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Israel in *The New York Times* Over the Decades:

A Changed Narrative and Its Impact on Jewish Readers

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During the winter of 1974, Seymour Topping, the assistant managing editor of The New York Times, and his wife, Audrey, visited Jordan as part of a tour of the Middle East.

On their stops in Egypt, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia and Syria, Topping often had to confront criticisms that The Times's coverage was too favorable to Israel. It was a familiar enough situation for him; to be the editor of The Times in charge of international coverage meant you were a magnet for complaints. They were usually about the paper, but sometimes about U.S. policy which foreigners often believed was refracted through The Times's coverage.

In his discussion with King Hussein and Queen Alia, his third wife, the King took a different approach; As the families sat alongside a Christmas tree in the Palace, Hussein arranged for the Toppings to visit a nearby Palestinian refugee camp. The visit affected Topping markedly — he saw both the squalor of the camp and the festering hatred of Israel — and he recounted afterwards that he understood the role of the Palestinians in the region's future in a new and visceral manner.

Over the years, the Toppings had also regularly discussed the region's problems with some good friends in New York, Najeeb and Doris Halaby. Topping was fond of Halaby, a man of Syrian and Lebanese ancestry who was chairman of Pan American Airways and stayed engaged in the politics of the Arab world.

Once, when their families were together at a conference, the Halabys' teenage daughter, Lisa, babysat for the Toppings.

A few years after his visit to Jordan, Topping, now the managing editor, was having lunch with Doris Halaby and again the subject was The Times's coverage of the region. By that time, the grown-up Lisa Halaby was Queen Noor of Jordan. She had become Hussein's fourth wife, Alia having been killed in a helicopter accident.

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Mrs. Halaby, likely reflecting as well the views of Jordan's royal household, said The Times's coverage of the Middle East was often biased in favor of Israel. She cited as a reason that the correspondent in the region, David K. Shipler, was a Jew.

The coverage by The Times was straightforward and fair, Topping asserted politely. And, after checking (for he actually did not know), he was later able to offer a winning rejoinder to Mrs. Halaby: Shipler was not Jewish.

Topping's response suggested that the religion of the Times correspondent in the region was irrelevant. Maybe so, but the issue was no simple matter at The Times, either for Shipler or for those who followed him.

Topping did not, for example, mention that when Abe Rosenthal, the paper's executive editor, chose Shipler to be the Jerusalem Bureau Chief, it was with the explicit but mistaken belief that the man he was sending to Israel was Jewish. Rosenthal believed he was breaking an invidious pattern at The Times of declining to send Jewish reporters to Israel. It was a practice predicated on the speculative notion that a Jewish correspondent would have an inherent conflict-of-interest that would leave the coverage open to criticism.

After his decision, Rosenthal remarked proudly to a small group on his decision to end the practice. Joseph Lelyveld, then the deputy foreign editor, told Rosenthal he was puzzled because he thought the paper was sending Shipler. We are, Rosenthal said. Lelyveld then told an amazed — and somewhat embarrassed — Rosenthal that Shipler was, in fact, Protestant.[1]

Rosenthal wasn't the last to make that mistake. Shipler, a man of gentle demeanor and keen intellect, would win a Pulitzer Prize for, "Arab and Jew,'' a book about the region after his Middle East experience.

During his tenure in Jerusalem, several of his readers who held Israel dear apparently also assumed Shipler was Jewish — he regularly received mail from them denouncing his coverage in vitriolic terms. Whereas Queen Noor's mother thought his coverage favored Israel, these Jewish readers held the opposite view, typically with great fervor.

He experienced these reactions during visits back to the United States when he occasionally accepted invitations to speak before Jewish audiences, an activity The Times encouraged (though, the correspondents often dreaded).

One reader, in a series of letters, regularly wished many kinds of ill-fortune upon him. Then, in a piece for the paper's Travel section, Shipler, described himself in an aside as a fallen Protestant.

After that, the reader who had had criticized him repeatedly wrote Shipler again. The man was deeply embarrassed and contrite. He said that he never would have written those starkly critical letters if he had known that Shipler was not Jewish.

His fury evidently had been fueled by a belief that Shipler's coverage was not just wrong or slanted; it was a disloyal, even traitorous act. In writing articles that could be construed as critical or at least not sufficiently supportive of Israel's position, Shipler's crime was not simply a journalistic one but a more serious matter of betraying the family.

He was, in this man's eyes, a self-hating Jew, an especially odious imprecation that several New York Times correspondents were obliged to endure over the years from some of Israel's most vehement supporters. (Most, but not all of the correspondents who succeeded Shipler, beginning with Tom Friedman, were, as it happens, Jewish or, as is increasingly common in America, half-Jewish.)[2]

This theme of Jews at the newspaper being uncomfortable about their Jewish identity has continued to be invoked, not only directed at individual correspondents, but also sometimes at the institution of The Times itself.

For years, a small but determined segment of American Jews have believed that the Times has been regularly unfair to Israel, even harming its standing and security.

This has produced a tension between the paper and a portion of its readers that is as intense today as ever and hovers over the paper's coverage of the region.

It is, however, largely an ill-founded—as well as toxic—notion based on misunderstandings of journalism, some lamentable history about the Times's coverage of the Holocaust, and perceptions about the relationship of the paper and some of its forebears to their own Jewish heritage. It also ignores the changing political realities in the region.

There are, of course, those who, like Doris Halaby, believe just as strongly—whether because of its journalism, its Americanness, or its many Jewish employees—that the Times has a pro-Israel bias.

Even so, the enduring criticism from this segment of American Jews, who have historic and geographic connections to the Times, is especially poignant. That's particularly so that given the inherent imperfections and weaknesses of close-quarters journalism—as opposed to history—the paper's coverage has been overwhelmingly fair and appropriate.

THE BASIC NARRATIVE ARC

A survey of nearly 3,000 articles in The Times about Israel over the decades from the 1960's to recent years provides a long-range view that shows that it is a narrative with, in the broadest sense, two phases.[3]

In the first phase, the early decades, Israel was depicted in the newspaper often as a struggling nation trying to thrive while surrounded by implacably hostile Arab neighbors. This reflected a picture of Israel that was probably prevalent in America, one that could be called the "Exodus'' view, after the novel by Leon Uris and film starring Paul Newman and Eva Marie-Saint in which the post-Holocaust Jews of the nascent state were heroes and the Arabs were treacherous, dangerous characters.

But, over various points beginning in the late 1960's through the next dozen years, the narrative began to change to a second, more equivocal phase. The template of the small nation as a David battling a Goliath composed of its enemies no longer fit after Israel prevailed handily in the 1967 War. And gradually, the situation of the Palestinian refugees began to emerge.

The early coverage of Palestinians by The Times typically treated displaced Palestinians as a generic refugee problem — a result of the shifting politics and decisions of the international community — and somewhat divorced from Israel's concerns.[4]

Gradually, that shifted to a notion that the Palestinians' situation was directly tied to Israel's creation and was in some way an ineluctable part of discussions about Israel's hopes for a peaceful future.[5]

The bulk of the news about and from Israel was distinctly favorable, sometimes even admiring in the early decades of its existence.[6]

Israel was depicted as a nation created by the Western powers explicitly — and the implication was justifiably — as a Jewish state in the aftermath of World War II in which Hitler had almost succeeded in wiping out European Jewry. It came into being through a just turn of history.[7]

And many articles celebrated the impressive ways in which the society, a hybrid of European refugees and Jews native to the British mandate territory of Palestine had created a modern, flourishing state. The Times did its part in chronicling what was indisputably a remarkable story.[8]

The first-rate journalists from The Times and other newspapers in those early years also filed articles with a critical eye about Israel but in doing so, they were like their counterparts in, say, France.[9]

The anniversary of the founding of Israel is an occasion for official joy in the country. But for many Arabs, it is instead commemorated as the "nakba'' or catastrophe, the time when half the region's Arab population — estimated at between 700,000 and 800,000 — had fled or were driven out. Exactly what happened remains a heated debate.

