



Master's thesis

**Media Representation and Foreign Aid Allocation:**

**Analysing the Impact of Coverage on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict**

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# Abstract

This thesis explores the impact that media representation can have on foreign aid allocation, especially focusing on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the period of October 2023 and May 2024. The United Kingdom and the United States will be the two case studies employed for this research, with the use of three news outlets of different political leanings from each country. Through the lenses of social constructivism and symbolic interactionism, which will be used as the theoretical frameworks, this research seeks to analyse the framing of the conflict through media narratives and how this may in turn create social constructions that have an impact on the provision of foreign aid. Using the triangulation and thematic analysis methods, this thesis will consolidate an analysis of both the media's representation of the conflict and the aid allocation during these months in two separate parts, followed by a discussion on how these findings answer the research question.

The analysis of media representation will focus on five main themes: victims, violence, suffering, aid, and humanitarian. Through the comprehension of how these five themes were portrayed this research will be able to provide a broader understanding of the media's representation of the conflict from various perspectives. The aid allocation analysis will be done through a chronological representation of the data to understand the differences that may have occurred during this period in government policies relating to foreign aid allotment.

The findings of this thesis indicate a correlation between media representations and the foreign aid that is provided in times of conflict. Coverage that continuously portrays Palestinians along with Hamas, which is represented as a terrorist organization, perpetuates a dehumanisation of the Palestinian suffering, while simultaneously generating support for Israel's military actions as a justification for their security concerns. A correlation was seen between the employment of these narratives and the allocation of foreign aid, seeing as the provision of military assistance to Israel was framed as a counterterrorism measure, while the aid provided to Palestinians saw more restrictions and was often held back due to fears of it inadvertently being used to fund Hamas.

This research project contributes to the growing academic discourse on the media's impact in conflict areas by offering insight into the complexities of not only media biases but also selective reporting and intergovernmental interests.

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# 1. Introduction

For nearly eight decades, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has stood as one of the most complex conflicts in the world, and certainly one of the most long-lasting. This dispute is based on deeply rooted religious elements and historical grievances that have gotten the attention of the international community, which has had to intervene many times throughout the years. In all of these decades, we have witnessed many military confrontations and peace negotiations in an attempt to put this conflict to an end, which have thus far not been successful. The media had been a mostly passive actor in its representation of this conflict, with the coverage only heightening when more significant events would trigger an outpour of news reports. In the past year, since the escalation of the war on October 7th, there has been an overwhelming amount of coverage about Palestine and Israel, as well as their distress, creating a big division amongst the public. In an era where news coverage is almost immediate and continuous, the particular type of language that the media uses and the sort of reporting that it chooses to publish, become very important in the depiction of the conflict both locally and internationally.

In order to analyse this conflict, an understanding of its historical, political, and cultural elements is required, to comprehend how they may influence the narratives and actions of the Israelis and Palestinians. The origin of this struggle stems from the aftermath of colonialism and the creation of a Jewish state after World War II. In this period, there was substantial Jewish immigration into Palestine, leading to rebellion and eventually war (Abdullah, 2019). Since then the conflict has been a complex battle of national identities and historical claims over the territory from Jews, who view the land as their biblical birthright, and Palestinians, who have inhabited the region for centuries (Abdullah, 2019).

In 1948, 750,000 Palestinians became refugees after they were displaced from their land in Palestine, which was later annexed by Israel, and from that period until 2024, Israel has continued its actions, leading to one of the biggest humanitarian crisis in the century which has only been exacerbated now with the escalation of the conflict. It then becomes incredibly challenging to comprehend how after all of these years, the aid relief going into Gaza is still below what would be the appropriate amounts to prevent an aggravation of the humanitarian crisis. Gaza is one of the world's most densely populated regions, with around 14,000 people per

square mile, where most civilians are experiencing a complete deprivation of food, fresh water, and medical supplies, and the global reaction has been painfully inadequate. Due to the blockade implemented by Israel, aid cannot get through in sufficient quantities to help all of those residing there, and the alternatives offered by international powers such as the United States or the European Union have been to try to get aid in through very ineffective routes that not only place Palestinians receiving the aid in danger, but that are also much less effective in terms of cost/quantity, resulting in families operating on the edge of severe poverty and barely finding means to survive. People living in Gaza have been left in an open-air prison, being cut off from even the most basic resources to stay alive, in a world where technology has advanced to a point where such resources could be swiftly mobilised and distributed if intended. The lack of appropriate help that Palestinians have received in these past decades does not come down to only a question of logistics, but also of the unwillingness of the international community to stand up against Israel to ensure that aid reaches those who need it the most.

The conflict between Israel and Palestine goes beyond the borders of both states, with a heavy impact and influence from other global powers. Both countries have actively sought out international support for their struggles as a recognition of how important a global endorsement is for either of their claims (Fonzo, 2016). For this reason, the conflict is complicated by external pressures and interests that can either hinder or facilitate progress toward a peaceful resolution. For instance, the United Nations and the International Court of Justice have both recognized the occupied territories as such, urging Israel to comply with international laws regarding military occupation (Adem, 2019). However, the non-compliance that has been experienced from Israel's side demonstrates the limits that international influence can have in resolving the conflict since local dynamics often outweigh global pressures.

The research question of how the media representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict influences foreign aid allocation aims to examine the impact that media language has on foreign aid distribution in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in the period between October 2023 and May 2024. The United Kingdom and the United States have been two powers with a heavy influence in this conflict and therefore will be the two case studies employed. This thesis will argue that the media in their reporting of conflicts has the ability to frame and report events in a way that influences perceptions and, in turn, the policy choices and foreign aid allocations and resources provided to a particular zone. The approach of this research will be done through a

social constructivist and symbolic interactionist theoretical lens, which will allow us to look at the processes of how media frameworks are created and how they change the meaning and relations around a specific conflict. By acknowledging the importance of media in these contexts, this research will be able to provide a bigger understanding of the role that the media plays in the provision of foreign assistance in times of conflict, with a particular focus on one of the world's longest-standing conflicts.

## 2. Theoretical Framework

### 2.1. Social Constructivism

Social constructivism is a theory that emphasizes the importance of social and cultural contexts in making sense of the world. This lens will be especially useful in this study in assessing to what degree media language and media coverage can affect attitudes towards the provision of foreign aid in the Israel-Palestinian conflict. This theoretical approach develops from the theory of Constructivism, however, because of the language and social-centered nature of this project, it was more suitable to limit the focus to social constructivism instead of the much broader theory of constructivism. Some of the most relevant points of social constructivism include the idea that reality is constructed through social interactions and shared meaning either by individuals or groups. It argues that knowledge and meanings are never objective; rather they are developed and worked on throughout different social processes and within different cultural contexts; for instance, in the case of media narratives.

To incorporate the notions of social constructivism within the analysis of the role that the media plays in shaping foreign aid policies, in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this research will examine how particular stories and images assist in shaping reality. The mass media helps to form people's perception of certain events by picking and presenting specific stories, problems or people, depending on their intended reporting (Gamson et al., 1992). These images are not however free from the dichotomy of representation, as they are contextualized in different cultural politics and social environments, which determine the meanings embedded in them by the consumers, but also by those who are portraying them (Gamson et al., 1992). These representations can change depending on which news outlet you are looking at, or even in which country they are based.

The media plays an active role in constructing narratives when it comes to conflict, and this can be seen in the pre-conceived notions that we, as a society, have constructed regarding what is and isn't considered terrorism, which will, in turn, influence our behaviours and the way we understand conflicts (Agius, 2022). These notions are often not understood by those who are exacerbating them, seeing as they are ingrained in our society, and translate into journalists' works, which they believe to be writing from an impartial point of view, and that may not always

be the case. For example, the media's emphasis on the suffering of Palestinian civilians as a result of military operations helps create a dimension where the humanitarian crisis in Gaza becomes perceived as desperate and immediate, thereby rallying global concern and assistance. However, media-centric interpretations that highlight the security of Israelis and depict Palestinian activities as acts of terrorism create a context that endorses retaliation and lessens concern for the humanitarian needs of Palestinians. Thus the media does not only cover the conflict, but it also takes part in the process of constructing the general understanding and consequent belief system of the public regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. According to Agius (2022), "uttering an apology or describing a conflict as 'genocide' has implications for meaning and action, constituting what is possible and what is not" (Agius, 2022, p.64), which is why it becomes crucial to make sure that the correct terminology is being used to report on conflicts.

One of the principles of social constructivism is that media representations and the public's ideas are molded within specific cultural and social frameworks. That is, different media, depending on the culture and polity existing within them, may interpret the same topic as another media organisation in a different manner, which is why there are sometimes noticeable differences when reading media that are embedded in different cultural backgrounds. An example of this can be when we look at journalism coming from Western countries, which may centre their discussion on the conflict around democratic principles and human rights, and then media coming from the Middle East that may have a focus on the issues of resistance and liberation. These varying constructions are likely to create different audiences that will also have different approaches to what the needs are in times of conflict. But these differences are not just geographical, media outlets even within the same country can have different focuses depending on their political leanings, which is why it is always important to consume different sources of media.

However, the use of social constructivism as a theoretical lens could potentially provide an underestimation of cultural aspects in the creation of knowledge and could reduce the entirety of the public to having the same ideals and therefore reacting to social constructions in the same manner. This is one of the reasons why it became important to focus on two different countries, that have different cultural norms so that these differences can be taken into account and a pattern can be established, which would be harder to prove if there was only a focus on one



country. In the context of the research question, social constructivism becomes an essential tool in analysing how traditional media can alter beliefs and behaviours towards foreign aid. This theoretical concept encapsulates how assessing and explaining these actions will provide us with a deeper understanding of the true impact that media can have in times of conflict.

## **2.2. Symbolic Interactionism**

Symbolic interactionism (SI) is a theory which explains the creation and reliance upon certain symbols for communication, in the process of social interactions, and it will be my entry point into media analysis. My choice to use symbolic interactionism instead of discourse analysis stems from the fact that SI will provide a better focus on how specific keywords can be used in dialogue about conflict and in turn shape the allocation of foreign aid. This framework proves quite beneficial in analysing the media's signs and images that shape public views and actions, especially in the case of the Israeli-Palestinian war, which has long been a divisive issue. The primary notions of symbolic interactionism are based on symbols, which in the case of my research will be the media language. Additionally, this theory is closely linked with the theory of constructivism, which is why it makes sense to use this theory alongside social constructivism, seeing as they complement one another. Alexander Wendt, one of the main figures of constructivism, has stemmed his ideas of identity from symbolic interactionists such as Blumer and Mead, who examined how our identities are created by a reflection of processes of socialization (Agius, 2022).

How these images, words, or symbols pertaining to the conflict between Israel and Palestine are shown in the media matters greatly, since it helps to construct a narrative concerning the events of the war. Such symbols are important both with governments and with general audiences, due to their ability to allow for the comprehension of the conflict and even the need to call for aid. As an illustration, the way the media depicts the victims and the perpetrators can have a big impact when trying to appeal for empathy and support, which is essential to decide if there is enough reason to provide foreign aid. The narrative on victimology can enhance these feelings by using descriptions mostly regarding women and children, which might provoke extreme emotional arousal and call for increased humanitarian aid. If there is the use of one-sided images or terms that lead to the wrongful depiction of the suffering, with a bigger

sympathy for one of the actors in the conflict, then the number of casualties is not as relevant because these narratives will already provide us with a bigger sense of empathy for a particular group, and reading about numbers will likely not leave the audience feeling as affected. This can then lead to a misunderstanding of who is actually in a bigger need to receive aid. The repeated use of specific symbols and narratives can lead to the internalization of these meanings by the public, thereby influencing their attitudes and behaviours.

An important concept from social interactionism theory to take into account is that of the ‘circuit of culture’, which refers to a complex interpretive process that shapes the meanings that certain things have for human beings (Denzin, 2014, p.4). This is a concept that is closely linked with the political economy and therefore will be an important concept to keep in mind for this research. According to Norman Denzin, “these objects and identities are, in turn, located in an ongoing political economy: ‘it determines the who, what, when, where, why, and how of wealth and power in everyday life’” (Denzin, 2014, p.4), and this is especially relevant when we are looking at foreign aid and the reasons that may have influenced its distribution in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Some of the limitations that using this theory may have on the research is the fact that the symbols that will be interpreted in the analysis can be hard to quantify, as there is no numerical data that can support them. However, to curb these limitations, the symbols that will be used in the analysis have been gathered through extensive research on the topic which allowed for the identification of symbols that were more commonly used in the reporting of this conflict. The methods employed in this research have made sure that the themes that will be analysed through this theoretical framework are ones that have relevance to the issue at hand.

By exploring this subject while employing symbolic interactionism as a theoretical framework, my focus will be directed towards a more qualitative media analysis in order to study the symbology and the storyline that captures this conflict and the aid situation. This theory offers a useful lens to assess the symbolic encoding of social realities and the role that the media has in the promotion of humanitarian causes. From this point of view, the focus of the study will incorporate media-oriented representations and most importantly the images and wordings in the presentation of conflicts, given that these elements can be vital for the humanitarian outcomes.

### 3. Literature Review

The main focus of my research will be on the influence that the media has in creating ideas and how much impact this can have on aid allocation. This touches on two different topics that are heavily debated individually: the power the media has in creating narratives; and the different influences that go into a government's choice to provide foreign aid during conflict. While doing research on the literature available that merged both of these topics, there were very few sources available, especially ones that touched upon the topic of Palestine and Israel. Additionally, the research that I did find, focused especially on media bias and had a more quantitative analysis, while my research will mostly be focused on qualitative aspects since language and how it is used will be my primary focus. The articles mentioned in this literature review were at the forefront of the research conducted, often being referenced in several other articles, and it was therefore essential that they were mentioned in this review. Given the radical changes that media-related studies have seen in the past years, with the quick advance of technologies, many articles that debated the topics of interest for this research were often outdated, with very little consideration for the increasing impact of media in society.

The mobilising capacity that certain historical events had for particular population groups, as well as actions geared toward them, can explain the importance of historical narratives, which is an important factor of this research, and something that needed to be considered when looking at relevant literature, given how necessary it is to have a deep understanding for a historical event in order to perceive if the media has been accurately representing it. For example, Israel's actions as an occupying power since the 1967 war have been interpreted by many Palestinians as a continuation of the 1948 Nakba, demonstrating how past events are continually reinterpreted to sustain the current conflict (Guy & Moore, 2012). Comprehending that dynamic is key if we are to, not only comprehend the Israeli-Palestinian conflicts which have taken place and developed in history but also to make sense of any strategies or future activities which can occur during this confrontation.

From the readings I have explored on this topic, the significance of the media in this conflict is notable, as it determines how not only people from the region but also globally, view the issue at hand. An example of this is the 1967 war, which is said to have been a turning point in cementing Israel's image as an 'occupying power' that has dominated the conflict ever since

(Guy & Moore, 2012). As often happens with media in its representations of war and conflicts, most news outlets will either delve deeply into the problem and its historical points or choose to simplify it in order to tell a specific story. According to Moore and Guy (2012), the portrayal of the 1967 war as a continuation of the 1948 Nakba for Palestinians is a prime example of how media can influence historical interpretation and, consequently, public sentiment (Guy & Moore, 2012). It is a common pattern between the two sides to have competing historical narratives in order to legitimise their stances. Israel frequently portrays itself as the rightful successor of the ancient lands and uses biblical history to extend its case in respect to the occupation of the land (Fonzo, 2016). On the other hand, Palestinians underline their age-old existence in the territory before any Jewish immigration, citing their historic and cultural claim over the land. This contention on historical correctness is not an issue for only scholars, but rather the ramifications of this go beyond academic writings, affecting things such as education and even foreign relations.

