeli assault in Gaza including in Harvard, Columbia, Yale and so on. However in multiple states university administration or government tried to silence those who speak against Israel by using different methods. For example, anti-boycott law was used to silence a scholar in Arkansas (New York Times, 2024). If you notice, WP's board was stating that protestors should take neutral stance and do not get involved in the political issues, however NYT argued that government should not intervene in the protests and give voice to both sides protecting freedom of speech. This suggests that even the platforms differ in their narratives on the same issue even though on many of the other topics they would write more or less the same. "This should concern Americans" the board said on the editorial called "when states try to take away America's freedom of thought" published on the 20th of January in 2024. The board believed that universities are indeed a place in which arguments are developed by discussing contemporary issues like the one Israel and Palestine. Universities should be open in this regard and should protect that openness-culture (New York Times, 2024).

"Arguments develop in an atmosphere of transparency, and protecting such an environment should be a top target for universities and any bodies wanting to affect public policy or discourse. Americans should be primarily worried about any efforts by the government to restrict individuals' freedom to express their opinions or to control what they can say".

When university of Arkansas invited a scholar, Nathan Thrall, to talk about the Israel Palestine conflict to students, the university administration pushed him to sign a document in which he should have agreed not to boycott Israel but he refused that. He thought this was the violation of his free-speech rights. That particular incident like many others, the NYT board believed, was a clear example of state intervening to freedom of speech, although the board itself was against the boycott of Israel. Such interventions would lead to much important loss (New York Times, 2024).

"This meant he couldn't share his insights, drawn from years of experience writing about Israeli-Palestinian relations, at a time when students urgently need to understand the causes and consequences of the Israel-Hamas conflict in Gaza".

The senator of Arkansas proudly celebrated the incident and called it a "win" by saying the following:

“Preventing someone who intends to advocate for terrorists from speaking on our college campuses is a success” (New York Times, 2024).

NYT and WP on hostages and two different perspectives for it

This paragraph will look through two editorials from WP and NYT in which both wrote on hostages taken by Hamas. They have two separate yet interconnected views on hostages. It will discuss how the attitude around the hostage deal also changed in their coverage. There was a deal between Hamas and Israel for a four day ceasefire during which 50 hostages were freed (New York Times, 2023).

However, by January 2024 Hamass still kept over 100 people. NYT saw the hostage deal as the only way for bringing peace in the Middle East and that everything around the conflict would start with bringing hostages home. Also, the situation of Gazans were dependent upon the hostage deal, NTY wrote on the editorial published on 29th of January (New York Times, 2024).

“Peace in the Middle East cannot be anticipated until the hostages captured during the October 7 attacks are brought back home. Until this goal is met, the children of Gaza will remain vulnerable to hunger and malnutrition. Their homes will be bombed, and their families torn apart”.

It is also what Israelis want from government. Despite the worldwide condemnation of Israel, this particular issue united them (New York Times, 2024).

“It is one of the few points that majority of Israelis agree on today. No nation would tolerate less, even in the face of global criticism of its military actions in recent weeks”.

At the same time, they also point out that freeing hostages will not help almost anything. It is only for starting the conversation for long term solution.

“Releasing the hostages won't permanently stop the violence. It won't provide Palestinians with the statehood they deserve or liberation from being ruled by a terrorist organization. It also won't hold Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his government accountable for their actions before and after October 7”.

The editorial by WP put forward a different perspective about hostages. They also think it is very important to bring them home but they have more to say. Thus far Israel could not defeat Hamas despite its best efforts according to Gadi Eisenkot, a member of war cabinet and Natinoal Unity party of Israel. He also stressed that if the war would end without bringing hostages back it would a defeat for Israel. Family members of hostages grew with anger towards their

government. They said to WP: if IDF cannot defeat enemy, then Israel should have a deal with Hamas in order to release hostages. But Netanyahu did not want that and instead he put extra hard conditions for a deal with Hamas (Washington Post, 2024).