Part of the appeal of the term "nakba'' for Arabs is certainly the hope that it may provide some rhetorical and moral counterweight to the emotive terms "Holocaust'' and "Shoah (Hebrew for "catastrophe.''). It has been in use among Arabs since 1949, according to one expert.[10]

The word does not, however, make its first appearance in The Times until 1998 in an article that was part of a series examining Israel on its 50th anniversary. "Nakba'' which has become a familiar term on university campuses because of the considerable support in such places for the Palestinian cause, subsequently appears in The Times's news pages only a few dozen more times.

THE TIMES AND ITS JEWISH READERSHIP

The New York Times has long played a singular role in its relations to its Jewish readers. It is no exaggeration to say that for a century it has served, in effect, as the hometown paper of American Jewry.

First, it is published in the city and region with the nation's greatest collection and concentration of Jews. And the paper itself has a Jewish pedigree, albeit one that is complicated and decidedly ambiguous.

The modern New York Times — in its conception, ideals and current suzerainty — began when Adolph Ochs, the son of German-Jewish immigrants who settled in Tennessee, became publisher in August 1896.

In purchasing and revitalizing The Times which had been struggling financially, Ochs was himself transformed quickly from an obscure printer-publisher in Chattanooga to a figure of great stature in New York and the nation. He understood however, that at the levels of society in which he now dwelt, his Jewishness presented an unwelcome otherness to some.

He evidenced this discomfort in several ways, one of which was a determination "not to have The Times ever appear to be a 'Jewish newspaper'."[11]

Adolph Ochs and his wife, Effie, had an only child, Iphigene. With his old-world sensibility, Adolph Ochs could not envision turning The Times over to a woman, even one as capable and cultivated as Iphigene.

So he relinquished the paper instead to the man to whom he also had reluctantly given his daughter — Arthur Hays Sulzberger. Sulzberger took effective control of the paper in 1933 when Ochs was ailing and became its formal head in 1935 upon Ochs's death. Iphigene and Arthur became the parents and grandparents of two of the next three publishers, Arthur Sulzberger and his son, Arthur Sulzberger Jr., the current holder of the position.[12]

Arthur Hays Sulzberger was regarded as a great success, overseeing the newspaper's growth and stature to where it strengthened its reputation as the world's finest, most admired newspaper. But his tenure also spanned the 20th Century's two seminal events for world Jewry, the Holocaust and the efforts that resulted in the founding of modern-day Israel. To many Jews, his behavior in both instances was deplorable.

Although the scope of the Holocaust would not be appreciated fully until after the war, there was considerable information available contemporaneously. Critics then and later said that The Times underplayed such news deliberately as part of its

determination to avoid seeming either a Jewish newspaper or a special pleader for Jewish causes.

In 1944, for example, the Nazi regime in its death throes set about deporting to the concentration camps the Jews of Hungary, the last large group of European Jews who had remained largely untouched by Hitler's extermination campaign. In July, 1944, The Times infamously ran an article of only four column inches citing "authoritative information'' that 400,000 Hungarian Jews had already been forcibly transported to their deaths and an additional 350,000 were to be killed in the next few weeks. It ran on page 12.[13]

From a journalistic standpoint, it is perplexing, if not stupefying years later to see how The Times covered the attempted annihilation of European Jewry. The paper published many articles, several of which recounted precisely the horror of what was happening, while at the same time flagrantly underplaying them — even given the context that much else was occurring because most of the world was at war. (It should be noted that no other news organization did any better).

Thus, the historic horror was never meaningfully conveyed because it was reported in only in unrelated bits and pieces, usually brief, and relegated to back pages.

Other times, atrocities involving Jews in Europe were reported in The Times, but with no mention of the victims being Jewish. In September, 1941, for example, the Nazis executed more than 50,000 men, women and children near Kiev, the Ukraine in what came to be known as the Babi Yar massacre.

The Times did not write about it until a month later and only after the Soviet Foreign Minister V. M. Molotov mentioned it in a speech. The news article and the subsequent editorial never mentioned what was generally believed, that the victims were overwhelmingly Jews.[14]

When the Soviets recaptured Kiev two years later, The Times correspondent traveling with the Red Army, W.H. Lawrence, reported the claim that tens of thousands of Jews had been killed at Babi Yar, but wrote that no witnesses to the shootings could be found for interviews. "It is impossible for this correspondent to judge the truth or falsity of the story told to us,'' he wrote.[15]

Laurel Leff, in her superb account of how The Times underreported the Holocaust, "Buried by The Times,'' wrote that the newspaper, suffused with the publisher's

sensitivities, was ever frightened of being seen as an organ of special pleading for Jews. (Senior editors appreciated the sensitivity of how The Times covered Jewish issues and it was understood that the most sensitive of those questions should be taken before Sulzberger himself.)

Arthur Hays Sulzberger held "religiously" Leff wrote, to the idea that Judaism was but a religion and nothing more. It was not a race or ethnic grouping of any kind. "Jews were just like any other citizen'' albeit with a different religion, he wrote. It was a view consistent with the early stance of Reform Judaism. Arthur admired Iphigene's grandfather, Isaac Wise, a pioneering Reform rabbi who first enunciated his belief in the 19th Century that Zionism was based on the wrong-headed notion that Jews were a people not a grouping by religion.

Arthur Hays Sulzberger's views about the definition of Jewishness, taken from Rabbi Wise, gave him a similar opposition to Zionism. Like Rabbi Wise, Arthur Hays Sulzberger reasoned that if Jews were not a people, they had no basis on which to form a state.

This was coupled, of course, with Arthur's full subscription to Adolph Ochs's belief that the paper's identification with any elements of its Jewish character should be muted whenever possible. In practice, this included the identity of its staff but that would prove difficult in a city and business that teemed with bright and ambitious Jewish men who longed to work at The Times. It resulted in ludicrous efforts by managers, eager to interpret the publisher's preferences, to leach the Jewish character out of some bylines; Abe Rosenthal was forced to become A.M. Rosenthal in the newspaper and Abe Raskin became A.H. Raskin.

It also meant not hiring or promoting some Jews in the first place. C.L. "Cy" Sulzberger, a nephew of the publisher, was a brash and worldly foreign correspondent who eventually was given power over who was hired on the paper's foreign staff.

Seymour Topping said that he was all set to be a correspondent for The Times in Nanking, China when he got word that his hiring was vetoed by Cy Sulzberger. He said he always wondered if Cy Sulzberger did not want the paper to hire another Jew or was just flexing his authority. It was generally believed that Cy had previously vetoed Abe Rosenthal's ascension from the metro desk to the foreign desk because he thought there were too many Jews on the foreign staff.

Ten years later, Topping was hired by The Times when Cy no longer had a veto; Topping said he was especially proud that as managing editor years later he had acquired the authority to choose the foreign correspondents, an authority that Cy Sulzberger had, in his view, misused.

For many Jews, Arthur Hays Sulzberger's behavior during the war and in the years when Zionists pressed for a Jewish state created a lingering notion that the family that owned The Times was embarrassed or ashamed about its Jewish heritage, that its members looked enviously at their Wasp counterparts at other elite institutions.