The distortion of history is also observable in the reference to the Holocaust by Israel's authorities. For instance, Israeli leaders have sometimes tried to equate Palestinians with the Holocaust, a practice that has been condemned for misusing the past in an incorrect manner to rationalise present-day politics (Fonzo, 2016). Erminio Fonzo's piece (2016) also brings attention to the fact that education plays a troubling role in furthering such narratives. In this respect, both Israeli and Palestinian political entities have control over the content of textbooks so that it is in accordance with their particular historical accounts, which in turn promotes nationalistic tendencies and creates a bigger rift (Fonzo, 2016).

As stated by Erminio Fonzo (2016), memory is also of great importance in the Israeli and Palestinian conflict, especially when looking at how both sides recall certain historical events (Fonzo, 2016). The 1948 war is termed by the Israelis as the War of Independence, whereas the Palestinians call it the Nakba (meaning catastrophe in Arabic), and it remains the principal cause of this conflict. While for Israelis it signifies the beginning of the Jewish state and the awakening of a new identity, for the Palestinians it represents loss and dispossession, a phenomenon which still calls for the right of return for the refugees (Fonzo, 2016). This social memory is not simply a matter of two conflicting viewpoints but is in fact something that is sustained through education, media, and political discourse. The banning of textbooks that present alternative narratives or the prohibition of literature that challenges national identity are examples of how

both Israeli and Palestinian authorities seek to control the historical narrative (Fonzo, 2016). This control over memory serves to maintain a sense of national identity and justify ongoing political stances, further entrenching the conflict.

Understanding this conflict through the portrayal of these authors leads us to a recognition of how history is not just recorded but actively constructed and used as a tool for political and ideological purposes. Only by addressing these deeply rooted narratives and the power dynamics that sustain them can there be hope for a more peaceful and equitable resolution to the conflict.

Only fairly recently did we start to see a rise in the literature that describes this conflict as a genocide, as well as in the media. Daud Abdullah (2019) makes a great case when explaining why what the Palestinians have been suffering has indeed fit right into the definition of genocide, with Israel's attempt "at destroying their national culture, political autonomy, and national will" (Abdullah, 2019, p.227). The media's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has evolved significantly over time, reflecting broader changes in global communication and geopolitics. Initially, coverage was limited, largely constrained by the technological limitations of the time and the fact that the conflict was considered a regional issue with limited global impact, however, the media still played a decisive role "in the circulation of competing versions of this conflict, and the construction of its memory" (Birkner et al., 2021, p.129).

Following the Six-Day War in 1967, the conflict gained increased international attention, partly due to the geopolitical implications of the war and the strategic importance of the Middle East during the Cold War. This period marked a shift in media coverage, and in the 1970s scholars truly began to examine the media coverage of the conflict (Neureiter, 2016). Major international news outlets began to report more extensively on the conflict, especially American news media, seeing how they were significantly involved (Birkner et al., 2021). But their reporting throughout the times has been far from unbiased. In a study from Michael Neureiter, looking at the 2010 Gaza flotilla raid in German, British and U.S. newspapers, it was found that American newspapers were significantly less critical of Israel in comparison to their counterparts and were the only country in their sample that exhibited a pro-Israel statement bias (Neureiter, 2016). But while in the U.K. there is an overall tendency to be more critical of Israel when compared to the U.S., this still depends on the political leaning of the newspapers that are reporting on the matter, seeing as British liberal news outlets will criticize Israel more often than

the conservatives (Neureiter, 2016). The overall findings of the study revealed that coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was indeed biased, but this bias can vary within and between states, within a state the differences were caused mostly by differing opinions among news outlets, and between nations, it was more of a matter of public opinion and demographics (Neureiter, 2016). This research piece by Neureiter (2016) was one of the most relevant articles regarding this topic and had details that are still relevant nearly a decade later, however, after the escalation of the conflict on October 7th there has been an overwhelming representation of the Israeli-Palestinian war, which has not yet been covered in research articles of this magnitude.

The bias mentioned seems to be a common theme when looking at other pieces of literature. According to Magdi Ahmed Kandil's research (2009), when analysing articles related to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in Al-Jazeera, BBC, and CNN, it concluded that those who read CNN News received a very limited amount of information regarding the conflict when compared to the other two news outlets (Kandil, 2009). This becomes even more concerning when we realize that the already limited reporting on this issue that American citizens have access to, is then also extremely biased. For example, in the same research, a documentary is mentioned that demonstrated that in the reporting of acts of violence by the Israeli army in the occupied territories, the U.S. media will portray the situation as a necessary measure by security forces which are retaliating or defending themselves against violence "giving the impression that these are legal authorities under attack rather than illegal forces protecting an illegal occupation of somebody else's land" (Kandil, 2009). One of the biggest concerns for the author is that the United States, a state which has a crucial role in this conflict and has unlimited political, military and financial support provided to Israel, does not have enough reporting to fully educate its citizens on what is going on and the consequences of what they are actually financing with their taxes (Kandil, 2009), which is an important point to raise.

It is important that when conducting research on this topic there is also a consideration of the potential differences that may occur from country to country, so to look at one country only seems like a small sample that can easily lead to a selection bias, and makes it harder to actually establish a pattern. It is a possibility that in a country such as the U.S. with a very prominent Jewish community, we will see a bigger bias in favour of Israel, seeing as its public opinion its relationship with Israel, and its media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict will all be intertwined with that factor (Neureiter, 2016). Comparatively, if we look at reporting coming

from Arab countries we will see that a pro-Palestinian narrative is more popular (Fonzo, 2016). And while in the West the Israeli narrative has been more prominent both narratives can be found (Fonzo, 2016). The advances of television brought images of the conflict into homes around the world, making the violence and humanitarian crises more tangible to global audiences. This visual coverage had a profound impact on public perceptions, as it allowed viewers to witness the realities of the conflict firsthand, albeit through the lens of media organizations that often had their own biases and agendas. The democratization of information has allowed a wider array of voices and perspectives to be heard, but it has also led to the proliferation of misinformation and propaganda, complicating the public's understanding of the conflict.

The media's role in shaping public opinion about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict cannot be overstated. News coverage, especially in Western countries, has often framed the conflict in ways that reflect the political and cultural biases of the reporting countries. For instance, some studies suggest that Western media has historically portrayed Israel as a democratic ally in a hostile region, while Palestinian actions are often depicted through the lens of terrorism and extremism (Kandil, 2009). The use of certain symbols can lead to a framing which influences public opinion differently depending on the political and ideological orientations of each news outlet (Kandil, 2009). We can see this when comparing media outlets from different countries with different political leanings, as done by Magdi Ahmed Kandil, who demonstrated that terrorism as a theme receives more emphasis on CNN and the least on Al-Jazeera, and that occupation as a theme is greatly emphasized on Al-Jazeera, and then is downplayed by CNN while receiving more reporting on BBC (Kandil, 2009).

It has also been shown that media coverage can have an influence on policy decisions. According to Norman Denzin, "all social institutions are media institutions" (Denzin, 2014, p.77). Politicians often respond to the public's perceptions, which are shaped by the media's portrayal of events, seeing as information technologies often mediate and define social life (Denzin, 2014). We can see the biggest example of this in the war on terror, which has, since 2001, greatly affected "not only international relations but also everyday life" (Agius, 2022, p.52). The way the war on terror was portrayed to the public has had a great impact on the public's perceptions of certain problems depending on the terminology that is used to describe it. If the words "terror" or "terrorism" are more closely used to describe one actor of a conflict in comparison to the other, that can lead to a biased view from the public and will in turn pressure

their government to act on it, which is why language can not be seen as a simple communicative instrument, but instead needs to be viewed as a defining force for social relations, and especially security language which “can create a different picture about a social problem or source of insecurity” (Social Constructivism, Christine Agius, p.64). The use of a constant fear format and colour-coded terrorism reports contributed directly to a politics of fear that has now become engrained in our lives (Denzin, 2014).

In the U.S., we see how the right-wing Republicans have an impact on the media, which they use to further advertise their conservative agenda that features a war on immigrants, persons of colour, and terror (Denzin, 2014). If this sort of information is featured on most mainstream news outlets, which allow for this propaganda to spread, it becomes hard for the public to receive an objective and clear reporting of events. This will in turn have an impact on who people vote for and whose side they choose to support when it comes to this type of conflict. While we can argue that individuals, as agents, can create their own experiences, these experiences are often manipulated and created by larger entities (Denzin, 2014), which in these cases are the media. Texts are not only portrayers of information, but they are also sites of political negotiation (Denzin, 2014).

Based on this literature, we are able to understand that the media is not just a passive observer in conflicts; it actively shapes the narratives that define them. In the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, this narrative shaping has profound implications, not only for how the conflict is understood but also for how it unfolds and it has arguably become one of the most complex and divisive conflicts of modern times. Therefore the narratives that the media puts forth become incredibly important when it comes to portraying an unbiased picture. Several ideological explanations argue that the political beliefs held by journalists, as well as the longstanding political identities of media outlets, are the primary source of media bias (Neureiter, 2016), which becomes hard to curve since people (journalists included) award meaning in relation to their own identities, the object, its text, and the context (Denzin, 2014).

One of the most significant ways in which media shapes narratives is through the selection of what stories to tell and how to tell them. For example, the terminology used by journalists can influence public perception—terms like “occupation,” “terrorist,” and “settler” carry connotations that can frame the conflict in particular ways. The use of such language can either legitimize or delegitimize the actions of one side, influencing public sympathy and



political support. In a study by Magdi Ahmed Kandil (2009), there is a clear demonstration that certain media outlets will avoid the use of words like “occupied territories” when mentioning the places where the conflicts are taking place, as a means to hide the illegality of the Israeli settlements (Kandil, 2009). It went as far as in 2001, The Independent reported that CNN sent out a memorandum to its reporters that they should refer to Gilo as a Jewish neighbourhood on the outskirts of Jerusalem and not as a settlement (Kandil, 2009). Moreover, the media’s focus on specific events, such as suicide bombings or airstrikes, can create a narrative that emphasizes certain aspects of the conflict while downplaying others (Denzin, 2014). This selective reporting can lead to a skewed understanding of the conflict’s root causes and dynamics, often reducing it to a series of violent incidents rather than a complex, multifaceted issue involving historical grievances, political power struggles, and deep-seated cultural and religious tensions.

The role of media in shaping narratives is also evident in the way that different outlets cater to their audiences. Media organizations often tailor their coverage to align with the political leanings and cultural values of their viewers, which can result in polarized reporting. This polarization can reinforce existing biases, making it difficult for the public to access balanced, nuanced information about the conflict. The main goal of mass media is not only to provide unbiased reporting but also to create an audience that adheres to a public opinion that is supportive of the strategic policies of the state (Denzin, 2014).

Just as Fonzo (2016) said, we must stop looking at discussions between scholars, media and politicians simply as academic debates, and start looking at them as narratives that directly involve the lives of millions of people (Fonzo, 2016).

While the academic research on this topic certainly demonstrates cohesiveness in its results, there seems to be a lack of research into the actual consequences of their findings. In most of the literature on media pertaining to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, the focus is mostly on their bias, and we have yet to be given extensive research on what the real life implications are for both the Israelis and the Palestinians.

As much as it is important to look at numbers and identify these patterns in the media, it is even more important to try to understand what the implications are for both nations in this conflict. If it is true that the media is reporting with a biased lens, then we must account for the ways that this influences the political action pertaining to this issue and how that in turn will influence the amount of foreign aid that each side receives.

Based on my review of the relevant literature, there seem to be a lot of interesting and significant research pieces, but they are all very narrow in their topics. Most of this research will either focus on media biases or on the foreign aid, but as individual topics, and there is a noticeable gap in the literature that merges these topics together, especially regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Not only that but it's also increasingly important to continue research on this topic seeing as this is a conflict that is constantly changing, and with it, there is always the possibility that certain journalists or media outlets change their biases over time (Neureiter, 2016). Most of the articles I found were also heavily reliant on the CNN effect, which is not as relevant for the argument that I will be presenting, seeing as the quantity of articles will not be something that I will be analysing, but rather their language. In this light, we can see how incredibly relevant it is to keep this conversation updated, especially with the changes we have been experiencing in media and the increased attention that this conflict has gained in this past year.

## 4. Methodology

One of the initial steps when conducting a research project is to choose the methods that will be employed when collecting and processing the data, so that the most suitable techniques for the research question can be utilized. The following sub-chapters will provide an explanation of the methodology that was selected when gathering the relevant data, as well as in the course of the analysis.

### 4.1. Triangulation

Triangulation was used as one of the methods in this analysis, as a validation strategy, in order to ensure the reliability of the multiple sources used. According to Bans-Akutey and Tiimub (2021), “research triangulation basically aims at validating the results of a study” (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021, p.1). Due to the nature of this research, multiple sources of data were used, such as media articles (both in the coding process and in the analysis of foreign aid allocation) and government records relating to the employment of aid in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Triangulation was then necessary so that all of these sources could be cross-verified, especially in the analysis of foreign aid allocation, where both sources of media and government data will need to be used to provide more comprehensive findings.

According to Carter et al. (2014), one of the key advantages of using the triangulation method during research is that it not only provides confirmation of the findings, but also provides the research with different perspectives that would not be shown if not for the use of various types of sources (Carter et al., 2014). A prominent example of this for this particular research question is when looking at aid allocation. If the research on this topic was only done through governmental sources the results would be more straight-forward and provide mostly numerical data, but the additional employment of media sources will provide a more in-depth understanding of the ways in which this aid is then employed on the field and the challenges or benefits it may be providing.

While there are many benefits in applying the triangulation method in research, there are also certain challenges to take into consideration. The use of both quantitative and qualitative data means that there needs to be an increased effort in ensuring the credibility of the sources

(Carter et al., 2014) and additionally this method requires a bigger effort from the researcher to ensure that the findings are not, for example, contradictory (Bans-Akutey & Tiimub, 2021).

## **4.2. Thematic Analysis**

One of the main focuses of this research is the manner in which the media has framed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. To be able to understand the representation of this issue in the media, it was important to employ the use of different themes in the analysis so that there could be a better understanding of the data collected in order to establish a pattern. For this reason it became important to employ the use of thematic analysis as my primary qualitative method.

Thematic analysis (TA) as a method is especially valuable when looking to identify or report patterns (or themes) within a specific set of data (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2015). In the case of this research, it was an important method to understand the various discourses that are present in news reporting. TA is a varied method for analysing qualitative data that can be employed in most theoretical frameworks (Terry et al., 2017).

This method of analysis is based on six chronological stages, which start with immersing yourself in the data, then moving on to the creation of initial codes and a search for themes, then reviewing and naming these themes, and the last stage is then producing a report, which can include extracts from the analysed data that delineate the themes properly (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2015). These steps were key elements in the conduction of this research project since they provided for a structured process for the analysis.

The initial comprehensive research of relevant literature on this topic provided a better understanding of the case, which then allowed for the proper creation of relevant themes. The main themes decided upon were: victims, violence, suffering, aid, and humanitarian. The choice for these themes was made given the fact that these were the most prominent subjects in articles where the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was discussed, and therefore are the most relevant to analyse when looking at media articles. The coding was then conducted with these key themes in mind, and each code was selected in the text when relevant language about the particular subject was employed. Having this division of data was essential to the proper organisation of the analysis in a way that provides a broader understanding of the media framing for this subject.