One important point to mention around hostage deal is that, NYT already mentioned that Netanyahu must go from office in their editorial published in December 2023, WP also started to make bold statements about his weakening strategic plans in the context of hostages. It appears WP also signalled him to go as well. “In order to renew trust in country, new election should be held” said G.Eisenkot (Washington Post, 2024).

As we have seen from the beginning, the initial war started between Hamas and Israel as a retaliation for Oct 7th, later it created much bigger dilemma and turned into serious political issue for Israel and even led to demand for Netanyahu’s resignation as a result.

NYT and WP on Gazans’ conditions and America’s big issue

The editorials published by both news platforms on humanitarian aid, killings and destruction in Gaza further put Israel under pressure by two most popular platforms in the US which is the top ally of Israel. As we discussed in the first period, both of the newspapers mainly focused on condemning Hamas and that Israel has a right to defend itself. But from January onwards, both of the platforms showed a lot more sympathy in their coverage to Palestinians and to some extent coming up with arguments for establishing Palestinian state as a long term solution. This can also be seen from how many editorials they published describing Gazans’ situation as compared to the first period. Out of 13 editorials between Oct-Dec, 5 were dedicated directly to Palestinians while 3 out of 7 in the second stage, nearly half of the editorials under headlines about plight of Gazans and destruction of Gaza strip. The other four also addressed the issue to some extent. The language used also showed more criticism to Israel and used more sympathetic language such as emotional adjectives for describing Gaza’s crisis. This is what Washington Post said on its editorial published on 9th of January called “Gaza is shattered”:

“The conflict between Israel and Gaza has inflicted severe damage on Gaza. Now, vast areas of Gaza lie in ruins, with its civilian population sheltering in tent camps, urgently requiring food and medicine”.

By December 2023, according to WP, Israel’s bombardment left massive destruction in Gaza, the scale of which has not been recorded in recent decades:

“Israel has dropped 29,000 bombs, munitions and shells on Gaza, leading to the destruction or damage of nearly 70 percent of its 439,000 homes and approximately half of its buildings. Much of Gaza's water, electrical, communications, and health-care infrastructure is irreparable. Most of the strip's 36 hospitals are closed, with only eight still admitting patients. Around 85 percent of Gaza population were displaced to the south of strip, Rafah. Over two-thirds of the schools are damaged, and the World Bank reports that more than half of all roads have been damaged or destroyed. The United Nations states that 342 schools have been damaged, including 70 of its own”(New York Times, 2024).

The humanitarian aid trucks had been carrying more than 500 trucks of food into Gaza daily before the war but this number reduced to over 100 per day which is not enough by any measure according to the UN (Washington Post, 2024).

The New York Times made a very similar statement on the editorial published on 24th February that the war was leading to massive killings of Gazans and millions have become displaced.

“Since the conflict started, the two million residents of Gaza have endured relentless Israeli airstrikes. Palestinian sources report over 29,000 deaths, with more than half of Gaza's homes and buildings demolished. The United Nations has warned that, due to the blockade on food supplies, Gazans face the threat of starvation”.

The US tried to restrict Israel's actions in Gaza but Netanyahu rejected all. He did so because of political interest to stay in power argued the board:

“Every attempt by the U.S. to curb the Israeli offensive has been dismissed by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Netanyahu has been particularly focused on appeasing the far-right and religious coalition partners who sustain his leadership”.

What Netanyahu wants after the war is to have full control of Gaza. This makes his supporters happy. But it will hinder the roadmap of post-war Gaza in which Gazans have a stable life once the war is over.

“He issued a position paper regarding postwar Gaza that permits indefinite Israeli military control, catering to his supporters but infuriating Palestinians”.

Similar uttering by finance minister of Israel, Smotrich, who called the Palestinians to leave the strip was rejected by president Isaac Herzog and the board said there is no way for peace except for accepting the Palestinian state which Netanyahu strongly opposes as other alternatives such as occupation have not succeeded thus far. Interestingly, as we witnessed from the clashes, the

government has issues within its members, it appears there is not one common goal within the Israeli government towards Gaza's future.