The issue of how American Jews of all classes view their Jewish identity and what it means for their place in society is a complex and layered psychological matrix, as it surely was for the Sulzbergers.

But there is no doubt they understood themselves to be Jewish, never denied their heritage and could hardly think otherwise as they were to experience regular anti-Semitic affronts. They were closely knit into the Jewish philanthropic world as befitted their social and economic standing.

It was rather Arthur Hays Sulzberger's persistent adherence to an assimilationist tradition which saw Judaism as a religion, not a social grouping that accounted, at least ostensibly, for his behavior.

Whatever complicated personal themes may have floated in Arthur Hays Sulzberger's private seas can only be guessed at. (The most common — and plausible — speculation is that he, like many established and wealthy American Jews of German heritage, was profoundly uncomfortable, or simply snobbish, about the more recent waves of Jewish immigrants from Eastern Europe who were seen by them as less cultured.)

So, while downplaying in The Times to a ludicrous degree the Jewish identity of the victims of some Nazi horrors (an editorial about the Warsaw Ghetto uprising somehow managed to omit that it was a ghetto of Jews), Arthur and Iphigene worked diligently to help distant relatives still in Germany emigrate to the United States. They surely understood these people were in danger from Hitler because of something more than their "choice" to subscribe to the Jewish, rather than say, the Lutheran, religion.

But it was out of this tradition that Arthur Hays Sulzberger positioned himself as an avid anti-Zionist even going so far to make speeches on the subject. He consistently opposed proposals ranging from the modest, like the (never realized) raising of an international Jewish military force, to the grand, the founding of a Jewish nation-state in the Middle East.

The actions of Arthur Hays Sulzberger fixed in place the notion among many American Jews that The Times was a place owned and run by Jews who did not feel comfortable in their Judaism — and who through their actions tried to demonstrate distance if not disdain for their Jewish heritage.

This notion remained deeply embedded and lingered in the memories of many even as they forgot or never really knew the specifics underlying it.

Joseph Lelyveld, who would later as a senior editor try to take it upon himself to be a kind of emissary for the paper to those elements of the Jewish community who were infuriated by The Times's coverage of Israel, grew up the son of a Reform rabbi active in American Jewish politics. Thus, even before he had contemplated working at The Times, Lelyveld was surrounded by people who were inculcated with the notion that The Times had a problematic history insofar as it related to Jewish matters.

The legacy of Arthur Hays Sulzberger's behavior for many of those people, Lelyveld said, was "a deep-seated feeling that the New York Times was made up of self-hating Jews,'' and from that legacy, it was easy for many to believe that The Times was hostile to Israel.

Later, after years at The Times, Lelyveld was to lose patience with the most strident and inflexible of the critics. "There has never been a Times correspondent who was considered honorable by the more extreme faction of pro-Israel readers,'' he said.

Arthur Hays Sulzberger's son, Arthur Sulzberger, known as "Punch'' after a childhood nickname, was, by any definition Jewish. But *his* son, Arthur Sulzberger Jr. was the product of a marriage between Punch and his first wife who was not Jewish.

Arthur Sulzberger Jr. has generally described himself, when pressed, as not Jewish.

But in lengthy remarks years ago to Ari Goldman, Arthur Jr., as he is generally known at the paper, offered a fuller answer. Goldman may have been the first observant Orthodox Jew to work at the modern Times and wrote about it in his book, "The Search for God at Harvard,'' (Random House, 1991).

After hearing Arthur Jr. describe himself in the newsroom as not Jewish but Episcopalian, Goldman decided to ask him years later to explain. He replied that, "I'm really betwixt and between. I'm not really Jewish and I'm not Episcopalian.'' He went on to say that he left behind in his teens the Christianity he was raised with and later did some exploration of his Jewish roots.

But he decided he was not a religious person although he made a point to expose his children to some Jewish rituals and customs, saying he felt an obligation to do so.

THE REASONS WHY THE NARRATIVE CHANGED

There are several factors that explain how the narrative of Israel in The Times's coverage changed, including:

- The natural appeal that the underdogs have in any political equation for outsiders, especially journalists.
- The election that brought Menachem Begin to power in 1977 which changed the character and the characters of the Israeli government who were not on the same familiar terms with senior New York Times executives as were their predecessors.
- The development of non-governmental organizations (NGO's) within Israel as advocates for the Palestinians which gave Western journalists a ready and credible source which could be used to criticize the Israeli government.
- The political actions of the Israeli government itself, notably the questionable invasion of Lebanon and the sometimes brutal tactics to quell the intifadas and terrorist actions the nation endured, actions which were repugnant, heartless and at least as brutal.
- The settlement policy of the Israeli government which was often spoken about in epochal biblical terms, but reflected as much as anything, the unstable coalition politics of modern Israel.
- The late emergence of a Palestinian nationalism.

There is also an argument — and it is a dismaying one — that the assorted acts of horrifying terrorism committed by various Palestinian groups produced a dividend of greater attention to their cause.

Reporters like underdogs

Journalism is, at bottom, story-telling and it's a basic tenet of the craft that those on the bottom are more sympathetic and affecting characters than the powerful. Reporters tend to favor underdogs; their stories can serve as a natural stage for depictions of pathos and suffering, which are winning narrative elements.

After the 1967 War in which Israel vanquished its foes, it could no longer play the underdog convincingly. History had recast it in the role of the powerful. And many Western correspondents in those years saw the Israelis as becoming filled with not simply a justifiable pride, but hubris (and, even more annoyingly to some of the correspondents, many Israelis clung to the image of themselves as victims.)

The Palestinians, many living in miserable conditions in the refugee camps like the one Topping visited were, however, camera-ready for the role of the downtrodden and disfavored. The Israelis often reinforced this new casting by playing their new part well over the years. Frustrated by terrorists among the Palestinian population, the Israeli government at times employed a tactic of destroying the homes of people in the Occupied Territories after a family member had been involved in terrorism. It is difficult to overstate the negative public relations impact of pictures showing wailing older women and children bereft at the sight of Israeli bulldozers flattening their modest homes as a form of retaliation for something of which they themselves were not guilty.

Terence Smith, who covered the '67 war and was the Israel correspondent for The Times from 1972-76, said the sea change in public attitudes towards Israel not only because of Israel's strengthened position after the '67 war, but also the subsequent occupation of the captured territories. "Occupation by one people of another is a dirty business and no matter how beneficent it might seem at the outset, it ultimately degrades both the occupied and the occupied," Smith said.

Menachem Begin is elected

For some, one of the turning points in the coverage in The Times and elsewhere was the surprising election of Menachem Begin, who became Israeli Prime Minister in 1977.

Before the Begin election, Times executives — and those of some other major newspapers — had familiar relationships with the old Israeli guard.

H.D.S. Greenway, who was a correspondent in the Middle East for the Washington Post, recalled how Katharine Graham, the dowager-publisher of that paper, had a warm, first-name relationship with the Israeli general and war hero, Moshe Dayan. "All of a sudden there were these Likudniks,'' he said. "She didn't know them at all.''

At The Times, a favorite was the urbane and Cambridge-educated (with notably polished accent and diction) Abba Eban, who was Israel's foreign minister and ambassador to the United Nations. In contrast, Begin and some of his associates could seem crude or coarse.

David Shipler said that after Begin won his surprise victory, Eban and others would continue to have lunch with their friends at The Times in New York where they regularly predicted the imminent collapse of the Begin government. Shipler had to fend off requests from New York to write about some minor crack in Begin's Likud coalition.