According to Riger and Sigurvinsdottir (2015), the main limitations of employing thematic analysis in research, stem from the problem that authors fail to develop an analysis and simply present extracts of the data that they have found, or that authors will select elements of data that they already know will make their argument rather than providing a systemic analysis of a data set (Riger & Sigurvinsdottir, 2015). These are limitations to consider in this research, which is why the data selection, such as the choice of media, were important deliberations to have, in order to make sure that a general and unbiased data set was gathered.

Overall, thematic analysis provided an essential method for a thorough understanding and representation of the media's portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **4.3. Data Selection**

#### **Choice of media**

After the choice to look at news outlets for the research, it was important to eliminate as many biases as possible so that an objective analysis could be produced. Since the main focus of this research will be two different countries, they were divided into three categories of ideological leanings, and then one media outlet was chosen for each category from both countries. In total, six news outlets were analysed.

According to the AllSides Media Bias Chart (n.d.), which is based on a list of over 1,400 media bias ratings, there are five perspectives and political leanings in U.S. online news content, which were titled: Left, Lean Left, Center, Lean Right, and Right (*Media Bias*, n.d.). However, most of the political leaning graphs and reporting found for the United Kingdom were only divided into three categories, such as Left, Center, and Right; therefore, for a more balanced analysis, the Lean Left and Lean Right categories from U.S. media were not included.

For this research, the following sets of news outlets were chosen:

United Kingdom: *The Guardian* (left); *BBC News* (centre); *The Telegraph* (right).

United States: *The New Yorker* (left); *Wall Street Journal News* (centre); *Fox News* (right).

When trying to find the political leanings of U.K. news outlets, there were no sources similar to AllSides, apart from a YouGov article (Smith, 2017) which mentions the eight most mainstream newspapers. This survey is the main mention in most of the remaining articles that were found about this topic, and so it was used to make the choices regarding the U.K. media outlets. Then to make sure that the data regarding the political stance of these news companies, were cross-checked with the AllSides database, whose information is not limited to the U.S. AllSides mentions that their data is “gathered from many people across the political spectrum - not just one biased individual or a very small, elite group. We have a patent on rating bias and use multiple methodologies, not an algorithm. Our methods are Blind Bias Surveys of Americans, Editorial Reviews by a multipartisan team of panelists who look for common types of media bias, independent reviews, and third-party data” (AllSides, 2023).

Given the controversy that the reporting on this conflict has seen, an analysis can only be fair when considering all sides of the political spectrum. This allows for a more complex understanding of the patterns in media bias since it will provide a chance to review if the patterns seem to be any different depending on the political leanings that a certain newspaper has. By being aware of the possible biases present in media discourse, we can critically assess the information we consume and more adequately understand the complexity of public perception.

In order to prevent any biased analysis in the research, the choice of which news outlets to focus on was very important, as well as which articles from these outlets would be looked into, to make sure that all of them were represented in an equal manner. Apart from making the decision to look at news companies from all political leanings, in order to provide a proportionate representation, 60 articles were chosen in total for the coding done in the analysis process (see Appendix A), so that there would be 10 articles from each media representative. The articles were chosen with the topics of the analysis in mind, so there were 2 articles for each theme from every news outlet. Once the articles had been selected they were individually coded based on the 5 topics and then analysed in regard to their language use and the framing of each subject, so that there was a fair and balanced analysis.

This provided an impartial lens where the main focus was the language of each article and the way that it was being employed pertaining to these specific topic, so that there could be a fair understanding of the way in which the general media is framing the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

### **Choice of aid**

Another important distinction that needed to be made when selecting the data for this research was between the type of aid that would be the focus. Both Israel and Palestine receive aid from both the U.K and the U.S., however, the specific type of aid that both of these countries receive are very different, and are provided with different aims in mind.

While there is a tendency to envision humanitarian aid when it is mentioned that a country has received some form of aid, this is not always the case as there are various forms of assistance that can be provided. Among the diverse types of aid that can be granted, the ones that are most prevalent in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is aid in the form of military and humanitarian assistance. For this reason, in order to encapsulate both forms, the broader title of foreign aid was the most suitable.

The aid provided to Israel is mostly military aid. This type of assistance usually requires a nation to either purchase arms or sign defence contracts directly with the country that is providing the assistance (Ross, 2024). The fact that these often include weapon sales overshadows the fact that this is still included in what is considered foreign aid and should therefore be described and portrayed as such. In the case of Palestine, the assistance is more easily recognizable since it is humanitarian aid. Therefore an accurate representation of the aid provided to this conflict would not be possible if there was not a consideration of both forms of aid.

According to Ross (2024), both of these categories fall into the definition of foreign aid, since this is “a form of financial assistance from one country to another. The goal is to help the receiving country go through an economic, humanitarian, or other crisis. Not only does foreign aid help the recipient, it also helps the donor country advance its own interests—notably, political, economic, and security” (Ross, 2024). If the research had only chosen either humanitarian aid or military aid as its focus, there could not be an accurate portrayal of the impact that the media might have in the allocation of foreign assistance, since both of these countries are receiving substantially different forms of aid for distinct reasons, and this understanding will also have an impact in the overall analysis.

## 5. Historical Context

For a long time, both the United States and Britain have been significant participants in times of war, therefore making sense that they are also playing a big role in the conflict between Israel and Palestine. Although the foreign policies of these nations may differ at some points, they both have similar strategies in terms of conflict, with most of them revolving around their interests in the Middle East. Since both of these countries will be the point of interest in this study, it is paramount to provide some background information on their historical relations with Israel and Palestine.

### 5.1 The United Kingdom

The initial association of the United Kingdom with Palestine began in the early 20th century, with the start of the British Mandate for Palestine, which started in 1922 and ended in 1948 (Hollis, 2016). This mandate served as an administration of the territory, and their policies were often contradictory. This contradiction can even be traced back to before the Mandate was set in place by making a comparison of the Hussein-McMahon Correspondence in 1915, which demonstrated support for the movement of Arab independence (Spyer, 2004), and the Balfour Declaration in 1917 that supported the creation of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine (Hollis, 2016).

At the time, the stand-offs between the Jewish and Arab communities were growing, and the U.K. was having issues with its management. In the year of 1939, it witnessed an establishment of limitations on Jewish immigration to Palestine, as articulated in the White Paper, along with a pledge to establish a self-governing state for Palestinians, which only served to intensify these tensions (Spyer, 2004). Ultimately, in 1947, with the eruption of the conflict, Britain made a resolution to exit from Palestine and left behind a history of distrust (Spyer, 2004).

According to Jonathan Spyer (2004), the U.K.’s policy toward Israel is often made with a distinction between two primary schools of thought: the ‘Diplomatic’ and the ‘Strategic’ approaches (Spyer, 2004). The diplomatic approach, often prevalent with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, supports that it is important to maintain a favourable relationship with



the Arab world, and showing criticism towards Israel will therefore be seen in a positive light (Spyer, 2004) and those who take on this framework believe that resolving the Arab and Israeli conflict is essential for regional stability (Spyer, 2004). Conversely, the Prime Minister's office tends to historically have a different viewpoint with the strategic approach instead (Spyer, 2004). This lens tends to be more appreciative of Israel and sees it as being valuable to maintain a Western influence in the region (Spyer, 2004).

The era post-Brexit was marked by the realignment of the U.K's relationship with Israel, demonstrating close economic and security cooperation. But even after leaving the European Union, the country has continued to express its support for a two-state solution and also demonstrates concern over illegal Israeli settlements in the West Bank (Spyer, 2004), and yet has also continued to provide military and technological support to Israel, demonstrating that it continues to have a contradictory stand in the conflict between Israel and Palestine, just as it did in the beginning of the 20th century.

## **5.2 The United States**

The United States and Israel have for a long time had a strong relationship, often described as a "special relationship" (Bard & Pipes, 1997). This relationship has been based on close democratic values and interests, which only got stronger due to their similar political ideals during the Cold War era (Bard & Pipes, 1997). Since it recognized Israel in 1948, the U.S. has remained its closest ally, with strong military, economic, and diplomatic cooperation (Bard & Pipes, 1997).

Shortly after Israel's establishment as a nation, the U.S. did not seem on board with providing direct military aid to the region. However, in 1967 during the Six-Day War, there was a change to this policy choice and the U.S. started providing Israel with substantial military support in comparison with its neighbouring countries (Bard & Pipes, 1997). This was mostly influenced by the U.S.'s fight against communism at the time, and with the possibility that there would be any Soviet effect in the Middle East, Israel was seen as a power that could counteract this influence (Bard & Pipes, 1997). Since then, Israel has maintained the number one spot as the biggest recipient of U.S. foreign aid, with a significant portion being allocated to military

assistance. In between 1974 and 1997 alone, the U.S. aid to Israel amounted to nearly \$75 billion (Bard & Pipes, 1997).

In the 80s, Ronald Reagan's administration signed the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU), which formally recognised Israel as a strategic ally. This act strengthened joint military cooperation and weapon sales, really proving how important Israel was for the U.S. strategy in the Cold War (Bard & Pipes, 1997). These actions demonstrate a dedication from the U.S. to make sure that Israel has military superiority when compared to its regional counterparts. We can see this with the creation of programs such as the Arrow Anti-Tactical Ballistic Missile and the Iron Dome.

However, the link between these two countries goes beyond a military partnership. In terms of economy, in 1985 the Free Trade Agreement was signed between both states and this was the first time that the U.S. was signing something similar (Bard & Pipes, 1997). In this agreement, it was established that tariffs would be eliminated in order to stimulate trade between both countries (Bard & Pipes, 1997).

The relationship that the U.S. has maintained with Palestine has not been as pleasant, especially in more recent years. Unlike the U.K. which had a prior relationship with Palestine before the conflict with Israel escalated, the relationship that the U.S. maintains with the region is more focused around the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Before the Oslo Accords in 1993, the U.S. did not have any direct connection to the Palestinian leadership (Zanotti, 2010). The circumstances took a different turn when after the accords, the U.S. started smoothing the way for negotiations to happen between the state of Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) and therefore had to recognise P.L.O. as a formal representative of the Palestinian people (Zanotti, 2010).

Similarly to Britain, they have since supported a two-state solution as the main resolution for the conflict, with President Bush making it part of official U.S. policy in 2002 (Zanotti, 2010). However, due to its strong partnership with Israel, most of its policies have placed their security concerns over the Palestinians' fight for independence, and the aid sent to Palestine has mostly been related to governance structures, economic development and counterterrorism efforts (Zanotti, 2010).

Since the 90's the U.S. has been one of the key players in terms of trying to reach a peace agreement between Israel and Palestine. After 1993, they also mediated several negotiations,

such as the Camp David Summit in 2000 and the Roadmap for Peace in 2003 (Zanotti, 2010). There have been several instances where progress has had to pause due to ongoing violence or disagreements over important elements in the negotiations, such as the status of Jerusalem or Israel expanding its settlements in the West Bank (Zanotti, 2010).

It wasn't until the Trump administration that the relationship between Palestine and the U.S. started truly declining. The shift was felt after their recognition of Jerusalem as the capital of Israel in 2017, and the relocation of the U.S. embassy in Israel there (Zanotti, 2010). Jerusalem is one of the most contested elements of this conflict, and this stance was heavily criticised by the international community and led to a rupture in the relations between the U.S. and Palestine, seeing as this action was viewed by the Palestinian leadership as an abandonment of U.S. impartiality in the peace process (Zanotti, 2010). Under Trump's office, there were also cuts made on the funding to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA), which supports Palestinian refugees, and significantly reduced aid being received in Palestine (Zanotti, 2010).

To further sever the ties between the two states, in 2018, it was decided on the closure of the P.L.O. office in Washington (Nauert, 2018), and in 2020, the Trump administration created the 'Deal of the Century' which was a peace plan that demonstrated the pro-Israel biases of that administration and was therefore rejected by the Palestinian leadership (Zanotti, 2010).

## 6. Analysis

### 6.1 Media

Apart from the choice of which media outlets this research should focus on, it was also relevant to decide how to choose the specific news articles to be employed in the analysis process. The sub-chapters for the first half of the analysis, which is focused on understanding the media's representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, have been divided into five different topics which are also the topics which were used when researching what news articles to employ. The topics are, in order: victims; violence; suffering; aid; and humanitarian. When speaking about this conflict, especially given the main focus of this research, these were the most relevant in terms of understanding the representations of these underlying themes which are all relevant for the overall comprehension of the conflict.

These topics are all significant in their own way and for their own reasons. The topic of victims is important to understand if there are any noticeable differences in the reporting between both actors in the conflict, given that the casualties in this war have been one of the most conflicting topics since the escalation of the war on October 7th.

While the topics of violence and suffering may seem similar, they each represent two very different aspects of the analysis. The subject of violence will focus more on the military aspects of the conflict, as well as any attacks or events that may have occurred during this period. This is especially relevant when looking at the different ways that an attack by Hamas may be represented when compared with an attack made by Israel's Defense Forces. Conversely, the topic of suffering is mostly related to the ways in which civilians experience these attacks and the manner in which their consequences are represented.

The two last topics may also imply a similar nature but will be dealing with different issues. The aid subject is focused on the way that aid, whether it be humanitarian or military, is represented. The humanitarian topic will provide more interest in understanding how the humanitarian situation of the conflict is portrayed, as well as how each side is represented in terms of their actions.

### 6.1.1 Victims

The representation of victims throughout this conflict by the media has dramatically contrasting portraits of Israeli and Palestinian casualties. While most reports touched on the human cost of the war between the two nations, the framing of the victims was done rather differently depending on the news outlet and their editorial focus.

Israeli victims were often humanised by the personal stories that depicted the brutal violence against them. Fox News followed this concept by publishing the stories of the specific Israeli victims killed in the Hamas attacks (Richard, 2023). The report introduced the readers to specific victims, including a 'dancer daughter', a 'sensitive jewellery designer', and an 'elderly couple married for more than 50 years' (Richard, 2023). By honing in on personal aspects, such as the fact that one daughter was an animal lover or that a grandmother was kind, it incites within the audience a deep sense of loss and makes the victims relatable and sympathetic. This type of strategy framed the Israeli victims as innocent targets of terrorism providing an emotional weight to these stories that were designed to emphasize the brutality of Hamas' attacks.

In a similar manner, The Telegraph presented a vivid account of the Hamas attacks that took place on October 7th, explaining how a large group of militants invaded the region killing 1,200 Israeli civilians, including children (Vasilyeva, 2024). The emphasis on how some children were murdered right in front of the parents was meant to deepen the horror and the pain that came with these attacks for the people reading the stories. These representations are not about the number of casualties but about particular people who were extremely brutalised by an attack that ended up costing them their lives. Reports of this kind demonstrate a personalisation of the Israeli victims, as opposed to Palestinians who were often represented as numbers and statistics that did not seek to explain their stories.