On the other hand, the US supported Israel immensely and unconditionally so far by vetoing three UN resolutions, and proposing a cease fire plan of its own which basically allowed Israel free timeframe to act. The only limit for Israel by the US-made resolution was not to invade Rafah, which is also a concerning (New York Times, 2024).

“The resolution the United States offering isn't very tough. It calls for a cease-fire as soon as practicable, which essentially leaves the timing up to Israel, and it cautions Israel against invading Rafah under the present circumstances”.

The board emphasized the fact that the resolution US was offering contain the word “cease-fire” should worry Israel because according to the board, the US was already fed up with Netanyahu's far-fetching war.

“American leaders are growing increasingly impatient with Mr. Netanyahu's perpetual conflict”.

The board put forward an important point on the editorial about the illegal settlements as it discussed the possible peace process. As the Obama administration did not veto the resolution regarding building settlements in the West Bank but made it clear that it is a barrier towards peace process with Palestinians. The current Biden administration also thinks of the same way. The board argues that Biden must warn Israel to be mindful of its actions especially given the US supports Israel both militarily and as a cover in the world arena. Netanyahu does not seem to listen to Biden and pulled himself from the Biden's administration thus became one of the barriers for lasting peace in the conflict. That's why the former ambassador of USA to Israel said that Biden should address the Israelis directly without Netanyahu's involvement and inform them that if Israel does not want to lose American support because of another possible militant attack, they need to have a plan for post-war Gaza which includes Gaza's rebuilding with international assistance and Israel's overall peace with Arab neighbours especially with Saudi Arabia (New York Times, 2024).

It is interesting to note that in the beginning the US announced its full support for Israel but after a few months their attitude also took a different path. How hard the US tried to curb the discourse towards the peace process, far-right and extremists like Ben Gvir, national security minister, has been vocal in his statements to squeeze Palestinians in the West Bank including for

example banning Palestinians from Al Aqsa Mosque during Ramadan. The board finally concluded that Biden got into a big trouble both from outside and inside the US. The external problem for him is that US's foreign policy getting hard to handle for him given the situation in the Middle East. The issue within the country is that he is facing extremely huge criticism from the American left regarding the steep death toll (New York Times, 2024).

“This is a moment when President Biden encounters bad political choices, making assertive leadership important. It is no longer acceptable to let this conflict persist without intervention, and only the United States possesses the power and influence to take the necessary action”.

That exact same rhetoric and language framing can be seen from the editorial of Washington Post published on 26th of February. It also discussed the crucial role of US in easing the situation in Gaza and urge Arab states to ask Hamas to come to deal with Israel as well as demanding Israel to reduce civilian death toll.

As relations between the US and Israel got tense over Gaza, WP published another editorial around relationship between Israel and the US. It is called “how US and Israel can get on the same page back”. The headline itself suggests that they moved away from each other already within over six months. The headline signals an important discourse shift because the first editorial by New York Times was called “attack requires unity and resolve” in which the unity meant and referred to the full cooperation between the US and Israel.

“As the conflict in Gaza enters its sixth month, signs of divergence are emerging in the previously steadfast alliance between Israel and the United States”.