Zev Chafets was a Jew born in Pontiac, Michigan who moved to Israel and eventually became Begin's chief spokesman. "Before 1977, the Israeli diplomatic establishment were Abba [Eban] and Golda [Meir],'' he said. "And they were very close to the American Jewish establishment and to the American media establishment.''

When Begin was elected, he said, many American correspondents in Israel didn't even know where the Likud headquarters was. He said that people like Eban and Simcha Dinitz, who was both a senior aide to Prime Minister Golda Meir and the Israeli ambassador to the U.S., spoke frequently to their friends in the media, telling them that the new crowd was a disaster, "that Begin was an extreme nationalist, a war-monger.''

The NGO's

H.D.S. Greenway, the Post correspondent in Israel who later became the Boston Globe's foreign editor, said the proliferation of civil rights groups composed of Israelis devoted to the situation of the Palestinians contributed to the matrix which provided for more critical coverage. Some of the groups were involved with helping Palestinians while some just espoused a leftist point of view.

For correspondents, these groups provided not only a quotable source, but additional evidence that Israeli society itself produced a robust debate about policy.

Israel's policies and the turns of history

The greatest factor in shifting the narrative surely has to be the events of the conflict itself, which includes some of the decisions undertaken by the Israeli government as the nation was forced to cope with a psychologically-wearying and seemingly unending state of war.

It may well be that many of the actions the Israelis took that diminished their standing in the world were the natural if not inevitable result of years of frustration, of worn-down patience and the inability to envision any lasting peace for the region. Much of Israeli society grew harder in its assessment of the capability of the Palestinians as reliable partners for peace.

All nations behave badly, that is abandon some of their essential values, in times of stress and threat. And that syndrome is always more noticeable in democracies with high standards and expectations.

Tom Hundley, a foreign correspondent with the Chicago Tribune for 19 years who worked in Israel from 1990 to 1994, said Israel faced its first wave of highly negative coverage in 1982 after its ill-considered invasion of Lebanon "and suddenly everyone realized that Israel could be criticized and the world went on.''

Nachman Shai, the spokesman for the Israeli defense minister after the Lebanon invasion, has written in a paper for the Shorenstein Center that even the Israeli media was generally opposed to the war, believing it to be a needless and exaggerated response to terrorist incursions from Lebanon. The foreign press was similarly unsupportive, in contrast to the '67 and '73 wars.

After initial military successes driving northward into Lebanon, the Israeli army found itself tarnished by the role it played in standing aside and allowing Christian Phalangist forces to enter and commit massacres in the Sabra and Shatila Palestinian refugee camps.

There was limited initial public awareness, both in Israel and the United States, of the massacres and accompanying atrocities committed by the Christian Lebanese forces that began on Wednesday, Sept. 15 and continued through the morning of Sept. 18, because the events occurred around Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year and no Israeli newspapers were published that weekend.

But that soon changed. The Times reported from Jerusalem on Sunday, Sept. 19 about the emerging scope of the disaster. The next day, along with Israeli media, The Times's correspondents began raising the issue of the Israeli military's culpability, reporting that military commanders may have known of the killing going on the camps and did nothing to stop it.

David Shipler and the man who would succeed him, Thomas Friedman, then the Lebanon correspondent, struggled to make sense of what happened in the early days.

Shipler wrote a front-page article on Sept. 24, 1981 taking account of how many Israelis were saying they were not responsible while others disagreed. "To a country that rose out of Hitler's death camps, the answers, 'we did not do it' and 'we did not know' are not enough,'' he wrote. "To a people who remember that six million were slaughtered as others turned their backs, the standards of behavior are more exacting, the questions more troubling.''

By the following Sunday, Friedman, after working nearly round-the-clock, put together a detailed 9,762-word definitive account of what happened that left a significant stain on the reputation of the Israeli army. His work on the subject won Friedman one of his three Pulitzer Prizes. The massacres in the camps, illuminated by reports in The Times, caused great anguish not only in Israel, but among American Jews.

The settlements

There may be no single issue that has alienated many American supporters of Israel, Jewish and otherwise, than Israel's policy of establishing settlements in places like

the West Bank of the Jordan River. It became and remains the focus of much media coverage.

Over the years, Israel settled hundreds of thousands of Jews inside the West Bank and East Jerusalem. The policy has hampered peace efforts and been more than an irritant in relations with the United States. The announcement of a new round of housing units in East Jerusalem while Vice President Biden was visiting Israel was at the center of the recent deterioration of relations between the Netanyahu government and President Obama.

Max Frankel, who was the editor of the editorial page years from 1977 to 1986 and became executive editor, the paper's top position in charge of news in 1986, said that, "the tenor of the whole discussion about the settlements changed with the emergence of Begin.''

The Labor Party, he said, had always claimed that the settlements were for military reasons. But the Begin government began referring to the territories seized in the war as part of Israel's historic territory. "Likud encouraged the religious, the orthodox, to settle there under that notion,'' Frankel said and The Times "began in earnest to record the split in Israel on these issues.''

There was a split as well among American Jews, possibly even sharper than that in Israel.

J Street, an organization founded in 2008, was designed to provide an alternative for American Jews to what many of them perceived to be an unhelpful approach of more-established Jewish groups. While those groups, notably the American Israel Public Affairs Committee (Aipac), were said by J Street officials to provide unthinking, reflexive support for Israel on all things, the new group was supposed to provide a different approach.

Jeremy Ben-Ami, the head of J Street, said his group would better reflect the concerns of many American Jews, notably the younger ones. It would also try to give some "running room'' to politicians, especially congressmen, who feared that any perceived criticism of Israel could result in a firestorm of opposition from Aipac and other groups.

J Street (named, in part, after a cartographical glitch in D.C. — among its alphabet-named streets, the capital has no J Street), has succeeded in being part of the debate

among American Jews, but its effectiveness in its own stated goals has, so far, been fitful and uncertain.

Established groups like Aipac have tried to treat J Street like lint. J Street also engendered hostile reactions in Israel. A group of conservative Israeli parliamentarians denounced it recently as an effective ally of Palestinian foes of Israel.

Putting aside the political debate, one of its most important contributions might be a poll conducted in 2009 which demonstrated the growing split among American Jews over their obligation to support Israeli policies. In a professionally-conducted poll, American Jews were asked about their view of Israel's settlement policy. A significant percentage, 60 percent, were uncomfortable with the policy.

But when the numbers were adjusted to break out just the respondents who said they were Orthodox, the results strikingly pointed in the opposite direction; 80 percent supported the settlement policy.

These Orthodox Jews who said they supported Israel's approach are typically those who travel regularly to Israel, might have relatives who have emigrated there and occasionally send their children to Israel for a break year between high school and university.

And it is from those ranks that the critics of The Times are likely to come.

Anthony Lewis, the venerable Times columnist, now mostly retired, was a pioneer at the newspaper in raising persistent objections to Israel's settlement policies.

In a series of columns, his theme was consistently that the creation of new Jewish settlements in place where Arabs had lived before the '67 War was, quite apart from whether the policy could be justified or not, was harmful to Israel's character and soul.[16]

Although his criticisms were always couched in the language of someone counseling a friend with straight talk about self-destructive behavior, the advice was largely unwelcome, both to Israelis and their most avid supporters in the United States.

Lewis received heavy criticism and even threats.

A product of a semi-religious Jewish household on New York's Upper East Side, He was the first of many Times writers to be assailed repeatedly and regularly as "a self-hating Jew.''