Unlike Israeli fatalities, Palestinian victims were often framed in terms of great numbers that represented the extent of the civilian casualties. In an article by the Wall Street Journal ("Aid Trucks Trickle Into Northern Gaza as Israel Opens New Route," 2024) they inform that more than 31,000 Palestinians were killed from the onset of this war, a large proportion of whom were women and children. As most articles were portraying Palestinian victims, on all Wall Street Journal articles after these numbers also came the reminder that these numbers were released by the Palestinian health authorities in a Hamas-controlled Health Ministry and covered all deaths without distinguishing between combatants and non-combatants, therefore inviting scepticism on

the accuracy of the figures and diminishing the suffering that was being felt in Gaza. However, the numbers suggested high rates of deaths in Gaza as families were said to have been wiped out by air strikes and bombings. The Guardian provided more details on this statement, recounting the loss of a woman, a young son, her pregnant daughter, and her eldest son, emphasizing the continuous pain suffered by Palestinian families (Burke et al., 2024). These large numbers were not only visually shocking but also demonstrated the large scale of the tragedy that civilians in Gaza were suffering as opposed to the victims' individualised narratives for the Israelis.

In an article that appeared on Fox News, the increasing number of incidences of deaths that occurred in Gaza was also put into perspective when it reported the numbers issued by the Health Ministry stating that more than 30,000 Palestinians had been killed in this conflict (Dorgan, 2024). The information regarding these deaths, primarily the provided statistic on two-thirds of the attacks being women and children, was meant to present how the Israeli air raids had affected the ordinary citizens. Nevertheless, the tendency to speak of Palestinians in terms of aggregated figures, without narrating any individual or familial stories, as well as their suffering, appeared more abstract in nature, something that made it rather difficult for the readers to empathise with the Palestinian deaths. In most of the articles, the numbers were given as almost a backstory or context cue for a broader topic that was the main interest of the article, and not as a true representation of devastation. The deaths of the 1,200 Israelis were often framed with bigger sympathy, and in a more graphic and devastating manner, than the Palestinian deaths which at that point had matched those numbers tenfold. They were instead seen as a consequence of the actions of Hamas on October 7th, and something that had to happen due to security concerns.

In demonstrations of the victims from both sides of the conflict, there was a bigger emphasis on the women and children as victims, rather than looking at the overall picture. In fact, several articles, such as one by The Telegraph (Zlochin, 2024), took a great interest in understanding if the percentages of women and children that had been killed were indeed correct, or if the numbers may be less than what is being reported. This provides another context for a lessening of the destruction that Israel had caused so far with the Palestinians as if not all deaths were valid and therefore relevant for the war context.

Hostage situations also considerably impacted the representation of victims. BBC (“Anger and Despair as Palestinians Queue for Supplies During Truce,” 2023) reported on the

swap of 50 Israelis held hostage by Hamas in exchange for 150 Palestinians imprisoned in Israeli jails. This narrative illustrated the political meaning of victimhood on both sides. The underlying cruelty behind this dynamic was the provision of media attention on the hostages (held by Hamas), which served to portray innocent civilians that were not combatants, and then a contrasting representation of the Palestinians who were being held in Israel, that was instead portrayed as prisoners, which will provide the audience with a biased view towards these Palestinian civilians by associating them with the inherently negative view that our society has towards those who are incarcerated. The articles that mentioned this hostage trade did not provide any representation into the reasons why these Palestinians were being held by Israel, but in a specific article by the New Yorker (Chotiner, 2024b) it is represented that not all Palestinians were being held in prisons for valid reasons and were very likely being subjected to torture. The symbology in this subtle shift in language, gives power to the idea that there is a different legal and moral status (Chotiner, 2024b), highlighting the idea that Israel is engaged in a conventional war against a terrorist group, and ignoring the larger conflict, involving occupation and human rights violations that has been ongoing for decades.

Overall, in my observation of these media articles, we can see an imbalance in the representation of the victims in the media regarding the conflict between Israel and Palestine. It was common in both British and U.S. media to illustrate individual Israeli victims through emotional narratives in order to evoke feelings of sympathy and understanding from their readers, and, in contrast, Palestinian deaths were simply tallied as figures to represent a collective scale of suffering. This sort of disparity built up a feeling towards each group, which in turn affected the understanding of the human cost in the conflict.

### **6.1.2 Violence**

The focus of the media in reporting violence during the course of the Israeli-Palestinian war has been the violence carried out by both parties with particular emphasis on the effects of the conflict on innocent people. Coverage of violence was influenced by claims of war crimes, violations of humanitarian laws, terrorism, and the justification or lack thereof of the conduct of war, as both Hamas and Israel engaged in military acts leading to a high level of indiscriminate destruction and civilian casualties.

As a result of Hama's assault on Israel, the world has witnessed a surge of media reports claiming that the attack and mass killings of over 1,200 Israeli citizens were an act of the most extreme violence (Vasilyeva, 2024). The Telegraph (Vasilyeva, 2024) reported that women, children and elders were gunned down indiscriminately by Hamas fighters as they invaded Israeli communities. The American channel Fox News also supported the above analysis, marking it as indiscriminate violence and an act of terrorism when it covered how hostilities in a Gaza music festival led to 260 deaths (Elkind, 2024). A significant portion of the coverage of the events surrounding the Israel-Hamas conflict escalation framed Hamas as a violent extremist group that predominantly targeted non-combatant civilians, and as an organization that was recognized by the U.S. as a terrorist organization. A BBC article ("Anger and Despair as Palestinians Queue for Supplies During Truce," 2023) portrayed a description of hostages openly displayed inside Gaza, which underscored the narrative that Hamas was intent on frightening and terrorising people.

In an article by The Wall Street Journal, there was an emphasis on the more graphic aspects of the attacks, covering the fact that the victims were mutilated and decapitated and that there were also reports of sexual violence by Hamas (Stancati, 2023). These narratives occur in order to provide a frame that depicts these attacks not as an act of war but as a campaign of terror, where Israeli civilians were deliberately targeted in dehumanising ways. Graphic representations of these kinds of attacks serve to enhance the emotional response, from those who are reading them, to the violence perpetrated, therefore portraying them as something far more unacceptable than any acts of warfare.

After the attacks on October 7th, Israel then launched a series of airstrikes and military operations, as a response, that were represented in the media as being highly destructive and with a significant number of casualties. There were certain reports, as mentioned in The Guardian, that questioned whether Israel's military actions, especially airstrikes on densely populated areas and the blockade of Gaza, had broken international laws (Wintour & O'Carroll, 2023). These questions were not felt equally in all media outlets, and British newspapers seemed to be more critical than American ones on this topic. BBC also expanded on this by citing U.N's human rights official, Volker Türk, who suggested that Israel could be using starvation as a weapon of war against the people of Palestine ("Gaza Starvation Could Amount to War Crime, UN Human Rights Chief Tells BBC," 2024).



As Israel continued defending their actions as necessary military acts in order to eliminate Hamas and protect their country against terrorism, some media outlets frequently raised concerns about the disproportionate impact that this may be having on the civilians in Gaza. The Wall Street Journal denoted that Israel had dropped more than 29,000 bombs in Gaza which had led to widespread destruction and the death of thousands (Stancati & Ayyoub, 2024). In this topic, The New Yorker was particularly critical of Israel's actions in comparison to other outlets and accused the country of engaging in indiscriminate attacks on civilian areas, despite their claims that they were only targeting Hamas militants (Chotiner, 2023c). This particular article argued that since Gaza has such a high population density, any military actions would always end up resulting in civilian casualties, and they even framed Israel's approach as excessively forceful.

Another article by The New Yorker pointed out that the laws of war were being broken on both sides – Hamas by its rocket fire towards Israeli cities and Israel through their damaging counter-offensive in densely populated areas (Chotiner, 2023a). The factors that depicted both factions as war criminals showed how interlocked the situations were, in that one act of injustice gave rise to another and most times innocents bore the brunt of the costs. In fact, on most of the reporting, when mentioning attacks done by Israel or news that were related to casualties in Gaza, most outlets left a note of justification for these actions by claiming that these are acts that had started only after an attack by Hamas. And while we know that these events did indeed cause an escalation in the conflict, it runs far deeper than this, and it cannot be accurately represented through that narrative.

Although there was, by some outlets, a more critical response to the actions taken by Israel, namely The Guardian, BBC, and The New Yorker, the majority of the media framed these attacks as appropriate responses to a terrorist attack and precise actions that were necessary in order to protect their population against future attacks and the spread of Hamas' power. This narrative was especially prominent in the earlier months right after the escalation of the conflict, where impacts from the casualties in Israel were still very fresh in the media and were constantly mentioned in the articles.

Besides the bloodshed in Gaza, the media also focused on the escalating violence between Israeli settlers and Palestinians in the West Bank. As reported in The Wall Street Journal (Rasmussen & AbdulKarim, 2023) and BBC (Bohen, 2023), due to the ongoing war, Jewish

settlers ventured into Palestinian territories and attacked villagers, set houses on fire, robbed properties, and murdered innocent citizens. The image of settlers as brutal aggressors at times, operating without restraint from Israeli forces, was another element of the violent narrative during the course of the conflict. According to Fox News (Lee, 2024), this fear was compounded by Israel trying to curb violence in several regions at the same time, considering its covert operations in military and police activities in both Gaza and West Bank were very resource-demanding and that they should instead focus their resources in combating the violence coming from Hamas.

Overall, the portrayal of violence in the Israel-Palestine conflict emphasized the brutality on both sides. As such, Hamas was painted as continuing a campaign of terror against individuals while, on the other hand, the military response by Israel was couched as excessively harmful to the Palestinian people but as a necessary measure of defence considering what their country had been subjected to.

### **6.1.3 Suffering**

The discourse regarding suffering has been one of the central themes in the media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, with an overwhelming focus on the severe hardships that civilians in the region are currently facing. In the articles analysed, the suffering was described both in physical and psychological terms, with the description of suffering ranging from physical injuries to trauma and long-term deprivation.

The suffering of Palestinian civilians in Gaza was portrayed as immense, with the relentless focus of the media on how most buildings, including homes, infrastructures, and even hospitals, have been destroyed. The Guardian (Burke et al., 2024) carried an emotional account of Palestinian families, including a woman who lost two children and a daughter, who was pregnant, within a short period. Fox News gave a chilling depiction of children suffering from malnutrition (Eglash, 2024a), as many relief agencies pointed out that Gaza was on the verge of starvation due to an acute shortage of food and medicines. Based on other reports, especially from BBC, the health system in Gaza has also suffered crippling defeats as the hospitals were full, and, in some instances, the rescue teams were forced to help the wounded from the wreckages without any appropriate devices (Thomas, 2023). These reports were used to highlight

the scale of suffering, where the civilians found themselves in a war that they were unable to escape from.

Along with covering the physical impact of the conflict, reports also focused on the psychological injuries that civilians suffered. According to the Telegraph, which focused on the suffering of Israelis, several families suffered trauma after Hamas carried out the attacks on October 7th, with images of children who had been shot, being cradled in their parent's arms (Vasilyeva, 2024). These reports carried a burden of emotions and the worries regarding the violence were not only physical, but emotional and psychological as well. These reports highlighted the terror that the people in Israel had been feeling in the aftermath of the attack, especially those who had been close to the attacks or knew anyone who had been affected directly. In the same way, BBC turned to the other side of the conflict by looking into the suffering in Palestine when they reported on the children's trauma but delved deeper into that of the hospitalized children and those who were refugees ("Gaza Starvation Could Amount to War Crime, UN Human Rights Chief Tells BBC," 2024).

On the reports of suffering, as depicted by the media, there was usually a bigger focus on the most affected groups – women, children and the elderly. These tales of distress helped in hearing the cause of death beyond the hard numbers of carnages and havoc created, in order to provide a more human element to the tragedies that were being depicted.

Starvation and deprivation were fundamental to the media's portrayal of suffering, especially so in the case of Gaza where the blockade by Israel created an absence of food, water and medical supplies. The Wall Street Journal described the malnutrition levels in the region and the extent to which some children had to go without food until death (Stancati & Ayyoub, 2024). The Guardian highlighted that the meagre supply of humanitarian supplies coming into Gaza was not enough to meet the extreme deficits, with doctors warning that it was rapidly going from bad to worse (Graham-Harrison, 2024).

The suffering extended beyond food and health supplies; Fox News indicated that these individuals also endured a shortage of electricity and clean water (Eglash, 2024a). Due to the breakdown of services in every respect, many were relying on donkey carts to carry the dead and the injured. Such a vivid account of the lack of resources in the area created an impression that the people living in Gaza, in addition to the ongoing war, were also facing a calamity of a humanitarian nature.

In the course of this conflict, the media demonstrated suffering as primarily focused on the Palestinian people living, mostly, in Gaza. Reports stressed the short-term physical pain inflicted by violence and deprivation in the long term caused by the siege and destruction of the region. Emotional and psychological suffering was also stressed as children and whole families were shown to experience such extreme grief amid constant violence.

#### **6.1.4 Aid**

One of the missions of the mass media, focused on aid, was the difficulty of rendering humanitarian assistance during the conflict. The picture of the attempts to render aid was largely influenced by getting the necessary items to civilians, the politics of providing such assistance, and how Israel and Hamas worked either to relieve limitations or to siege the humanitarian aid, respectively.

It was suggested time and again by the media that the process of aiding the citizens of Gaza was a daunting task, with the major cause being the interventions of the Israeli government and the political unrest. The Guardian claims that the number of supplies being delivered to the people of Gaza was too low to cater for the nearly 2 million people who had severe shortages of food, clean water, and medical supplies leading to increasing desperation among the population (Graham-Harrison, 2024). The piece highlighted how the conflict was already affecting doctors in Gaza, with some cautioning that children had begun to die from starvation and those who did not die would suffer health difficulties for the rest of their lives. A Fox News article (Egash, 2024a) narrated traumatizing pictures of famished kids and anguished people, while many charities in the area claimed that the Israeli government was the one hindering aid from coming by deliberately delaying or blocking aid deliveries.

In the majority of cases, the blockade set by Israel was mentioned as a key problem in the provision of humanitarian assistance, and The Telegraph (Buncombe, 2024) observed that there are increased calls for Israel to relax its stance on providing humanitarian aid to Gaza. On the other hand, the image of Israel was of the benevolent donor dealing with foes attempting to restrain food and medical help to destabilize populations. A report published by the BBC (“Gaza Starvation Could Amount to War Crime, UN Human Rights Chief Tells BBC,” 2024) stated that the Israeli government made claims that the blockade was necessary because Hamas operatives

were using civilian sites for military action, hence there was a risk that any supplies brought in would be used by terrorists. This framing suggested that the blockade was more of a security concern rather than an active effort to starve the civilian population.

Hamas' role in obstructing aid deliveries was also a key point of discussion in the media. Fox News accused Hamas of manipulating casualty figures and using civilian areas as shields, complicating efforts to deliver aid without inadvertently supporting the militant group (Eglash, 2024c). The New Yorker expanded on this, noting that Hamas had long been accused of diverting humanitarian aid for its own purposes, including using aid money to fund its military operations (Rasgon, 2023). This portrayal of Hamas as both a recipient and manipulator of aid added a layer of complexity to the narrative, suggesting that the group bore some responsibility for the humanitarian crisis in Gaza.

The international response to the humanitarian crisis in Gaza was portrayed as inadequate, with media outlets frequently highlighting the challenges faced by aid organisations. The Guardian reported that seven aid workers were killed in an Israeli airstrike while delivering food to Gaza, underscoring the dangers faced by humanitarian personnel (Jones, 2024). The Wall Street Journal described how hospitals in Gaza were overwhelmed, with healthcare workers struggling to treat the thousands of injured civilians due to a lack of supplies and equipment (Stancati & Ayyoub, 2024).