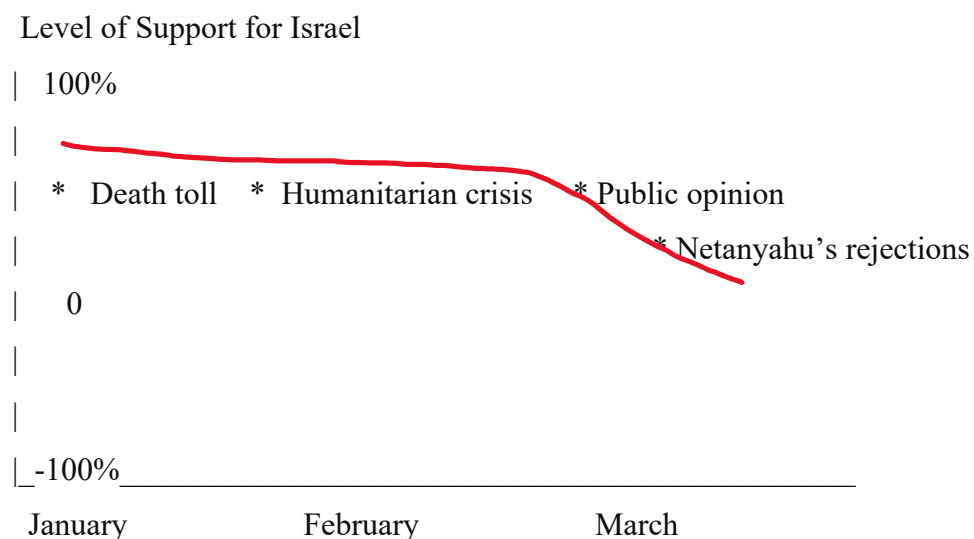
There are a couple of factors for the worsening of the relations of the closest allies. First is that Israel failed to reduce civilian casualties in Gaza and enough aid was not reaching civilians as Biden pointed out many times. The second is the resignation of Netanyahu, as the strongest Jewish supporter of Israel in American Congress, Charles Schumer, called for new elections in Israel as he thought Netanyahu consistently failed in handling the war. The board assumed the situations may even put the relations between two countries at risk (Washington Post, 2024).

“The message shows the most obvious indication so far that dissatisfaction with Netanyahu's strategy of the Gaza conflict is getting intense and could potentially endanger the strong relations between Israel and the United States”.

Meanwhile, after vetoing UN ceasefire resolution for three times from the beginning, the US abstained from that in March and it was passed which caused Netanyahu to be angry with the US administration and cancelled the meeting scheduled with Biden's officials (Washington Post, 2024).

Couple of months into the war, the world was seeing a completely different picture compared to the initial weeks of the battle. This is not the end of worsening the situation between them, the last period from April to May there are few more incidents that make it even very bad. Once a very close unity between two close allies has entered into a cycle of multiple serious arguments one after another. After all the factors that drove the US away from Israel, but not fully, created very negative context in Western media outlets towards Israel, which normally would support it. That suggests that Israel is losing the media war as well as support from western allies.

Overall change in the line chart below:



3.6. The third period: Apr-May

As the war gets into its eighth month, it appears that WP and NYT's attention shade away from the conflict as they did not react to it as much as they did in the first or second period although many important events happened in recent weeks. There are only three editorials in this period which discuss three different themes: military aid to Israel, student protests and Iran's attack to Israel. The period is different from previous stages of the war for multiple reasons and thus affected the discourse a bit differently. First, it is already eight months of the bombardment in Gaza and world pressure is extremely high, let alone countries that are warning Israel by various measures to stop the war as soon as possible including the US. In the first months, WP or NYT were not calling Israel to stop the war, on the contrary, they supported that Israel have "responsibility" to defend itself (please see the first period) but as the pressure from world has been increasing as a reaction to unbearable human cost and crises in Gaza both NYT and WP also moved to other side and pushed Israel to stop the war.

For example, NYT published an editorial on US's warning of stopping the transfer of military aid to Israel unless Israel does not take sufficient measures to comply with international law.

Second, college campuses in the US woke up with anger to Israel's continuous killings of civilians in Gaza and pushed the US administration to do more to stop the war.

Third, there was a possibility of Iran being dragged into the conflict after its direct missile attacks on Israel as a retaliation to Israel's attack on Iranian embassy in Damascus, Syria. As a result, after the battle between Iran and Israel WP started to question the peace solution for the conflict in the near future. This is where we can notice a dilemma of editorial.

In summary, it seems over time media outlets forgot about Oct 7th to the point that they did not mention it anymore and started a different path to either criticize Israel, mentioning America's role in solving regional conflict or advocating establishing Palestinian state as a long-term solution. As for the last period, news platforms did not write much except for three separate yet interconnected editorials which I will analyze each separately and try to connect dots between them.

The first editorial by NYT was published under the headline "military assistance to Israel cannot be unconditional" on 13th of April. It points that Netanyahu and his extremist allies in his government have denied to listening to America's calls for humanitarian aid and limiting

casualties and went on to pursue his political game. As its closest ally, the US allocates huge amount of aid to Israel every year which is the largest in the US's foreign aid.