In the early 70's when Lewis returned to America and made Cambridge, Mass. the base for his op-ed column, he was invited to be part of an informal discussion group of Jewish and Palestinian intellectuals, drawn mostly from Harvard. Before that, he recounted, he was generally a reflexive supporter of Israeli policies. But his participation in the group changed him. "I saw at once that the Palestinians were like any other people,'' he said. "Educated, uneducated, good, bad…." He said, "My prejudices fell away.''

His columns arguing that Israel, through its behavior and particularly its settlement policy, was squandering its moral standing and humanistic legacy earned him the most negative mail of his career, much of it laced with the self-hating Jew theme. In 1984, he was told by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and the New York police that his name was found on what appeared to be a hit list of "enemies of the Jews'' by a militant Jewish group.

The Times's coverage of issues like the settlement policy and the Sabra and Shatila tragedies unsettled many Jewish readers. It was through the paper's coverage that some who had supported Israel suddenly found themselves entertaining doubts about their firmly-held beliefs.

Noah Feldman, a Harvard law school professor, grew up in a religious Jewish family near Boston and attended an Orthodox day school. He was, he said, a strong believer in the rightness of just about everything in Israel and its story.

He recently recounted a moment of profound sadness and disappointment when he was a teenager and read an article in The Times that upended some of his views. The article demonstrated that some Israeli soldiers had, under orders, set about "breaking bones'' in dealing with Palestinian protesters.[17]

Feldman's upbringing had left him with an unstinting trust in Israel *and* The New York Times. Suddenly, one of those objects of faith was telling him something unbearable about the other.

He said he telephoned his best friend and discussing it was so painful they both wept.

Improved public relations by the P.L.O.

The Israelis always had a strong appreciation of the importance of shaping their story for the world. They even had a word for it in Hebrew, *hasbara,* which translates roughly as "explanation," but has been taken to be a something that encompasses a wider conception of public diplomacy, or putting the best face on the situation of a country faced with hostility and suspicion around the world. Critics say it is more accurately defined as propaganda.

Israel's national budget allocated funds annually to what its leaders thought was the necessity of *hasbara.*

There was, for many years, no equivalent effort on the part of the Palestinians. "People began to appreciate that the Israeli government had the smooth machine for propaganda and the other side had nothing in that regard,'' said Tom Hundley, the former Chicago Tribune correspondent.

But that began to change. By the time of Israel's invasion of Lebanon in 1982, Western news reporters and outlets began regularly citing dispatches from Wafa, a Palestinian news agency, as to what was occurring in Lebanon.

In March, 1988, during the first Intifada, Israel closed down Wafa's operations inside the country. A Reuters dispatch on the shutdown described Wafa "as the main source of information for the foreign press on the 16-week-old Palestinian uprising in the occupied West Bank and Gaza Strip.''

The emergence of something like the Palestinian news service paralleled a larger development, the growth of a distinct Palestinian national consciousness.

The Palestinians also made progress with reporters on the diplomatic scene in the U.S. Israel might have had the impressive Abba Eban. But in 1974, the Palestinians were given the right to be represented at the United Nations with the status of observers, and they chose Zehdi Terzi as their representative.

Terzi, the P.L.O.'s first representative to the U.N. found great favor among journalists, regaling them with stories of his own career as a guerrilla fighter. He was regularly described as courtly and charming and, because the U.S. prohibited its officials and diplomats from meeting with him, he brought with him a tantalizing air of the forbidden. Sam Roberts who has held influential posts at the Daily News and,

more recently, The Times lived in Terzi's Manhattan building and found him an engaging character. He introduced Terzi to Jimmy Breslin who wrote a column about him for the Daily News.

Separate from all of these factors, there is another element which cannot be ignored. The P.L.O. and its offshoots, no match for the Israelis in conventional warfare, embarked on a campaign of terrorism, executing acts designed to be and which were, in fact, stunning.

What should and did shock the conscience — kidnapping and murder of Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics, blowing up buses filled with civilian passengers, murder of a wheelchair-bound passenger on the Achille Lauro cruise ship — could also, perversely, stimulate the conscience about the underlying issue. Terrorism may be effective to some degree because those who are repelled by an act might simultaneously be made curious as to what could drive people to commit such horrifying deeds.

And, so the P.L.O.'s terrorism campaign kept alive the Palestinian cause, perhaps more than political appeals alone could have done.

For many of these reasons the media and, in particular, The Times, began to pay greater attention to the Palestinians. In 1978, Lelyveld, then on the foreign desk, decided the paper should produce a series on the Palestinians and their role in the Middle East.[18]

In doing so, he suspected that the project might displease Rosenthal. Years later, after his retirement, Rosenthal wrote a column on the The Times Op-Ed page in which he revealed himself to no one's surprise to be a strong advocate of Israel.

Lelyveld said that Rosenthal raised no objections to the series at the time but offered no praise either.

THE CORRESPONDENTS OF THE TIMES

When Tom Hundley of the Chicago Tribune was stationed in Israel, he never had any doubt that no matter how good a correspondent he might be, his stature in Israel would never come close to that of The Times correspondent.

“The Times correspondent lives in a house that is, in effect, like an embassy,’’ he said. “And the correspondent is, in some ways, treated better than a diplomat, sometimes like royalty.’’

When Clyde Haberman took up his post as Jerusalem bureau chief in 1991, Hundley said he was able to set up interviews right away with Yitzhak Shamir, Yitzhak Rabin and other top officials.

“They were practically calling him,’’ Hundley said. “The Chicago Tribune had a tough time getting a phone call returned from any of these people.’’

The Times coverage of the region carried the greatest weight of any media outlet both inside both the United States and Israel; It was, of course, regarded as the most important medium for foreign news in general. But both the paper and its readers understood it had a special role to play when it came to Israel.

Part of the reason was that it catered to a heavily-Jewish readership with intense interest in the subject much the same way the Boston Globe, long before any other outlet, maintained for years a bureau in Dublin that reflected the interest of its Irish-American readership.[19]

Allan M. Siegal, who retired as an assistant managing editor at The Times, said that Teddy Kollek, who was mayor of Jerusalem from 1965 to 1993, “knew every executive at The Times by first name.’’ And Times editors who visited Israel, he said, were generally “treated like visiting royalty.’’

While The Times covered Israel since its founding, other newspapers (and this seems surprising now) did not have regular correspondents in Jerusalem until much later. The Washington Post did not open a bureau there until 1976.

H.D.S. Greenway said the paper which had operated its only Middle East bureau in Lebanon planned to have a second bureau in the region and assigned him to open it in Amman, Jordan. He said he realized immediately that the decision to locate in Amman in 1976 was a mistake and lobbied successfully to have it in Jerusalem instead (going so far to rent a house in Jerusalem instead of Amman even before his bosses agreed).

Zev Chafets, Begin's spokesman, said the pecking order for the Israeli government in terms of influencing the United States was sometimes The Times correspondent, followed by the U.S. ambassador.

"It had primacy,'' he said of The Times. "If it was in The Times it was automatically going to be everywhere else.'' He said the government paid almost no attention to what was in the European press in his day and little about any other American paper, except a bit for the Washington Post, which was also influential with policymakers.[20]

The experiences of three different correspondents demonstrate some of the special issues that may arise in being The Times's person in Jerusalem. All three are well regarded within The Times.