Despite these efforts, BBC (Thomas, 2023) and Fox News (Eglash, 2024a) noted that the amount of aid reaching Gaza was far too small to address the scale of the crisis. The portrayal of international aid efforts was often critical, with many reports emphasising the limitations of the aid being provided and the global frustration over the lack of meaningful intervention. Many reports demonstrated the inadequacy of the aid being provided. In an article by The Telegraph, it was reported that, at this point, up to 33,000 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli forces, which led even Israel's allies to call for more humanitarian aid to be allowed into Gaza (Buncombe, 2024).

The portrayal of aid during the conflict highlighted the immense challenges of delivering humanitarian assistance in a war zone, with both Israel and Hamas portrayed as obstacles to aid delivery. While Israel's blockade was frequently criticised, its actions were also framed as being a method of terrorism surveillance. Meanwhile, Hamas' role in obstructing and manipulating aid

further complicated the narrative, leaving civilians in Gaza to suffer the consequences of a protracted and politically charged humanitarian crisis.

### **6.1.5 Humanitarian**

The media's narrative regarding the humanitarian angle in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict tended to centre around the critical situation prevailing in Gaza where civilians were already experiencing acute shortages of necessary supplies due to an excessive military offensive. Humanitarian aspects were also put forward upon both Israel and Palestine with Israel in most cases being the guilty party while Palestinian misery was the subject of most coverage. Nevertheless, there were also attempts to analyse how help could gain entry into Gaza and the threats created by Hamas. While in most articles there was a sense that Israel was indeed the cause behind the humanitarian disaster in Gaza, we had many instances where news outlets would report on Israel's attempts at improving the humanitarian situation, and the different methods that they were employing to get aid into Gaza, when they were the ones placing all of the bureaucratic difficulties that humanitarian agencies were experiencing.

The humanitarian conditions in Gaza were continually portrayed as devastating, with the media giving much attention to the effects of Israel's air raids and the land, sea and air blockade on the civilian population. The Israeli blockade on Gaza has been a constant factor in this crisis as most factors were seen to aggravate the situation. The Telegraph (Buncombe, 2024) and The Guardian (Graham-Harrison & Borger, 2023) have covered how control of the humanitarian aid delivered into Gaza was becoming more of an international crisis especially after aid deliveries were attacked or rerouted. For example, The Guardian pointed out an airstrike that left 25 people dead in a refugee camp in southern Gaza and exposed the risks that civilians face in places that are supposedly safe for humanitarian operations, and to which Israel had wanted to relocate these civilians to in the first place, as an attempt to save them (Graham-Harrison & Borger, 2023). As the months progressed after the attack on October 7th, and the humanitarian situation in Gaza kept deteriorating, the depictions of the humanitarian crisis were dominated by the focus on the role of Israel as actively working to prevent the flow of much-needed relief aid into Gaza.

This blockade was at times also characterised as a strategy by Israel to drain out Hamas, but this came with severe implications for the civilians. The Wall Street Journal (Stancati &

Ayyoub, 2024) and BBC (“Gaza Starvation Could Amount to War Crime, UN Human Rights Chief Tells BBC,” 2024) put out articles noting that the almost seven-month war had come with an extreme cost to the people of Gaza with 34,000 lives lost and many others gone missing or wounded. The two reports observed that, for instance, Israel had justified its blockade saying that it was mandatory for security, especially as aid was often misused by Hamas with the help of the civilian facilities. This type of argument was often fueled by the media, who seemed sympathetic to their reasoning.

Israeli military attacks were often considered the main reason behind the deterioration of the humanitarian situation, however, several sources pointed out the aggravation of the circumstances by Hamas as well. The author of a Fox News article claimed that Hamas engaged in active military operations while using schools and hospitals as cover, therefore making it impossible for Israel to strike them without collateral damage to the innocent population (Egash, 2024c). This type of framing implied that Hamas was to blame for the grave humanitarian crisis that Gaza was currently facing, as the organisation’s way of fighting made it hard to assist people in need while keeping them safe, with little accountability pointed towards Israel. For the majority of articles that seemed to be critical of the humanitarian situation in Gaza, and that gave some fault to Israel, the argument that the conflict had been started by Hamas in the first place was always present, providing a framework that is excusing Israel’s actions.

The New Yorker explained the complex relationship between international humanitarian organisations and Hamas, claiming that Israel continuously accused them of inappropriate utilisation of humanitarian aid for their own purposes (Rasgon, 2023). The article went on to explain that these blocked aid supplies were caught in the broader conflict between Hamas and Israel, but that both parties diverted it into local politics, each manipulating the humanitarian aspect for their political and military gains. This assessment added another dimension to the explanatory framework of the humanitarian crisis in Gaza, noting that undeniably, the Palestinians are suffering, but there may be an aggravation by Hamas. These narratives become incredibly dangerous when we look at the fact that the humanitarian situation is already put to the side by the media as something that is inevitable given Israel’s security concerns, and in order to be able to take down Hamas.

The international coverage of the humanitarian situation during the war, mostly revolved around the various efforts, including reports on their effectiveness to bring relief in the region.

The Guardian (Graham-Harrison & Borger, 2023) and BBC (Thomas, 2023) touched on the various humanitarian challenges faced by bodies such as the United Nations, the Medecins Sans Frontiers and the Red Crescent in providing assistance to the civilians in Gaza. Such organisations were often attacked during Israeli air raids targeting the roads used by the aid convoys.

The New Yorker also added that international organisations like the Red Cross had been banned from visiting any Israeli prisons where Palestinians were being held, which raised further concerns about Israel's policies and the humanitarian implications that this had (Chotiner, 2024b). There was indeed a focus on the limitations from the international community in making sure that Palestinians are being treated in a fair manner and receiving the care they deserve, but this focus was not extended to all media outlets and came mostly from The New Yorker with their investigative pieces, and was very rarely mentioned by other reports.

While there was an acknowledgment that this crisis was currently being caused by Israel, and the media tended to focus more on the humanitarian issues, there was always also a big focus on Israel's narratives and particularly on its defences and justifications for their actions and policies. In a Fox News article, they noted that the health ministry in Gaza was currently controlled by Hamas, and that casualty figures were rejected by Israeli officials who claimed that most of those killed were combatants, rather than civilians and that the death of innocents was exaggerated for propaganda purposes (Eglash, 2024c). This sentiment was also shared by the Wall Street Journal which claimed that Israel had long accused Hamas of using civilians in Gaza as shields, which made it harder for Israel's military and led to higher civilian casualties (Zlochin, 2024). The BBC also covered Israel's claims that it had taken precautionary measures to reduce civilian deaths, by providing warnings before an air strike or attempting to strike Hamas' facilities as opposed to the civilian areas (Thomas, 2023).

The New Yorker was the only media outlet who openly and continuously criticized Israel's military operations, claiming that if Hamas was indeed using civilians as shields, that Israel's response continued to be disproportionate (Chotiner, 2023c).

The constant justification of the actions taken by the Israeli authorities depicted the humanitarian challenges as an unfortunate event but one which must be embraced as a necessary consequence in the course of the war against Hamas, as highlighted by the Israeli authorities who



always argued that they had to consider national security first even when there was a humanitarian crisis going on, a sentiment that was echoed in most media channels.

The focus of the media in reporting on the humanitarian crisis that's going on in Gaza, which increased in the course of the escalation of the Israel-Palestine conflict, has centred more on the plight of the civilians in Gaza, who comprise the majority of the victims. Most narratives suggested that the military operations and the blockade imposed by Israel were aggravating the plight of those suffering, although arguments were also made about Hamas' role in making the situation worse than it needed to be.

## **6.2 Foreign Aid**

### **6.2.1 The United States**

After the attacks by Hamas on October 7th, and the retaliation by Israel in Palestine, a dire humanitarian crisis in Gaza has elicited international responses, with the U.S. being the biggest donor in aid to both parties. The United States supplied crucial assistance through direct funding and other logistical endeavours between October 2023 and May 2024 while manoeuvring difficult political and security dilemmas. This chapter will examine these trends in U.S. assistance to both Palestine and Israel throughout this period.

#### **Palestine**

##### **October**

In October, it was announced that the U.S. would provide \$100 million in an aid package to meet urgent humanitarian needs in Gaza and the West Bank. This funding was made available through USAID and the U.S. Department of State, and it aimed to provide support “for displaced and other conflict-affected Palestinian people through the provisions of safe water, emergency food, shelter, hygiene support, and healthcare services.” (U.S. Agency for International Development, 2023). Along with the funding the government had also started to work with partners on the ground—in particular, the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA), and also Israel and Egypt—actively aiming to facilitate secure, timely delivery of aid to Palestinians as the conflict escalated.

The early U.S. engagement in the coordination of the assistance made clear the country’s presence in the global human relief efforts but the difficulties that emerged in the course of managing a plethora of actors in the area of conflict, with Israel and Egypt being among them, raised concerns in the humanitarian space.

## November

As the humanitarian situation in Gaza continued deteriorating, the U.S. emphasised its role as the primary donor to the UN's humanitarian efforts in Gaza by having the U.S. Air Force airlift 54,000 pounds of UN aid into Gaza (Vergun, 2023). Apart from the UN aid, 500,000 pounds of food assistance from the U.S. were sent through ground routes (Vergun, 2023).

Logistics issues for aid agencies were evident during this time, with airlifts playing a part in this, due to the limited number of aid that was able to be moved in comparison to aid being sent by trucks.

## December

In the third month of conflict, the United States increased their humanitarian operations in Palestine with 36,000 pounds being airlifted and delivered on December 5th ("The United States Announces Additional Humanitarian Assistance for the Palestinian People | Press Release," 2023) and another 58,000 pounds being taken by the U.S. Air Force on December 8th ("U.S. Air Force Delivers Aid to Gaza," 2023). At the same time, the U.S. promised \$21 million as additional support to donate food and nonfood items to those affected by the conflict in Gaza and the West Bank.

## January and February

The start of 2024 found the aid policies of the United States under intense scrutiny domestically and internationally. Amid allegations that 12 staff members of UNRWA were engaged in militant activities during the attack on October 7th, the U.S., along with other donor countries, has temporarily halted funding for the organisation (McKernan, 2024). These allegations were brought to light by Israeli authorities who stated that UNRWA should not operate in Gaza since it is associated with the Hamas organisations, and were originally obtained through Israeli interrogations of prisoners, who several human rights groups have frequently described as reaching the level of torture (Bayoumi, 2024). Human rights organisations have criticised the decision to stop all aid, claiming it "will significantly worsen the humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip" (McKernan, 2024). As UNRWA's biggest donor, without the

contributions from the U.S., millions who rely on UNRWA's help would suffer greatly. The UN had already launched an investigation and terminated the members involved (McKernan, 2024), who make up a small percentage (0,05%) of the total 13,000 UNRWA workers in Gaza alone.

According to experts, the abrupt cut of funds does not come from the government's worry about safety concerns regarding the UNRWA but is instead "an act of political retaliation that puts the lives of millions of people needlessly at risk and an abdication on an international scale of the United States' supposed western liberal values" (Bayoumi, 2024) seeing as there was no clear institutional collusion between UNRWA and Hamas, apart from the fact that those accused had jobs at the agency (Bayoumi, 2024).

The suspension of funds to UNRWA within January came with a lot of discourse with some members of the congress suggesting strict regulations barring any American investments into the organisation for years. However, despite this situation, U.S. legislators were keen on channelling more money into Gaza for humanitarian relief purposes. As a consequence of this, in February, it was decided that another \$53 million would be sent to the region through other partners, including WFP, among others, to handle the escalating humanitarian crisis in the area ("The United States Announces Additional Humanitarian Assistance for People in Gaza and the West Bank | Press Release," 2024). But there are worries about how effective this additional aid will be, seeing as the humanitarian response in Gaza is heavily dependent on the UNRWA, which has ensured that aid reached those in greater need to the biggest extent, even when their own staff is being killed, injured and displaced ("Humanitarian Response in Gaza 'Completely Dependent' on Palestine Refugee Agency, Relief Chief Tells Security Council, Urging Countries to Restore Funding | Meetings Coverage and Press Releases," 2024).

The second month of the year also marked Congress' scrutiny of the organisation, when a proposed legislation included a provision which would prohibit Washington from granting any funds to the UNRWA, raising alarm among humanitarian organisations (Kestler, 2024). This comes before there was even a conclusion on the investigation being currently conducted by the UN. This provision would apply to any humanitarian assistance included in the bill and any previously approved funds for UNRWA that had not yet been allocated, which would total \$300,000 ("The United States Announces Additional Humanitarian Assistance for People in Gaza and the West Bank | Press Release," 2024). After this decision, Sarah Yager, the Washington director of Human Rights Watch, claimed that "as long as the administration

sidesteps the reality of Israeli abuses in Gaza and applies the rules of military assistance selectively, the moral authority claimed by the United States will slip further away” (Yager, 2024).

### March

As an alternative route of providing assistance, the U.S. began building a temporary humanitarian pier to facilitate aid entry to Gaza. This step comes as an attempt to get considerably more humanitarian assistance to be supplied to Gaza (“Why Is the US Setting up Temporary Port off Gaza for Aid Deliveries?” 2024) since aid via trucks was being stopped with several delays caused by Israel’s control at the crossing points. Aid agencies said the airdrops being conducted until this point were below the needs of the emergency, and much greater volumes should have been allowed into the country through land corridors earlier (“Why Is the US Setting up Temporary Port off Gaza for Aid Deliveries?” 2024).

Amid House approval of a bill denying UNRWA funding from the U.S. (Harb, 2024), this pier comes as an attempt to uphold its logistical part in supporting humanitarian assistance. However, the Pentagon claimed that it had not yet determined how the floating port would be secured against any threats, but that it was in talks with several partners, which include Israel (“Why Is the US Setting up Temporary Port off Gaza for Aid Deliveries?” 2024), who is primarily responsible for withholding aid from going into Gaza in the most effective manner.

### April and May

In April, a new bill that included an additional \$1 billion for humanitarian aid to Gaza was passed by the U.S. Government. This bill also included \$14 billion “for funding to support Israel” (Lopez, 2024). This dual measure highlighted the intricacies of U.S. policy as on one hand, it was supporting relief endeavours in Gaza while on the other being tenfold supportive of Israel. The provision of military and humanitarian aid is a cause for contention by pro-Palestinian supporters who feel that such assistance discredits their plight.

In May, the U.S.-constructed pier finally began operations, moving over 1 million pounds of aid into Gaza (Clark, 2024). While this represented a significant logistical achievement, the

scale of the humanitarian crisis remained overwhelming, with many agencies calling for increased and more efficient aid deliveries.

## **Israel**

### **October**

A ‘cornerstone’ of American foreign policy for decades has been providing military aid to Israel, since the presidency of Harry Truman (“U.S. Security Cooperation With Israel - United States Department of State,” 2023). In 2016 the two countries entered into an agreement to see the U.S. provide Israel with military aid in a value of \$3.8 billion every year for the next ten years (“U.S. Security Cooperation With Israel - United States Department of State,” 2023). Most of this routine aid goes to military contracts used to keep up Israel’s armed forces; like rocket shields such as the iron dome. So it was no surprise when President Joe Biden assured his continued support for Israel in October after Hamas’ attacks, by pledging unwavering support to the country (“Biden Pledges Military Aid, Political Support for Israel Amid Gaza War,” 2023).