"The United States' assistance to Israel, which compounds to \$3.8 billion annually in military aid, shows the strongest and most lasting foreign aid relationship the U.S. has with any country."

but the board thinks that Netanyahu broke the strong bond with the US and it suggests to reconsider conditions of the US's aid and if necessary, it should be stopped.

"The United States must stop providing Israel with the weapons it has been utilizing in its conflict with Hamas".

Yet, it is also obvious that board still supports the idea of the US supporting Israel defend itself.

"The question is not whether the United States should continue supporting Israel's self-defense".

What they strongly oppose is that Netanyahu's games with the US in an effort to keep himself in power and not agreeing to accept deals with Hamas as a possible solution of freeing remaining hostages. He also let extremists, ultra-fanatic people in his government to make utterly rejectable and unbearable statements such as Smotrich or Ben Gvir who are openly calling to occupy Gaza and expulse Gazans from their lands. They strongly oppose Palestinian state. This is not what the US wants the board added (New York Times, 2024).

Despite the US's clear warnings, Israel did not provide enough humanitarian aid to Gazans instead they bombed Gazans who are starving for months. Not only Israel did not give aid to starving Gazans but it blocked others to help Gazans too. Then, the US had to make an effort to help Gazans by dropping packages from air or by building a special platform in the sea to deliver aid to civilians. On top of that, Israel targeted the convoy of seven volunteers of World Central Kitchen, who were foreign nationals from the West (New York Times, 2024).

"The attack on a World Central Kitchen convoy in Gaza, resulting in the killings of seven aid workers and which Israel acknowledged was an mistake, emphasizes the high risks faced by international aid organizations trying to provide assistance".

Now, it is very important to notice that America reacts to big incidents and pushes Israel harder. There are few things from the start of the war that always made the US's administration to

pressure Israel, the most important of them is the increasing death toll of Gazans. The more people killed; the harder Israel got criticized. Second factor is the ever-growing pressure both within America and outside for Biden's administration to stop the war. And another is the death of foreign nationals, people who were working in NGOs in Gaza and journalists. Therefore, when WCK's convoy was targeted, many US's senators started to push Biden to halt sending arms to Israel. The board also supported this move by senators (New York Times, 2024).

"A growing number of senators, led by Chris Van Hollen, a Democrat from Maryland, have been pressuring president to halting military arms' transfer to Israel".

Many politicians also signed a letter for the president and secretary of state to assure that the US arms being used in Israel are in accordance with the American and international law and if they are not, they must be suspended to be transferred to Israel. The board believed that it was a crucial step from the US.

"It points out the president's strength to use military aid as a way to make sure the nation's weapons are used responsibly".

Also, it is one of the last options with which Biden can affect Netanyahu because he has disregarded previous warnings from the US.

"The administration has employed various tactics of pressure and warnings, such as public declarations, reported expressions of dissatisfaction, and U.N. Security Council resolutions. However, none of these efforts have been successful with Mr. Netanyahu".

Netanyahu is to blame in this situation and he disrespected the US and his own people the board said:

"Nevertheless, Mr. Netanyahu has disregarded America's appeals, instigating a crisis in U.S.-Israeli relations at a time when Israel's security and the stability of the entire region are crucial".

NYT on protests

One of the last factors to move editorial discourse to a new direction is student protests in the US college campuses. It is vital to point out that the war in the Gaza has resonated many in the world

and its waves shake different places including campuses. It suggests that it is not a normal protest due to its large scale and effects to public opinion. Recent protests by both pro-Palestinians and pro-Israelis in the US campuses drew the board's attention and once again as they did in the second period came out to protect freedom of speech in universities. They think that freedom of speech is an important element of open culture and that protests are inseparable part of the culture. Universities should not be afraid of consistently discussing the issues that the protestors are marching for (New York Times, 2024).

"The primary target of a university is to develop a culture of openness, where free speech and academic freedom are highly respected. Protest is an integral part of this culture, and the topic of many current demonstrations — U.S. involvement in the Israel-Hamas conflict — should be vigorously and consistently debated on college campuses".