David Shipler:

David Shipler served from 1979 to 1984 and used his experience to write a book, "Arab and Jew, Wounded Spirits in a Promised Land'' (New York Times Books, 1986). It won that year's Pulitzer Prize for a non-fiction book and was praised in The Los Angeles Times as "deep and powerful,'' the equivalent of an immersion course in the emotional language of the conflict between the two groups.

Shipler said in an interview that there were two occasions in which he believed his dispatches were dealt with in a political manner at the paper, instances of excessive sensitivity.

In one, he wrote about how Israelis celebrated a holiday of remembrance and he quoted a brother and sister he met at a ceremony at Mt. Herzl. They were sheltered during the Holocaust by Christians along with another brother who had been killed in one of Israel's wars.

He wrote a brief story and discovered it was killed in New York because some editor thought that mentioning the holocaust in a Times story was a problem because it was Israeli propaganda. He was outraged and recycled the story which ran later.[21]

In the second, more detailed incident, he was assigned in 1981 to write a piece for The Book Review about Jacobo Timerman, the Argentine writer and human rights figure who had emigrated to Israel.

It was to accompany a review of Timerman's latest book. In an interview with Timerman, the writer told Shipler that in Argentina he had "buried" his Judaism as he went about being a dissident, reasoning that he was already reviled by the government and didn't want to have his stance mingled with any potential element of anti-Semitism.

But he said that in Israel he was able to "dig beneath the tomb stones'' and found he was proud of being Jewish.

But he was stark in another of his observations: while he was suddenly proud of his Jewishness, he was, he said, ashamed of being an Israeli because of how the nation treated the Palestinians.

The book review editor, Shipler said, told him that the piece was somehow unsuitable; The Times could not and should not run a piece with Timerman castigating Israel.

Shipler had his piece sent over to the foreign desk where he hoped it would be salvaged for publication, but it lingered there. He was questioned by an editor as to whether he had accurately represented Timerman's views. The question was of a kind to be offensive to a seasoned reporter. The interview also had been tape-recorded.

"Reasonable people in the news business can disagree about the best presentation of some issues,'' Shipler said. But the unease and suppression of the Timerman piece, he believed, "was purely political in that they didn't want a person of Timerman's stature criticizing Israel.'' He recycled the Timerman interview, as well, including it in a larger article about Israeli attitudes.[22]

Sometime later, Timerman visited The Times in New York and expressed the same views of Israel to editors who earlier had been skeptical that he could think that way. Shipler said Timerman was surprised at what he said was the censorship of his views at the hands of The Times.

Deborah Sontag:

Deborah Sontag who was in Jerusalem from September, 1998 for almost three years, remains the only woman to have served in that post. Her time there was, by all accounts, an unhappy one for her.

She was the only one of several editors and former correspondents at the paper who declined outright to be interviewed about her experience, suggesting it would be painful for her to relive that period. “I just can’t imagine that anything I have to say about the period would be illuminating,’’ she wrote, “and it may be troubling to me.’’

Sontag has been well regarded at The Times for her intellect and what Bill Keller, the executive editor, described as “her vivid writing’’ which was often deployed to emphasize the human aspect of a story.

She was a finalist for a Pulitzer Prize for her articles in 2010 about the devastation of Haiti after serial catastrophes.

But numerous people at The Times say that she did not feel fondly about Israel during her tour there and was stressed by the immediacy of the story and the intensity of the scrutiny of her coverage.

Jeffrey Goldberg, who has covered Israel and the Middle East for The New Yorker and The Atlantic magazines, said her work more than any other Times reporter, seemed to reflect that very liberal segment of America that has grown impatient with Israel, and skeptical of Israelis. “It represented an approach to Israel that is best seen these days on American universities,’’ he said.

Goldberg, who is American and Jewish, volunteered and served in the Israeli army as a young man. He is regarded by some as more empathetic with Israel’s situation than the average correspondent but his view of Sontag’s coverage resembles that of several others interviewed and is especially noteworthy because of a different reason: The Times tried to to hire him to be its Jerusalem correspondent to succeed her.

Joseph Lelyveld, who praised Sontag and her coverage, said he had breakfast with Goldberg during her tenure to see about having him cover Israel. Goldberg remembers the breakfast, but said he got no offer at the time. He was asked to consider the post a few years later when he met with Bill Keller and Jill Abramson, then the executive editor and managing editor respectively. He declined the position.

In considering Goldberg for the position, the editors of The Times must have known they would be getting a change of some sort from the way in which Sontag covered

the story, at least in style or tone. One editor involved in the process said the paper was looking to dial back the intensity of the coverage. The criticism of The Times by Israel's supporters seemed to have become especially intense during Sontag's tenure.

Sontag's most controversial piece was an unusually long (nearly 5,000 words) analysis of why the July, 2000 Camp David peace talks between Yasser Arafat and Ehud Barak, midwifed by President Clinton, did not yield a settlement. The July 26, 2001 article boldly disputed the conventional wisdom that the Palestinian side was mostly at fault, that Arafat could not bring himself to cut a deal, either because he was not made for negotiating peace after all his years of running a war operation or, in the view of some, he thought he would be discredited or even assassinated by hardliners. Sontag's article shifted a significant portion of the blame onto the Israelis and the Americans and was a surprising departure from what most people believed at the time. It paralleled a minority view espoused by Rob Malley, an adviser to President Clinton.[23]

She wrote that, "A potent, simplistic narrative has taken hold in Israel and to some extent in the United States. It says: Mr. Barak offered Mr. Arafat the moon at Camp David last summer. Mr. Arafat turned it down.'' While that was a caricature of the general view, and thus a bit of a straw man, she went on to argue that the Israelis and the Americans shared far more of the blame than had generally been believed.

In an editorial on July 28, The Times noted Sontag's report but failed to express any support for her approach and pointedly said that the Israeli Prime Minister, Ehud Barak, had brought "a daring peace offer'' to Camp David. Arafat, the editorial noted, did not offer any proposals of his own.

Asked about the article, one senior editor's first words in response was: "I had nothing to do with that. I was out of the country at the time.''

Since then, there has been some further discussion and debate over the notion that the Palestinian side bore the overwhelming responsibility for the failure of the talks. But for the most part, correspondents and experts — even senior editors at The Times — do not accept the view suggested in Sontag's piece, instead generally believing that Arafat's side was, as the conventional wisdom would have it, the major stumbling block.

Ethan Bronner:

Ethan Bronner, who is at the time of this writing the current Times bureau chief in Jerusalem. He was splendidly prepared for the posting as his assignment there for The Times is his third tour in Israel. He had worked there for Reuters in the early 80's at a time when the British-based news agency hired few Americans to work abroad. He was there next for the Boston Globe. After joining The Times he was a member of the paper's editorial board, where he was largely responsible for the paper's Middle East editorials before becoming deputy foreign editor.

All journalists know the all-purpose excuse/explanation for criticism of their work that goes like this: If you're being attacked by both sides in a dispute you must be doing things right.

But most good journalists also know that the aphorism is usually without value; such criticism by itself proves little and a reporter might well be criticized by both sides due to being mediocre at covering both sides of the story.

However, the polarized state of the coverage of Israel and the Middle East does, in fact, provide one area where there may be wisdom in the idea that criticism from both sides is probably a recommendation. In writing about the politics of the region, a reporter might find himself simultaneously attacked as a Zionist lackey *and* an anti-Semite or self-hating Jew — sometimes for the *same* article.

And so it has been with Bronner. He has been assailed furiously by C.A.M.E.R.A., a pro-Israel group based in Boston that monitors the media for what it perceives as flawed and biased media coverage against Israel; and he has been treated just as harshly by Mondoweiss, a web site from a leftist perspective that advertises itself as a voice of progressive Jews and works with several Palestinian interest groups.