In the wake of the eruption of the violence, Israel was "shot-up with more military help" in a speedily and a large scale way; this meant that its stock of weaponry such as bullets as well as Iron Dome missiles was re-stocked speedily (“Biden Pledges Military Aid, Political Support for Israel Amid Gaza War,” 2023), in addition to the billions already provided yearly. This move clearly showed the importance that the U.S. places on maintaining the Israeli military advantage within that area despite mounting global anxiety related to innocent lives being lost in Gaza.

### **November**

In November, the U.S. government reiterated its historical stance that American and Israeli security interests are inherently interconnected. As David Makovsky, director and senior fellow on Arab-Israel relations at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy put it, "America's enemies are Israel’s enemies" (Hutchinson, 2023), referring to historical threats like Nazism, communism, and Islamist extremism. The conception underpinned the U.S. backing of Israel in

defence terms, such as military aid, for it was perceived as part of the global fight against terrorism or extremists.

Although this strategy was quite popular with American governmental leaders, it played a role in the increasing worldwide outcry against Israel's conduct in Gaza especially on issues concerning loss of life to civilians in its army's hands. The second month of the conflict was marked by the U.S.'s continuous claims in favor of Israel's right to defend itself.

### December

December saw a sale of emergency weapons approved by President Biden, bypassing Congress in a move that would escalate American involvement in the conflict ("Biden Administration Bypasses Congress on Weapons Sales to Israel," 2023). The purchase which amounted to \$147.5 million, was justified as vital for Israel's defense ("Biden Administration Bypasses Congress on Weapons Sales to Israel," 2023). This was the second substantial weapons consignment within that month after Israel received 14,000 tank rounds costing over \$106 million ("Biden Administration Bypasses Congress on Weapons Sales to Israel," 2023). According to the Council on Foreign Relations (2024), both transactions fell under wide-ranging military aid transfers as they were channelled through the \$3.8 billion annual aid given each year to Israel (Maizland et al., 2024).

The U.S.'s extraordinary readiness to deliver advanced military equipment to Israel on short notice was underscored by these emergency sales. According to this information, the current administration has redefined the norms of transferring weapons in times of conflict.

### January and February

In January, as the war in Palestine continued to escalate, the U.S. Congress started developing a bill that would allocate \$10 billion more of "unconditional military aid" for Israel ("Senator Bernie Sanders Calls For NO MORE U.S. Funding For Netanyahu's Illegal and Immoral War Against the Palestinian People » Senator Bernie Sanders," 2024). It was designed in order to help Israel maintain its military operations in Gaza, without any particular terms attached. Opponents claimed that providing such support without conditions might result in

sustained hostilities (“Senator Bernie Sanders Calls For NO MORE U.S. Funding For Netanyahu's Illegal and Immoral War Against the Palestinian People » Senator Bernie Sanders,” 2024); however, the plan picked up considerable pace among lawmakers.

In February, a larger aid package worth \$14 billion for Israel was passed by the U.S. Senate, including funds that had been asked for since October (Hussein, 2024). In spite of not being a law yet, this bill marked the resolve of both sides of American politics to keep the Israeli military actions continuing. By now, there were more voices raised against Gaza’s humanitarian crisis worldwide, as the death toll continued to rise.

### March

The scale of U.S. military aid to Israel was revealed in March when information emerged that the U.S. government authorised over 100 different arms deals with the country since the Gaza conflict started (Hudson, 2024), however, the majority were not disclosed yet, and a U.S. national security spokesman declined to provide the total number or cost of U.S. arms transfers since October 7th (Saballa, 2024). There were only two such deals that had been announced adding up to \$253.5 million (Hudson, 2024). This is a record amount of weapons transferred and it is especially significant at the realization that Israel would not be able to fund their military campaign since October without such an increased level of U.S. support (Hudson, 2024).

According to Reuters, in the recent days before this news broke out, the U.S. had authorized the transfer of billions of dollars worth of bombs and fighter jets to Israel (Pamuk & Ali, 2024). By keeping these transactions a secret the U.S. government was able to assure its support for Israel’s military actions while at the same time keeping the knowledge of the public at bay. According to John Kirby, the U.S. “continue to support Israel with its self-defence needs. That’s not going to change, and we have been very, very direct about that” (Saballa, 2024).

### April

A bill that had been discussed since October, was signed into law in April by President Biden. This bill will give Israel \$17 billion more in aid, making the U.S. the primary supporter of Israel’s army (“Biden Signs Law Securing Billions in U.S. Aid for Ukraine, Israel,” 2024). Biden



stated that his dedication to Israel was unwavering, adding that the United States considered Israel's safety as crucial to its own national security and that its commitment to the nation was "ironclad" ("Biden Signs Law Securing Billions in U.S. Aid for Ukraine, Israel," 2024). This assistance served to affirm the United States' status as the most vital partner of Israel, while the humanitarian situation in Gaza claimed thousands of lives.

At this point, Israel was already being accused before the International Criminal Court of committing genocide against Palestinians ("Biden Signs Law Securing Billions in US Aid for Ukraine, Israel," 2024) which did not seem to be deterring the U.S. administration from their views of Israel's security actions or on their provision of weapons to them.

## May

President Biden acknowledged the civilian toll of Israel's military operations in May stating, for the first time, that if the country expanded its offensive into the densely populated city of Rafah, some shipments of American weapons could be temporarily suspended (Liptak, 2024). It was the first time that this administration had publicly spoken about cutting off aid because of Israel's actions in Gaza. In the same statement, Biden promised to continue the ongoing backing for Israel's Iron Dome and other defence systems, but that this suspension would be in terms of weapons and artillery shell supplies (Liptak, 2024).

One week later, the Biden administration informed Congress that it intended to transfer \$1 billion in weapon sales to Israel ("U.S. Poised to Send \$1 Billion in Weapons to Israel, Sources Say," 2024), doing exactly the opposite of what they had claimed only a few days prior. This demonstrates the government's lack of interest in placing stringent regulations on military financing as indicated by the events following Biden's advice.

### 6.2.2. The United Kingdom

The U.K.'s response to the escalating conflict in Gaza between October 2023 and May 2024 reflects a balancing act between providing critical support to Palestinians while maintaining diplomatic alignment with Israel. Despite the challenges and political sensitivities, the U.K. government's aid to Palestine, particularly in the Occupied Palestinian Territories (OPTs), increased significantly during this period, underscoring its humanitarian commitments. During this time, the ties that exist between the U.K. and Israel in the military sector have been very strong, especially after the flare-up of differences between Israel and Hamas. The U.K. government has stood by its assertion that Israel's actions are lawful under international law despite increasing global condemnation and growing legal controversies at home. This chapter examines the scope, motivations, and political dynamics behind the U.K.'s aid initiatives to Palestine and Israel against the backdrop of ongoing military conflict and diplomatic tensions.

#### Palestine

##### October

In October the conflict between Israel and Palestine escalated, forcing the U.K. government to intervene. On the 16th of the same month, Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak revealed that Britain would provide £10 million in funds towards humanitarian assistance to residents of Palestine which would be about 37% more than the £27 million in funding given that year to the region (Prime Minister's Office et al., 2023). This first aid package aimed to offer the most needed relief items such as food, water and emergency shelter through reliable partners among them the UN agencies (Prime Minister's Office et al., 2023).

In the same statement, Sunak condemned Hamas and emphasised that Israel has a right to defend itself while stressing the importance of helping the Palestinian community. By this action, Sunak presented Britain's aid as serving two purposes: fulfilling humanitarian needs and ensuring peace throughout the region. This rise in funding follows U.K's past backing for UNRWA, which plays a crucial function in the delivery of vital services to the Palestinians (*UK Aid for Refugee Host Countries*, 2023).

Following the first promise, on the 23rd of October, the U.K. increased its humanitarian aid by £20 million thus totalling its aid at £30 million pounds (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office et al., 2023). This act stood out as one that clearly shows the position held by Britain among the highest donors towards Gaza's humanitarian crisis and came after the Prime Minister's efforts to have Rafah borders opened so that supplies could pass through them into the Gaza strip (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office et al., 2023). Sunak made clear that the U.K. government is placing intensive diplomatic efforts to prevent a regional escalation (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office et al., 2023).

### November and December

Historically, the U.K. has provided a yearly average of £70.8 million in aid to Palestine since the Conservative party entered government in 2010 (Smith, 2023). More recent figures show that aid from the U.K. government has dropped by millions of pounds from what it used to be, even with the additional commitments which had doubled the total aid this year. In the 2019/20 financial year, the aid commitment received a total package of £93.5 million, and it peaked the previous year at £106.5 million (Smith, 2023).

In November, the government committed a further £30 million in humanitarian aid to the people in Gaza, bringing the total aid sent since the escalation of the conflict in October to £60 million (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office et al., 2023). According to Full Fact U.K., "MPs should use official information transparently and with all relevant context and caveats when a claim is first made" (Smith, 2023), so while these numbers may seem large, they are very limited in comparison to what has been given in previous years.

In the same month, aid started to be delivered by U.K. flights to Egypt, with Gaza being the intended destination (Ministry of Defence et al., 2023). In December the U.K. Government continued its mission to provide humanitarian assistance to Gaza by starting to operate through a land route from Jordan to Gaza via the Kerem Shalom crossing. It marked the start of the distribution of life-saving food aid supplies coming from the U.K. with an amount of 750 tonnes (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office & The Rt Hon Lord Cameron, 2023).

At this point, the government demonstrated that they were adamant about acknowledging that international law had to be respected by the Israel Defence Forces (I.D.F) according to

reports from the U.K. during the last month of the year (Department for Business & Trade, 2023).

### January and February

The decision to UNRWA's temporary cessation of funds from the United Kingdom, along with other donor countries, marked the beginning of the year (Scott, 2024). This came after claims came out that some of the UNRWA staff had played a role in the Hamas attacks that took place on October 7th. Despite the fact that the mentioned employees were immediately terminated and an internal investigation was launched by its administration (Scott, 2024), the move to cut off funding by Britain drew sharp criticism. Christopher Gunness, who is a former UNRWA spokesperson, faulted the U.K. government for going overboard in their decisions which would only worsen the Gaza humanitarian situation ("UNRWA Claims: UK Halts Aid to UN Agency Over Allegation Staff Helped Hamas Attack," 2024), and Hussein al-Sheikh, head of the Palestinian Liberation Organization (PLO) also urged countries to rethink their decisions which will bring great humanitarian risks (Scott, 2024).

The halted U.K. aid to UNRWA demonstrates how fragile the U.K.'s political opinion is when it comes to funding Palestine. Nonetheless, the U.K. government maintained its stand that its aid did not find its way to Hamas; but cutting off financing for UNRWA—an amount of £16 million that was meant for the agency—posed operational hurdles to Gaza's biggest implements of emergencies (Tobin, 2024). It is unclear how much of the £16 million had been already given to the UNRWA before funding was cut (Ramsay, 2024). By February, given the dire situation in Gaza, several humanitarian organisations were urging the U.K. to resume its funding, one of these being TUC, who claimed that the "UNRWA is carrying out lifesaving humanitarian work in Gaza, providing shelter, food and water. We've called on the U.K. government to resume its funding to UNRWA while an investigation into allegations by the Israeli government that several UNRWA staff were involved in the 7 October attacks – is carried out. [...] the organisation's head has said that if the funding remains suspended, it will most likely have to shut down its operations in Gaza and across the region by the end of February" (Sukhram, 2024).

### March and April

In March, the U.K. government was increasingly pressured to renew its aid to UNRWA, with more than 50 MPs from a cross-party group requesting David Cameron, then foreign secretary, to provide funds again citing the colossal reputational harm that comes with the withdrawal of support as far as saving lives was concerned (“UK Must Restore Unrwa Funding 'Without Delay', MPs and Peers Say,” 2024). David Cameron then admitted that the decision had been “too hasty” and was looking for ways around it (Akkad & Hearst, 2024). By mid-March, Gaza had received 150 tons of U.K. assistance, while another £10 million was pledged (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office & The Rt Hon Lord Cameron, 2024). However, air and sea conveyances remained the preferred modes for delivery even though there were warnings that they were not as proficient as land-based methods. More than 2,000 tonnes of food aid were also being distributed by the World Food Programme (WFP) on the ground (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office & The Rt Hon Lord Cameron, 2024).

By April, most countries who had paused their funding in January had restored their funding to UNRWA but the U.K. did not act in the same way, and there were claims that they were “unlikely to make snap decisions over UNRWA funding” (Wintour, 2024c).

### May

In the beginning of May, airdrop deliveries were picking up, and in one day eleven airdrops of aid were delivered to Gaza, with a total of 110 tonnes of aid from 120 parachutes (Ministry of Defence et al., 2024). As the U.K. uses the temporary pier built by the U.S. to deliver shelter coverage kits in Gaza, U.K. senior ministers acknowledged that maritime and air routes could not serve as substitutes to land-based aid deliveries despite this being a crucial point for instant relief, and continued to urge Israel to open additional land crossings, but these calls had been ineffective in the past months (Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office et al., 2024).

With the humanitarian situation in Gaza getting worse with every passing month, worries started being raised about what aid is reaching Gaza and who is receiving it (*UK Humanitarian Aid to Gaza*, 2024). At this point in time, the United Kingdom continued to refuse to support the largest aid agency in Gaza, UNRWA.

## Israel

### October

In October, after the Hamas-led attacks and retaliatory action of Israel, the U.K.'s assurance of the safety of Israel was renewed. Prime Minister Rishi Sunak stated that the U.K. was “poised” to provide military, intelligence or security assistance to Israel if requested (Mason, 2023). However, a spokesperson of the government, assured that there will not be any redeployment plans for military assets back to Israel even at a time when the British HMS Duncan already patrolled the Mediterranean under NATO's control (Mason, 2023).

Nonetheless, human rights organisations and civil society groups in the U.K. raised strong opposition against such military alignments, claiming that the U.K. government was going against their own rules on arms exports by supplying arms which were used in attacks mostly targeting Palestinian civilians (Bychawski, 2023). Focusing on this aspect; the U.K. has had a historic role in providing F-35 stealth aircraft parts—15% are made by British companies—which are currently being used in the bombardment of Gaza (*Statement on UK Arms Exports to Israel*, 2023). As of 2016, these contracts were estimated at £336 million thus making them an important actor in Israel's military operations (*Statement on UK Arms Exports to Israel*, 2023).

According to the Campaign Against Arms Trade (CAAT), “the reaction from the international community has undoubtedly emboldened the Israeli authorities to commit these crimes with impunity” (*Statement on UK Arms Exports to Israel*, 2023) and they called on the government to revoke all licences for arms exports to Israel.

As per export licences granted for military exports to Israel in October, the value was £353,000, according to limited numbers, since from early 2023, the U.K. government kept 15% of their export data on a parallel system that was not public (*Statement on UK Arms Exports to Israel*, 2023). At this point, the government expressed that it had no plans to suspend its arms sales to Israel (Bychawski, 2023).

## November

U.K. arms exports to Israel faced increasing legal contestations as conflicts continued to flare out in November. Human rights groups dragged the government before the High Court on claims that there are ongoing arms sales violating both U.K. and international laws (Mortimer, 2023). In response, the government emphasised that every export licence was subject to a “careful and continual review” process (*Arms Export Licences: Israel*, 2023). However, it continued supporting Israel’s military actions and their right to defend themselves, provided they adhere to International Humanitarian Law (*Arms Export Licences: Israel*, 2023).