Also, the board highlights that the main point of protests is to draw attention and sympathy from the world and the campuses should stand by some discomfort the protests create.

"Campuses ought to accept a certain level of disruption, because it is an inseparable part of any protest".

No matter what is being discussed and protested hate speech should not be allowed and no one should be harmed in campuses the board argues:

"In the middle of the protests, there has been large debate about antisemitism and Islamophobia, particularly about when such issues turn into hate speech".

NYT board underscores a critical problem within higher education: the lack of clear guidelines and consistent enforcement regarding free expression. As a result of that gap, the academic environment becomes unpredictable and susceptible to manipulation by those not genuinely committed to its values. This situation can erode trust and hinder genuine intellectual growth and exploration.

The board also presents a critical view of right-wing efforts to regulate speech in universities, framing these actions as an assault on academic freedom. It suggests that the justification of antisemitism is being used opportunistically to advance a broader agenda against free expression in academic settings (New York Times, 2024).

“Right-wing Republicans at both federal and state levels have seized opportunities to attack academic freedom, recently using allegations of campus antisemitism as their latest tactic”.

Furthermore, the editorial identifies a lack of strong leadership from university officials as a contributing factor to this problem. By not adequately defending a wide spectrum of viewpoints, these leaders have created an environment where conservative ideas, in particular, are increasingly marginalized. This, the board argues, has led to a chilling effect on academic inquiry and participation in public discourse, as scholars fear backlash for pushing ideological boundaries (New York Times, 2024).

WP on Iran

The attack of Iran to Israel followed by Israel’s bombing of Iranian embassy in Damascus has made the conflict even more complex. This time, Iran attacked Israel with missiles directly from Iranian territory which is the first time ever. This shows that Iran has strong capability for long range attacks (Washington Post, 2024).

“The point of Iranian missiles and drones targeting Israel, but being almost all intercepted, has led to huge astonishment. This marks the first direct attack on Israel from Iran and highlights the highly effective defense system deployed by Israel and its allies, including the United States”.

However, it became obvious that after the Iran’s attack on Israel, the discourse may have shifted a bit towards Israel again. The attack by Iran urged the US politicians to think about increasing aid package to Israel. The attack was intercepted by mostly American defensive shields. Along with the US, there were other countries that helped with the defense of Israel: Jordan, France and the Britain.

The respond from Biden to Israel was simple: do not get into large scale war with Iran. The statement highlights President Biden's strategic advice aimed at preventing a potential wider conflict in the Middle East. By advising Israel to avoid a cycle of retaliation with Iran, Biden tried to reduce the risk of a larger, more destructive war (Washington Post, 2024).

The board suggested that Israel should concentrate on finishing unprecedented killings of Gazans and planning the day after.