In a Jan. 2009 article in the paper's Week in Review section, Bronner lamented how the story has been so polarized that the institutional advocates on both sides are so dug in they cannot be pleased unless he tells the story with their biases.[24]

At the time, he had been covering the Israeli invasion of Gaza that followed rocket attacks on Israeli settlers.

"Trying to tell the story so that both sides can hear it in the same way feels more and more to me like a Greek tragedy in which I play the despised chorus. It feels like I

am only fanning the flames, adding to the misunderstandings and mutual antagonism with every word I write because the fervent inner voice of each side is so loud that it drowns everything else out,'' he wrote .

"Since the war started on Dec. 27, I have received hundreds of messages about my coverage, '' he said, adding drily that, "They are generally not offering congratulations on a job well done.''

In an interview, Bronner noted that the constant flow of criticism is generally divorced from any claim of explicit factual errors.

Tom Friedman, a renowned correspondent in the Middle East and columnist for The Times, said that he has steadfastly refused to get involved in what he called "the cottage industry of analyzing the press coverage in Israel.''

He said that, "so much of what goes on is just politics masquerading as journalism criticism'' in which the most vocal participants are not interested in the good journalism, "but just want to discredit your reporting for political reasons.''

For Bronner, the argument about his coverage, always at a slow boil, erupted in 2010 and it involved his 20-year-old son. Like many young men, he was at ends about what to do with his life and decided to enlist in the Israeli Defense Forces for a stint of 14 months.

The younger Bronner's enlistment in the IDF was first reported by a Palestinian website called the "Electronic Intifada'' and picked up by others like Mondoweiss, a web site that is generally critical of Israeli policies.

On February, 6, 2010, The Times's public editor (the paper's term for its independent ombudsman), Clark Hoyt, weighed in. He wrote that Bronner's coverage could not be faulted, saying it was, in the most difficult of situations, "solid and fair.''[25] Nonetheless, Hoyt thought it best for appearances' sake that The Times reassign Bronner, a conclusion hotly rejected by Bill Keller, the executive editor, and other editors on the foreign desk. (Keller had, of course, earlier sought to hire Jeffrey Goldberg, who had, himself, served in the IDF).

Asked about it during an interview on NPR about it, Keller replied: "Can a gay reporter write about the issue of same-sex marriage? Can you assign a reporter of African descent to cover Africa or of Indian descent to cover India? All of those

things we've done. In the end, it has to come down to a complicated judgment, and the judgment is really is this reporter capable of laying this baggage aside and writing fairly on the subject?''[26]

The ensuing debate was a turbulent discussion of ethics and loyalties. Some people at The Times were troubled that the criticism of Bronner was reminiscent of the days when it was thought unwise for the paper to have a Jewish reporter cover Israel.

Hoyt quoted David Shipler who thought Bronner's situation did not present a problem, noting that foreign correspondents in the region typically rely on translators and locals, many of whom have served in the Israeli army (the longtime local stringer during Shipler's tenure was the splendidly-named Moshe Brilliant). Hoyt also quoted Alex Jones, another former Timesman, the co-author of an acclaimed history of the newspaper, and the director of Harvard's Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, who took the opposite view, saying Bronner should be reassigned.

For Bronner, the incident was painful, most probably because it linked what would ordinarily be the private sphere of his family with what is decidedly public but sensitive in itself—the need for a journalist to be both fair and, just as important, be perceived as fair. Some critics had already noted that his wife is Israeli.

"I knew that if word of this got out it could cause a problem,'' he recalled. "But I felt that I had no right to tell my adult son what to do. He had to make his own life decisions and I knew it wouldn't affect how I would cover the Israeli army.''

Bronner said that as he had been covering the region for 30 years, he had long known people who had been in and out of the Israeli army. "I have heard their stories and they paint a decidedly mixed picture,'' he said.

He was also dismayed to find that some people on both sides of the issue began with a wholly false premise — that his son's enlistment was somehow a considered decision on Bronner's part to invest his family in the Zionist cause.

In the end, the young Bronner decided that Israeli military life was not for him. He is back in the United States, enrolled in college.

At the time of the controversy, it was generally not known that despite the strong support for Bronner at The Times, one dissenting voice was Taghreed el-Khodary,

who had been the paper's Palestinian stringer in the region. She made it clear to the foreign desk that she thought the young Bronner's enlistment in the Israeli army would be a problem. She said she believed it would make it difficult for her to travel in Gaza and maintain contacts as a representative of The Times.

Times editors believed that, stressed by the years of the assignment, she was already contemplating leaving the paper and the issue of Bronner's son added to her decision. She said in an interview, however, that without the enlistment, she would have resumed her assignment. She left the Times and stayed away from Gaza for two years.

Her successor, Fares Akram, said in an interview, however, that he believed the younger Bronner's military service had never been an impediment to or affected his coverage of Gaza.

"There's not much to say about this simply because it has affected neither my life nor my work in Gaza,'' Akram said. He said nobody from Gaza had ever expressed concern about it; the only people who asked him about it were visiting foreign journalists.

THE CRITICS

The Times has fierce institutional critics, on both sides of the discussion.

One of the most relentless is C.A.M.E.R.A., the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting in America, an organization now based in Boston that monitors the media for what it perceives as anti-Israel bias.

Camera was founded in 1982 initially as a response to what its supporters thought was unfair coverage by the Washington Post of Israel's invasion that year of Lebanon.

But since then, Camera has expanded to cover the entire waterfront of the media and its special targets are The Times, the Washington Post and NPR, three of the most influential of the media outlets that cover Israel.

Before the founding of Camera, the more establishment Jewish organizations would occasionally take up complaints about coverage of Israel at The Times. Max Frankel,

during the 1970's when he ran The Times's editorial page, said he would meet usually once a year with someone from group like the Conference of Presidents of Major Jewish Organizations.

He said he typically did so to relieve Arthur "Punch" Sulzberger of the burden of what was seen as an obligatory courtesy.

But those groups, with their gentle chiding, became eclipsed by Camera which is regarded by many Times editors as harsh, angry, and usually unreasoning.

Camera is run from a nondescript office building overlooking the Massachusetts Turnpike in the Allston section of Boston.

Its current director, Andrea Levin, oversees a staff of about 35, 20 of whom work in the Allston office, the rest around the nation and overseas, in Israel and other places.

The group has an annual budget of $3.5 million, she said, though it does not disclose the specifics of its donors.

At The Times, a mention of Camera frequently induces eye-rolling or shrugs. Editors have clearly lost patience with the group.

Lelyveld said he started out trying to be cooperative, "but it's just hard to continue to deal with someone who is always saying: 'you're a liar'.''

There are counterparts on the left, media critics of The Times who generally complain the paper is too favorable or even in thrall to Israel. But there is nothing equivalent in size or funding to Camera.

The website, Mondoweiss, is among the most energetic on the other side of the ledger. It was started by Phillip Weiss, a New York writer, who had previously written for The Times Magazine. Mondoweiss is affiliated with The Nation Institute which is connected to The Nation Magazine.

Weiss said that his site's annual budget has never exceeded $125,000. But his site was widely read, he said, because he was able to leverage the reach of the internet by, for example, sharing with several pro-Palestinian websites.

The most intriguing group of readers arrayed against The Times with regard to Israel might be the community of Orthodox Jews in New York City whose displeasure is usually spread by word of mouth in synagogues. In 2001, a prominent

rabbi started what appears to have been the first of several calls for a temporary boycott of the paper to protest what he said was its biased coverage against Israel.