Moreover, ministers avoided mentioning specific defence items within their relationship with Israel while citing reasons related to national security issues indicating political intricacies involved (*Arms Export Licences: Israel*, 2023). There were calls made for more transparency especially when it comes to the volume of weaponry exported.

## December

Amidst increasing civilian deaths in Gaza, the U.K’s export licence of arms to Israel, in December, had a value of £313,000 and one additional unlimited value licence was issued (*Statement on UK Arms Exports to Israel*, 2023). The controversy was inflamed by the open licences that allow transfers of unlimited and unspecified quantities of military goods (Mahalingam, 2023). There is a continued absence of transparency in these arms deals involving sensitive equipment such as parts for F-35 fighter jets the U.K. government.

The U.K. government refused to suspend arms exports despite mounting evidence against Israeli forces’ possible breaches of international humanitarian law including allegations of genocide within Gaza (Abdul, 2023). According to the House of Commons, “a licence will not be granted if: There is a clear risk that the items might be used to ‘commit or facilitate’ internal repression or a serious violation of international humanitarian law (Criteria 2a and 2c); There is a clear risk that the items would, overall, undermine internal peace and security (Criterion 3) or regional/international peace and security (Criterion 4); The items could be used to commit or facilitate an offence under international conventions or protocols to which the United Kingdom is party relating to terrorism or transnational organised crime (Criterion 6a)” (*Arms Export Licences for Sales to Israel*, 2023).

## January

In January, no heed of calls from various human rights organisations and a review on arms exports to Israel were enough to suspend sales as there was no evidence that it was a necessary measure. In documents revealed by CAAT, David Cameron advised the government to continue exporting weapons, noting that Israel has a different interpretation of its International Humanitarian Law (IHL) obligations (“David Cameron Advised,” 2024). And even though there were reports of civilian casualties in Gaza, the U.K. accepted those reassurances from Israel concerning compliance with IHL.

However, court documents reveal limited potential IHL violations considered in the decision-making process, resulting in claims that the U.K. was ignoring more serious violations. Zarah Sultana, Labour MP for Coventry South, claimed that “it’s utterly outrageous that the government made the active decision to continue arming Israel despite the overwhelming evidence of Israeli war crimes in Gaza” (“David Cameron Advised,” 2024), these claims refer to the fact that there was at this time a large amount of evidence being presented in the South African ICJ case against the Israeli government and their genocide against Palestinian people. Despite these accusations, the government maintained that Israel’s actions were part of its right to self-defence thereby upholding its traditional policy of supporting Israel against terrorism. In the documents of their review, it was satisfied by reassurances from the Israeli government that it is committed to complying with IHL, repeatedly stating that Israel has a different interpretation and view of its IHL obligations, and decided there was insufficient information to assess whether there had been potential IHL violations (“David Cameron Advised,” 2024).

## February and March

Britain insisted that it had not given any lethal military support when the hostilities started intensifying in October 2023, but in a recent affidavit filed at the High Court by the Department for Business and Trade in January, the government had mentioned 28 current licences and 28 pending application for the export of equipment, which was likely to be used in offensive operations in Gaza (“UK’s Public Position on Israel,” 2024). This demonstrates the lack of cohesiveness in the government’s public statements, and what is then seen in official documents, which has been occurring for the past months.



By February, an increasing global outcry was heard pushing for the U.K. government to suspend all exports of weapons into Israel, especially following the sustained Israeli military operations in Gaza. This resulted in claims that the U.K. would consider suspending arms exports to Israel, especially if they went ahead with the offensive in Rafah (Wintour, 2024a), which are similar to allegations also made by the U.S. in the same period.

In these two months, a lot was raised about the violation of British arms export control criterion, including by the Scottish National Party's spokesperson on foreign affairs who demonstrated concern that the U.K. was taking confidence in Israel's compliance with IHL, based merely on claims by the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) and not on an impartial international body such as the UN or the International Criminal Court (Akkad, 2024).

In March, despite claims in February that halting weapon sales was being considered, there were no moves made by the government in that direction.

#### April and May

After Israeli air raids killed three aid workers from England in Gaza, the authorities in London maintained their position towards the issue (McDonald, 2024). In the same period, reports were released, that stated that key figures like David Cameron and Kemi Badenoch had approved arms transactions right after these civilian deaths; this statement was confirmed by court papers (McEvoy, 2024). Besides, the system of open licences created an additional challenge because it allowed an unlimited supply of parts for military vehicles between the two nations. According to a briefing from CAAT, open licences "lack transparency and allow for unlimited quantities and value of exports of the specified equipment without further monitoring" (Campaign Against Arms Trade, 2024).

In April, the British government declined a request by Action On Armed Violence, for information on arms export licences since October 7th, citing exemptions under the Freedom of Information Act, and the current size of the market is unclear given the number of open licences ("Who Is Arming Israel? U.K Exports to Israel," 2024). Oliver Dowden responded that as long as it remains lawful to sell arms to Israel, then the U.K's position is unlikely to change ("Who Is Arming Israel? U.K. Exports to Israel," 2024).

In May, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak defended that the U.K. reviewed Israel’s compliance with IHL and reiterated that the U.K's position on arms sales remained the same, based on those reviews (“No Change in U.K's Export Licenses for Arm Shipments to Israel, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak Says,” 2024). However, the assessments are hard to confirm, as they are based on intelligence provided by Israel, so as long as their view of a specific military target in any strike is unknown, no assessment can be made accurately (Wintour, 2024b). In conversation with The Guardian, the Global Legal Action Network, argued that this creates a presumption in favour of Israel and is an incentive for them to not supply information (Wintour, 2024b). David Cameron repeated Sunak's remarks and added that ending arms exports would only strengthen Hamas and take away Israel’s ability to protect its citizens, claiming that while he did not support an attack in Rafah, he would not follow the same plan as President Biden to stop some arms sales (“U.K Ban on Selling Arms to Israel Would Strengthen Hamas, Says Cameron,” 2024).

Later in the year, in July, the numbers for these licences were revealed, in the name of transparency, by the Department for Business & Trade, as represented in the table below

**Israel export control licensing decisions made between 7 October 2023 and 31 May 2024 (Department for Business & Trade, 2024)**

<b>License Type</b>	<b>Description of goods</b>	<b>Number Issued</b>
Standard individual export licence (SIEL)	Military	37
Standard individual export licence (SIEL)	Non-military	63
Standard individual export licence (SIEL)	Total	100
Open individual export licence (OIEL)	Military	5
Open individual export licence (OIEL)	Non-military	3
Open individual export licence (OIEL)	Total	8

### 6.2.3 Conclusion

Deeply embedded in the United States and United Kingdom's actions in relation to the Israel-Palestine conflict between October 2023 to May 2024 are abiding tensions, both humanitarian and political. However, there was significant financial and logistical support availed, and their continuing provision was faced with complex tradeoffs between strategic interests within the region and mounting demands for accountability for the violence and violations of human rights.

The situation was fundamentally contradictory for the U.S. The humanitarian aid from the U.S. to Palestine was impressive but at the same time fraught with many political issues. In effect, they were always seeking measures to address broader political interests such as security issues hence making any assistance very difficult logistically, as indicated by halting funding towards UNRWA. This ambiguity made the U.S. policy unconvincing because, while on one hand, it intended to provide humanitarian assistance, on the other, it seemed to be holding national security and global politics to the highest standard when it came down to making any decisions on foreign aid provided to the region. Furthermore, Biden's administration's unwavering military backing for Israel was not helpful, with the government always placing a bigger emphasis on military aid rather than subduing it or holding them accountable. Significant amounts of military aid were sent to Israel through channels that largely ignored the civilian casualties in Gaza, as seen in the bill approved in April which prioritised sending a larger amount of aid to Israel, than to Palestine, as the humanitarian situation in Gaza was only getting worse.

In the same vein, the U.K. faced difficulties with its own humanitarian support to Palestine. While the £60 million announced during the initial months after the escalation of the conflict seemed to be a big financial support, it ended up being a smaller amount than in previous years when the humanitarian situation was not nearly as challenging, and their continued support of Israel through the provision of weaponry seemed to go against their support of Palestinians. Unfortunately, the disturbance in UNRWA funding (both by the U.K. and the U.S.) posed further challenges which created bottlenecks that reduced efficiency in delivering aid. This was just one manifestation which showed the U.K's dilemma between honouring its bilateral relations with Israel without neglecting its humanitarian obligation to Palestinians.

The U.K's military support provided to Israel was a great illustration of the tensions between the nation's humanitarian duties and its diplomacy during this time. Despite massive

evidence that civilians were suffering and numerous lawsuits over the weapons that they were sent abroad, the British government remained insistent on Israel's need for these weapons based on self-protection purposes. Throughout these months there was a clear lack of transparency in regards to the weapons sent to Israel, especially regarding the information about when open licences could be used or how many arms could be sold – all these issues made it difficult to subject the government to any form of accountability.

## 7. Discussion

The representations portrayed by the media play a big part in shaping public perceptions, and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is no exception. These perceptions then have a role in influencing how foreign aid is allocated to both sides. Looking at this issue with a social constructivist and symbolic interactionist lens, we are able to understand better how these narratives have been constructed and the symbolisms that they then generate, which impact the flow of aid.

Media coverage provides us with cultural contexts for this conflict that posit knowledge and meaning to the different events and the different players in it. The constant framing of Palestinians and Israelis has contributed to the construction of the conflict's 'reality' for audiences worldwide, without the need to be an active participant in it. This can become dangerous, as we become more susceptible to falling into biased views and reporting, without being aware of it, distorting our perceptions. A common portrayal of the Palestinians, for example, constantly represents them as powerless victims, that we see when reporting on victims is limited to mentions of women and children, or as victims of Hamas. This framing subtly shifts responsibility for Palestinian suffering onto Hamas, legitimising Israel's military actions as defensive and justified. By emphasising Hamas' role as a terrorist organisation rather than recognising its political governance of Gaza, the media constructs a narrative that avoids a deeper exploration of the historical and political dimensions of the conflict. This representation allows for the continued framing of Israel as a democracy defending itself from terrorism, while Palestinian suffering is diminished.

We can further see the construction of social realities when we look at the comparative portrayal of casualties. Media coverage often refers to Palestinian deaths alongside Israel's, even when the main focus of the article is the devastation and suffering being experienced in Gaza. Despite the overwhelming number of Palestinian deaths in comparison to Israeli deaths, this type of reporting provides the framing of a balanced conflict, where both parties are suffering equally, which is not the case. The constant reinforcement of this narrative, which we saw in most media outlets, bar from The New Yorker and The Guardian, reduces significantly the urgency to provide substantial aid to Palestinians and to stop aid from being sent to Israel. When there is the

constant use of words like ‘terrorist’ or ‘terrorism’ which have such strong emotional and moral connotations, there is an almost immediate trigger of a sense of fear and anger, but also a need for justice. So when we see a constant link between Hamas and Palestinians who are often mentioned as being Hamas combatants, since even in articles that mention casualties in Gaza there was the constant need to note that “the figures don’t distinguish between civilians and combatants” (Stancati & Ayyoub, 2024), there is a connection that is positing the Palestinians as being linked to aggression, regardless of their individual perspectives. This provides a space for the dehumanisation of Palestinians and reduces the levels of empathy, even when hearing about all of their suffering, whose deaths are framed as unfortunate consequences of counterterrorism measures.

While analysing the media’s coverage of the conflict between Israel and Palestine, another notable aspect, and perhaps one of the most important, was the constant omission of the historical roots that led to the events that we have experienced in this past year. Most articles chose to make their focus from October, after Hamas’ attacks, onwards, therefore omitting decades of occupation, displacement, and systemic inequalities towards the Palestinian population that came before it. By representing this war simply as a response to recent events, the media misrepresents the broader context of the Palestinian struggle and narrows the scope of public understanding. If the framing of the conflict is constantly centred around the attack from October 7th, then we provide an opportunity for Israel, and the governments supporting it, to dismiss their actions as a defence against a terrorist act when there is a much larger context to this conflict that has been ongoing for decades. The historical context of the conflict has rarely received any representation after the escalation in October 2023, and it was even less represented before that, meaning that the general public does not have a full understanding of all of the events that ultimately led us to the attack by Hamas.

The approach taken by the media when representing a group, such as Hamas, as a terrorist organization, is deeply rooted in Western notions of terrorism, which provides a justification for all the violence that is currently taking place in Gaza. Representing Hamas merely as a terrorist group, without providing any context on the organization as a political entity that is currently governing Gaza, provides those reading these reports with a simplified view of the conflict. By consistently resorting to this label when talking about Hamas, the media capitalizes on long-standing associations that Western society has built around terrorism as a

concept, especially in a post-9/11 world. While the war on terror was a much more prominent priority in the early 2000s, it is still an ongoing issue, with very prominent symbols that influence our perceptions of reality. This kind of representation plays on the fears, prejudices and stereotypes that are so deeply rooted in the West, which sees terrorism as a fundamental danger to global security and to democracy, and therefore must be eradicated at all costs. As a result, this creates an environment that justifies the inhumane military actions of Israel in Gaza as a countermeasure against terrorism, even if such measures entail high levels of civilian loss and suffering.

From the perspective of symbolic interactionism, media representations also shape how individuals and societies attach meaning to the conflict. Symbols, language, and images used in media coverage become tools that define how audiences understand the situation. The repeated framing of Hamas as ‘terrorists’ and Israel as a ‘democratic country defending itself’ is a powerful symbolic narrative that not only shapes public opinion but also affects how aid is perceived. The symbology that is attached to terrorism means that once a group has been labelled as terrorist all of the political implications and the historical meanings behind their attacks will be perpetually dismissed as senseless acts of violence, and this is particularly relevant in Hamas’ case. The moment this label is given, the majority of people will not look to understand the larger history behind their actions, and in this case, will not understand the Palestinian resistance and Israeli occupation, and their sole focus will become the acts of violence that are committed and which fit the western ideal of terrorism. These sorts of societal constructions mean that it will be hard for the public to view Hamas as something other than a threat, and this becomes not only about Israel but starts to feel almost personal, therefore allowing Israel to continue with its unjustifiable military actions since they are viewed as a defence mechanism. The media then provides strength to these views by regularly reinforcing Hamas’ association with violence and rarely mentioning the broader context in which these events have occurred. The Palestinian resistance, which stems from decades of occupation and system inequalities caused by Israel, is barely mentioned in any articles and is therefore also lost to society.

When we look at the aid that was being sent to Gaza, there was a common framing of it as potentially providing support to Hamas, therefore deterring any international efforts to provide humanitarian assistance to those who need it most (Jones et al., 2023). Palestinians are mostly framed as either victims of Hamas, or as being complicit in their own suffering, which also

affects how humanitarian aid is viewed. We saw this more heavily in the articles that reported on UNRWA's members' involvement with the October 7th attack and the way that this topic was quickly blown out of proportion. This may be one of the best examples of how impactful the media is on the allocation of aid, depending on how they choose to represent a certain event. By creating a symbolic association of aid with terrorism, a barrier is created to the provisions of aid since it transforms something that should be seen as essential, and a humanitarian need, into something more political and far more charged and divisive.