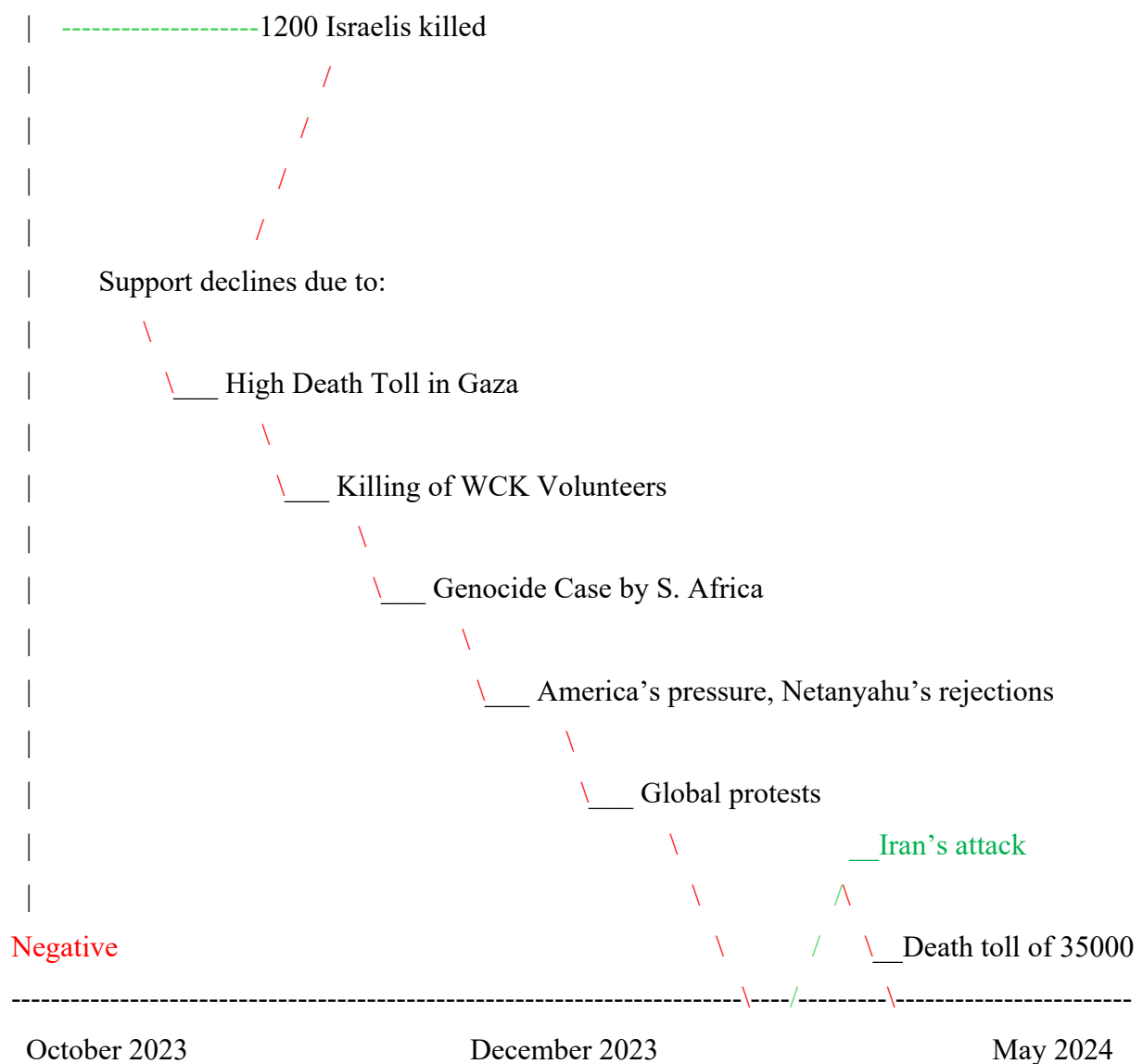
“To preserve relationships between the US and alleviate the unbearable suffering of civilian men, women, and children, Israel should prioritize ending the war in Gaza as quickly as possible”.

The board holds the opinion that after Iran’s attack the US and Israel can cooperate easier with Arab states to reconstruct Gaza. At the same time board questioned any close solution for the issue and believed in the US’s role in resolving it (Washington Post, 2024).

“Conflicts seem far from being resolved. The United States, using its unique capabilities, can intervene to prevent the worst outcomes”.

Overall, after 8 months of war in Gaza the narrative shift in WP and NYT would look like this:

Positive



4 Conclusions and reflections

4.1. My reflections around the war

In reflecting on the ongoing conflict between Israel and Palestine, I have observed insights from a multitude of media platforms spanning various reputable sources such as the New York Times, Washington Post, The Guardian, and Al Jazeera, BBC alongside diverse social media channels like YouTube, TikTok, and Telegram where we can see explicit images of children, women, babies being decimated into parts. Through this extensive exposure to real-time updates from Gaza, I have discerned several critical observations since October 7th, 2023.