This type of representation constructs a negative symbolic meaning around humanitarian aid, which should not be happening during one of the largest current humanitarian crises since it reduces any pressures that the international community may feel to provide effective assistance to Palestinians. We saw this with the increase of aid being sent to Gaza via sea or by airdrops, which is the most ineffective way to provide humanitarian supplies, as international organisations constantly warned about. However, this made sure that both the U.S. and the U.K. were not viewed as ignoring a humanitarian crisis, while at the same time allowing them to maintain support for Israel's policies and actions, which were blocking aid from entering Gaza by proper channels. However, in contrast, Israel was often represented as a humanitarian actor in the conflict, with the media constantly portraying its efforts to warn Palestinian civilians before any of its military actions in Gaza (Stancati, 2023) and reporting on their constant negotiations with the U.S. and U.K. government on the best options to get aid into Gaza, which was used as evidence of their moral superiority. This symbolic framing positions Israel as both a defender of its people and a benevolent actor in Gaza, reinforcing public support for military aid to Israel.

This symbolic framing can also be found in the coverage of the Israeli and Palestinian suffering. There was a particular Fox News article that encapsulates this, with its reporting on the experience of Jewish Americans who have travelled all the way to Israel in order to provide support to its suffering citizens, but then the images shown were of well-equipped homes and children playing with electric toy cars (Lanum, 2024). These images, which demonstrate a sense of normalcy and comfort, are a sharp contrast to the true image of destruction and suffering that were coming out of Gaza at the time and yet this article has been written as a demonstration of a heroic action by these American citizens: travelling to a place where they are able to stay in a comfortable home and where their biggest priority to help in the Israeli suffering was to go buy toys and books for children. These are the sort of luxuries that are not even in the minds of any



Palestinian citizens, and yet their suffering was never represented with such a big emphasis on it and on those who travelled to Gaza to provide help. This type of framing was more prominent in American media, a country with a big Jewish population, and reinforced a symbolic narrative where the Israeli suffering is represented as being more relatable and therefore more deserving of empathy from those abroad. These symbols have a big influence in the public's perception, making it easier for the readers to continue supporting the military actions taken by Israel and for governments to keep providing them with help without significant public backlash.

The media's role in shaping these symbolic interpretations also impacts how governments respond to the conflict. In a Fox News article, there is an emphasis on the provision of humanitarian aid that the U.S. will be providing to Palestine while at the same time downplaying the far larger sum of military aid that had been given to Israel (Eglash, 2024a). Through the imposition of one narrative above the other, Fox News is creating a symbolic narrative that the U.S. is doing its part in helping in helping the Palestinians, when in reality the aid provided is often insufficient and ineffective, while they are also providing more significant assistance to the state that is causing the humanitarian crisis in the first place.

These portrayals also serve as a simplification of the conflict by reinforcing a dynamic of 'good versus evil' that resonates strongly with Western countries, making it seem like conflict is black and white when it is in fact multidimensional. These symbolic framings affect particularly the populations that frequently consume media, which includes politicians, and therefore governments, which are not only influenced by the politician's own personal world views but also by the views that their citizens hold. As we can see in the analysis, the allocation of foreign aid relating to this conflict is seen more so through a security lens, than as a concern with helping a population in need, and the whole issue is interconnected with security concerns regarding terrorism. Both the U.K. and the U.S. have some of the most advanced counterterrorism units in the world, so when a conflict becomes about terrorism, the victims stop being those who are suffering greatly in humanitarian terms, but instead become those who are fighting against a terrorist threat. We can see this in the particular way that both countries reacted when the news about UNRWA potentially having members who are combatants led to an immediate stop in funding, and yet the constant calls for both of these governments to push for a ceasefire and to stop the provision of military aid to Israel, due to the increase in casualties in Gaza, were always ignored throughout the months in which this analysis took place. The immediate association of

UNRWA with a terrorist organisation was seen as more important than the overwhelming loss of life in Palestine, making matters worse when even after the UNRWA took measures to terminate all the members involved and launched an investigation, both countries still continued to withhold their funding, knowing that Gaza was already experiencing a lack of aid for the amount that was necessary, and this was the organisation that had the biggest presence and influence on the ground.

With the lenses of social constructivism and symbolic interactionism, it becomes easier to grasp the true impact that the media's coverage has on the conflict between Israel and Palestine, other than just presenting narratives. These reports have the ability to construct social realities through the symbolic meanings that they attribute, influencing in turn the way the conflict is perceived and the decisions made regarding foreign aid policies. The media's portrayal of Palestinians, coupled with the framing of Israel as a moral actor in the conflict has led to an imbalance of how aid has been perceived and distributed.

While we perceive media as mostly unbiased narrators, this does not seem to be the case, both in the U.S. and in the U.K., but more particularly in the U.S. where media is heavily divided by ideologies. When the media continuously frames aid as being a potential fund for Hamas, it removes its legitimacy and creates resistance by the public to support a more significant humanitarian intervention in Gaza. This then projects to governments who feel pressure to impose restrictions or conditions in order to provide aid, therefore reducing its effectiveness and diverting necessary funds from reaching those in dire humanitarian need.

## 8. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is important to note the key findings of this research on the media's portrayal of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and its impact on foreign aid allocation.

Firstly, we were able to view that there was indeed a pattern in the media's continuous framing of Hamas as a terrorist group which in turn fed into Western constructs of terrorism that are deeply rooted in a post-9/11 world. This association not only leads to a simplification of the conflict but it also results in the dehumanisation of the people of Palestine, who are being directly linked to acts of terror, without providing any background into the historical context of occupation and resistance that they have suffered in the past decades. This narrative does not only provide a biased view of this conflict, it also reinforces the existing social construct that terrorism is aligned with Islam and the Middle East, justifying not only the violence committed by Israel towards Palestinians but also the constant prejudice against Islamic people that we have witnessed in the past years both in the U.K. and in the U.S.

By using a symbolic interactionist lens with this particular research topic, it was possible to identify how the use of repeated symbols can shape public perceptions and policy decisions. The manner in which this conflict has been described by the media has very much relied on a binary lens of good versus evil when it has already been established that this is a war with deeply rooted historical grievances that cannot be explained in such a simple manner. The increasing use of the 'terrorism' term, when applied to Hamas, allows for an immediate attribution of the evil role to Hamas, which is in turn attached to Palestinians. These accounts of events have allowed the governments of the U.S. and the U.K. to frame the foreign aid that they have sent to Israel as defensive measures of counterterrorism, with very little regard for the devastating impact that this has had on civilians in Gaza. The aid sent to Palestine by both of these states has been incredibly inadequate given the dire humanitarian situation that civilians in Gaza are facing, especially with so many humanitarian organisations warning that the aid currently being received is not enough to reach all of those who desperately need it.

The disproportionate response to Israel and Palestine was seen when the constant calls for military aid to stop being provided to Israel, given the increase of casualties in Gaza, were ignored by both countries (in fact, the U.S. even increased their aid in May of 2024), and conversely, on the Palestinian side, when there were accusations that 12 members of UNRWA

were involved with Hamas, that seemed to be enough to completely cut the funding from the organisation that is able to get the most aid into Gaza and is essential to the lives of Palestinians. This example allowed us to understand the true impact that social constructions have in aid allocation, because if the decision solely amounted to the needs of a specific region, then it is clear that Palestine is in a much more dire need of assistance than Israel, but that does not seem to be the direction that aid allocation is taking. The aid provided to Palestine has been in relatively smaller quantities than the amount of aid provided to Israel, and it always comes with limitations and justifications, as if saving the lives of the population in Gaza is not enough when compared to the threat of terrorism. The framing of the suffering and deaths of Palestinians alongside Hamas, which we saw when numbers of casualties in Gaza were reported with mentions that this information had been provided by the Hamas-run Health Ministry or the mention that these numbers didn't distinguish between civilians and combatants, distorts the humanitarian aspect of the conflict by lessening the empathy towards Palestinians and complicating the delivery of aid since the discourse will inadvertently be geared towards the possible support of Hamas.

While some news organizations seemed more condemning of Israel's actions, there was an overall lack of critical reporting of their military actions which were often dismissed as being done in a defensive manner, further exacerbating the unequal dynamic in the representation of this decades-long conflict. This allowed for both the U.S. and the U.K. governments to continue sending aid to Israel without feeling many repercussions from it. The representation of the aid being sent to Gaza as humanitarian and Israel's aid being mostly dismissed as military affairs made it seem like these countries were actively working towards the improvement of the situation in Gaza when in reality they were sending even bigger amounts of money to Israel, who is responsible for all of the destruction.

To sum up, the research question of how the media representation of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict influences foreign aid allocation in the period between October 2023 and May 2024 has allowed for the discovery of key patterns that have provided a deeper understanding of the process that the creation of symbols through media reporting can influence social constructions leading to an imbalance in foreign assistance. This is particularly seen in the case of Israel and Palestine, with Israel being the main actor in receiving support, when in fact the Palestinians present a much deeper need for urgent assistance. The media needs to provide a

more nuanced understanding of the conflict and acknowledge all of its complexities. Social constructivism has demonstrated how these narratives are built through media representation, while symbolic interactionism demonstrated how repeated symbols and language shape public perception. In order to decrease the influence the media has on conflicts, there is a need for a more balanced approach to media coverage, especially one that can acknowledge the power that their language choices and the symbology used have in shaping aid allocation in times of conflict.

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## 10. Appendix A

**Table of articles coded for analysis.**

News Outlet	Article Title
<b>The Guardian</b>	Al-Mawasi: Palestinians fleeing to 'humanitarian zone' find little hope (Burke et al., 2024)
	EU aid to Palestinians will 'not be cancelled' as decision reversed (Wintour & O'Carroll, 2023)
	Gaza aid convoy strike: what happened and who were the victims? (Jones, 2024)
	Humanitarian workers face deportation from Israel after freeze on visas (Graham-Harrison, 2024)
	Palestinian death toll in Gaza nears 20,000 with nearly 2 million people displaced (Graham-Harrison & Borger, 2023)
	Here in the West Bank, Palestinians are expecting awful reprisals. Such is the cycle of adversity (AbdulKarim, 2023)
	Pleas to end the suffering in Gaza are growing louder, but neither side actually wants a ceasefire (Westcott, 2023)
	We all see the horrific videos of suffering in Gaza. We must not look away (Ensler, 2024)
	What will end the cycle of Israel-Palestine violence? (Cooke-Cohen et al., 2023)
	Which countries supply Israel with arms and why is Biden reluctant to stop? (Tait, 2024)
<b>BBC News</b>	Anger and despair as Palestinians queue for supplies during truce ("Anger and Despair as Palestinians Queue for Supplies During Truce," 2023)
	Gaza starvation could amount to war crime, UN human rights chief tells BBC ("Gaza Starvation Could Amount to War Crime, UN Human Rights Chief Tells BBC," 2024)
	Israel Gaza: What Gaza's death toll says about the war (Thomas, 2023)
	Israeli settler violence brings destruction and fear to West Bank as war rages (Bowen, 2023a)
	Hamas Israel attacks: The international victims of the assault on Israel ("Hamas Israel Attacks: The International Victims of the Assault on Israel," 2023)
	Israel determined to finish Gaza operation despite civilian suffering (Bowen, 2023b)
	Israel says it plans 'humanitarian islands' for Gaza displaced (Foster, 2024)
	Israel says it will open new aid routes into Gaza (Vernon & Nimoni, 2024)
	Israel: Woman killed, 17 hurt in suspected Palestinian car-ramming attack (Berg, 2024)

	UNRWA: Key UN Gaza aid agency runs into diplomatic storm (Lowen, 2024)
<b>The Telegraph</b>	Bombed, killed by flu and shot by Hamas: the youngest victims of the Israel-Gaza war (Vasilyeva, 2024)
	The numbers of dead in Gaza don't add up - and there is no easy explanation (Zlochin, 2024)
	Why Israel's aid convoy bombing comes at a perilous time for Netanyahu (Buncombe, 2024)
	An independent Palestine now is too great a risk (Coughlin, 2024b)
	Macron urges Israel to stop 'killing women and babies' in Gaza ("Macron Urges Israel to Stop 'Killing Women and Babies' in Gaza," 2023)
	How Houthis are using war in Gaza to tighten grip on Yemen (Swan, 2024)
	Israel offers glimpse of post-war plan for Gaza as it seeks Palestinians to run 'humanitarian zones' (Confino, 2024)
	Israel is winning. Its enemies are powerless to stop it (Coughlin, 2024a)
	Israel may have violated humanitarian law with American weapons, US says (Sabur et al., 2024)
	Airdropped aid packages kill five in Gaza (Bowman, 2024)
<b>The New Yorker</b>	The humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza (Chotiner, 2023a)
	The brutal conditions facing Palestinian prisoners (Chotiner, 2024b)
	There are no safe places in Gaza (Rasgon, 2023)
	In the Cities of Killing (Remnick, 2023b)
	How Much Aid Is Actually Reaching Gazans? (Chotiner, 2024c)
	How Would a Humanitarian Pause Work in Gaza? (Coll, 2023)
	Israel's Calamity—and After (Remnick, 2023a)
	Should U.S. Aid to Israel Be Contingent on Human Rights? (Chotiner, 2023c)
	What the War Means for Palestinians Inside Israel (Chotiner, 2023b)
	Why America Isn't Using Its Leverage with Israel (Chotiner, 2024a)
<b>Wall Street Journal</b>	Aid Trucks Trickle Into Northern Gaza as Israel Opens New Route ("Aid Trucks Trickle Into Northern Gaza as Israel Opens New Route," 2024)
	Gazans Are Starting to Blame Hamas for Wartime Suffering (Stancati, 2023)
	How the West - and Israel Itself - Inadvertently Funded Hamas (Jones et al., 2023)
	In Gaza, Authorities Lose Count of the Dead (Stancati & Ayyoub, 2024)
	Violence Surges in the West Bank Following Hamas Attack on Israelis (Rasmussen & AbdulKarim, 2023)
	Another Front for Israel's Military: Violence Between Settlers and Palestinians (Abdel-Baqui et al., 2024)
	Humanitarian Crisis in Gaza to Deepen as Aid Is Frozen (Grove & Wise, 2024)

	Israel's Campaign Is Causing Undue Suffering in Gaza ("Israel's Campaign Is Causing Undue Suffering in Gaza," 2024)
	Israel's Quest to Identify Every Victim of Hamas Leaves Scientists Exhausted, Traumatized (Cloud, 2023)
	Israelis Craft Secret Plan to Put Anti-Hamas Palestinians in Charge of Gaza Aid (Said et al., 2024)
<b>Fox News</b>	Stampede, gunfire at Gaza humanitarian aid delivery kills over 100, reports say (Dorgan, 2024)
	Florida father and son leave home to help suffering Israeli citizens: 'We have to be the strong ones' (Lanum, 2024)
	Gaza aid from US, others falling short as critics say better and cheaper ways: Nobody 'knows what's going on' (Eglash, 2024a)
	House overwhelmingly passes \$26 billion aid to Israel, Gaza as tensions with Iran escalate (Elkind, 2024)
	Several countries come to Israel's aid to stop Iran barrage (Lee, 2024)
	See their faces: Israeli victims of Hamas violence include a dancing daughter, a jewelry designer, others (Richard, 2023)
	UN revises Gaza death toll, almost 50% less women and children killed than previously reported (Eglash, 2024c)
	Why Mideast neighbors won't offer refuge to Palestinians stuck in Gaza war zone (Eglash, 2024b)
	'Target on my back:' Fear grips Jewish students as hundreds protest Columbia suspending Palestinian groups (Sahakian, 2023)
	Rashida Tlaib's top campaign fundraiser accuses Israel of wanting to ethnically 'cleanse' Palestinians (Schoffstall, 2023)