One of my main observations is the open accessibility of information in today's digital age has significantly altered global perceptions, doing manipulation or misinformation by news platforms virtually impossible. This accessibility has facilitated a heightened awareness of the realities unfolding on the ground all over the world, particularly recently in conflict zones like Gaza. Consequently, global support for Palestinians has grown exponentially, reaching unprecedented levels in recent months. While initial sentiments may have inclined towards supporting Israel's efforts to combat Hamas, the disproportionate civilian casualties inflicted by Israel's military actions have triggered a huge shift in public opinion. The sheer magnitude of civilian deaths, starkly juxtaposed with the widespread of harrowing images and videos, has catalyzed a reevaluation of global political relations, prompting even staunch allies like the United States to issue condemnations against Israel's conduct of war. It has been even leading to their relations at risks.

Secondly, the protracted conflict has precipitated a resurgence of geopolitical complexities within the Middle East, portending a bleak trajectory often observed by heightened instability and uncertainty. The entrenchment of rival states, exacerbated by external interventions and geopolitical games, threatens to exacerbate existing problems and precipitate further regional stability. This geopolitical dilemma is never good for the region's economic and political stability, signaling a precarious future fraught with dangerous outcomes.

Thirdly, I suppose the conflict has underscored inherent shortcomings within dominant international relations theories, notably liberalism, which is openly claimed to be the champion of individual freedoms and human rights. However, the instrumentalization of these principles to serve common interests has created a climate of censorship and suppression, particularly within

Western democracies namely those that founded on liberal values. The erosion of civil liberties and indicative of a broader moral quandary inherent in the pursuit of political interests at the expense of human lives. As we have seen the US's interest or Netanyahu's political greed caused the loss of thousands of people's lives.

Finally, the framing, language of narratives was systematically changing from one incident to another. There are good and bad sides of news platforms I have noticed. As I pointed out earlier there are questions to both WP and NYT regarding their pre-war coverage. After the 7th of October their coverage took extremely much attention leading to publishing more than 10 articles per day and started to condemn Hamas. But there were three bombings in Gaza in September about which either of platforms did not write. But both claimed the evil only started from Oct 7th. They did not mention what drove Hamas to attack Israel even though Hamas knew Israel would attack back. The overall and fundamental issue, oppression of Gazans before the war, was missing from their contexts. They supported Israel with coverage from the beginning and until December they did not give enough pressure or attention to thousands of people in Gaza it was clear from their wordings, the headlines would say constantly "suffering" when describing Gazans but when describing the killings of Israelis, they used emotional words like "horrific", "atrocious", "brutal". They were still upholding Israel's right to defend itself up until January-February 2024 after which death toll would made them change their narratives to a different direction. If there were events like the death toll reaching to unbearable point, bombings of refugee camp or US's criticism about Israel's conduct of war, global protests, UN resolutions, then they would write and give their opinions, this is also obvious from the timing of their editorials. After such incidents they published editorials expressing their stance. At later time, they only wrote 3 editorials which means one per month. What about the events and killings of thousands of people in between that time gap? There are some good points about the editorials after the second period, they took the issue more seriously and addressed with more attention by calling America to stop the war and stopping transfers of arms to Israel. They also urged and reminded the only way to peace is establishing an independent Palestinian state by dragging, convincing the US to do so. What will happen in the future is under question, as the war in Rafah is on the way and people being starved as of May 2024.

4.2.Important findings or conclusions

After all the discussions and analysis, there is a similar trajectory of the discourse throughout all the editorials. It is the fact that when the war started in middle east, slowly its wave moved to the US in a way of political clash between Hamas and Israel. It appears that almost all-important decisions or political talks are coming from the US whether it is cease-fire deal, hostage deal, humanitarian aid, military aid for Israel, post-war plan for Gaza, mediating the fighting parties, reactions from universities and congressmen or Senators. It creates an assumption that the US seems to be at the top and at the bottom of everything, everywhere in this conflict. It is also clear from editorials that majority of them were about the US and its role in the conflict. That shows the power dynamic in news platforms eventually would be linked to the US. Still, some in Israel do not care about warnings from the US, Netanyahu and his allies in the government for example. That opens up a big discussion into power relations and structures in the world. It suggests that if Netanyahu does not listen to America which is the strongest country in the world, then there is a big challenge about America's power or who holds that power as well.

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