Rabbi Haskel Lookstein, the leader of Congregation Kehilath Jeshurun on the Upper East Side of Manhattan, and principal of the Ramaz School, both important centers for the New York area's Modern Orthodox community, called for a suspension of subscriptions of the Times by his congregants and other like-minded members of the community. He made his plea in a July, 2001 letter in the Jewish Week, a New York-based publication.

He said in a recent interview that, "Starting with the Second Intifada and during the editorship of Joe Lelyveld I found that The Times through its headlines and its lede paragraphs frequently, if not consistently, presented the Palestinian version of the conflict without reflecting the Israeli version,'' he said.

The effort to wound the paper commercially was hardly successful but Rabbi Lookstein contends that at the least, he ended a practice at his and some other synagogues of posting paid death notices in The Times, causing some financial loss for the paper.

After his first letter appeared, he received a call from Lelyveld, then the foreign editor, asking for a meeting. Rabbi Lookstein's father, Rabbi Joseph H. Lookstein, had been friends with Lelyveld's father, Rabbi Arthur J. Lelyveld. Lelyveld said he remembered that the elder Lookstein had attended the reception for his bar mitzvah.

"Joe Lelyveld reached out to me,'' Lookstein recalled recently. He said he was invited to meet with Lelyveld and Serge Schmemann, then an editor on the foreign desk and a former correspondent in Israel.

"We had a discussion. He agreed with me that some of the headlines and stories were slanted and that some of my complaints were legitimate,'' he said. But Lelyveld, he said, also rejected several of his criticisms. The Rabbi said that after the meeting, the coverage, in his view, improved for a while but then returned to an unacceptably hostile perspective on Israel.

Lelyveld, giving his version of those events, said that he contacted Lookstein believing that he was capable of soothing The Times's strained relationship with that segment of the Jewish community, in part because of his father's pedigree.

"I thought I could use my credentials,'' he said. "I could say: 'Listen, I'm a rabbi's son. What are you talking about'' when you assert that The Times is slanted against Israel? In the end, he seemed to have found it a more difficult task than he had first thought.

Lookstein's calls to suspend readership and subscriptions were generally for limited terms but he occasionally renewed them when he was angered by some specific coverage. The last such effort was in 2006 and Rabbi Lookstein was asked in a recent interview if he still avoided the paper. He said his family found it difficult to get by without The Times and its delivery was quickly restored then and, presumably, forever. "It was hard to live without it,'' he said. Renewing the subscription to The Times, "was necessary to keep peace in the family.''

CONCLUSIONS

* The Times's narrative of Israel stayed largely in the journalistic "middle" throughout the decades but the "middle" changed because of many factors, including a growing awareness of the situation of the Palestinians who were themselves just developing a nationalist consciousness; Mainstream papers do just that: they try to stay in the mainstream and, in doing so, help define the mainstream.

Allan Siegal, who had been a deputy foreign editor, said that articles from and about Israel were always handled on the foreign desk with same journalistic standards as were dispatches from elsewhere in the world.

He acknowledged that other parts of the newsroom were not so scrupulous and said there were sometimes problems when parts of the paper, like the Metro Desk, played a role in a story about Israel. Some editors and writers, he said, could not conceal their positive views of Israel and the foreign desk sometimes had to intervene to keep things on track.

Siegal said that once Arthur "Punch" Sulzberger succeeded his father, the paper's self-consciousness about the story evaporated. Under Arthur Hays Sulzberger's regime, "there was lots of sensitivity, nervousness about things relating to Israel,'' he recalled. "People were very aware of his sensitivities about Zionism,'' though that it isn't necessarily clear how or whether it affected the daily coverage.

“When Punch became publisher, he didn’t share those sensitivities,’’ he said. “He was more of a journalist with the premise that you just go ahead and tell the news.’’

There was a dearth of attention to the Palestinian issue in the early years. But Max Frankel, noting the Palestinians’ own developing nationalism didn’t flower until the 1970’s, said it would be unfair to judge The Times’s coverage before that by today’s political sensibilities about Palestinian matters.

* Some American Jewish readers became accustomed to what can be thought of as the “Exodus” phase in which Israel was generally glorified and found it difficult to accept the changed narrative in which the Israel no longer had, in the coverage, a near-monopoly on righteousness. Such readers usually have not fully accepted the legitimacy of Palestinian nationalism or the force it now plays.

Critics like Rabbi Lookstein can easily find what seems to them errors in emphasis or tone on any individual article. A newspaper or media outlet is, to many, a stunning achievement: each day, (or with the web, these days, almost each moment) a rendering of tens of thousands of words produced under great time pressures. That means that errors or misplaced emphases are inevitable. These will be smoothed over the time and, for any fair analysis, coverage should be viewed as part of a larger thematic narrative.

The unwillingness or inability to do so, might be seen in Rabbi Lookstein’s complaint during his last burst of anger at The Times in 2006. He wrote, among other complaints, that a brief piece inside the paper noted the number of rockets that fell on the Israeli village of Sderot the day before. The article recorded the fact that no one was injured.

The Rabbi was angered that while the dispatch noted the lack of injury from the latest rocket salvo, it did not mention the many times previous rocket attacks on Sderot had injured, killed and maimed people.

But those attacks, at least many of them, had been covered in The Times, rather thoroughly. The article to which Lookstein objected was a simple exercise in basic news — recording the events of the day and, in a limited space. The article was a piece of “spot news’’ and was not intended — nor could it — carry the burden of a full exegesis of the rocket war against Sderot.

Another common theme of American Jewish supporters of Israel who criticize The Times is that the paper, and indeed most Western media, generally do not cover fully the range of anti-Semitic and anti-Israel invective that is depressingly common in parts of the Arab media and clergy.[27]

The critics are frustrated by this and have a point. Newspapers generally have a difficult time in dealing with any repeated phenomena, like hateful speech. An individual article may cover the subject once, that is lay out the general phenomenon. But it is generally impractical to write an article about each subsequent instance. Moreover, editors may believe that the subject has already been covered by the initial article.

As a result, those outrageous comments in parts of the Arab press and pulpits recede into something akin to background noise. They may be deplorable but are not always deplored.

Much of this kind of criticism is rolled into an all-purpose complaint that Israel is subjected to a double standard relative to its Arab adversaries.

Perhaps it is, but might that be understandable or even acceptable? Is there not an argument that there should be a higher standard for an ally, a fellow democracy and a recipient of enormous U.S. aid? Doesn't the U.S. media fittingly and unreservedly use a double standard, for example, when it comes to reporting abuses and crimes committed by American forces as compared to say, Zimbabwean soldiers? And who is surprised that we hold different groups to different standards?

But a problem in applying a double standard, even if appropriate, is that the criticisms can be used to make a false political comparison, as in those who would hold Israel to a high standard and then, judging its lapses by that standard, say the criticism proves it is it is the equivalent of apartheid South Africa.

Another common theme of criticism by Israel's American Jewish supporters is that The Times and other media overdramatize and feature Palestinian deaths and suffering relative to those of the Israelis. The people who make this argument acknowledge that Palestinian casualties are usually greater but say that the Israelis killed are targeted as civilians while Palestinian civilians are not intended targets and are more properly characterized as collateral damage.

So what is to be made of such statistical comparisons and efforts to compare the relative balance sheets of suffering. Any individual death, be it a Palestinian or Israeli, evokes by itself somewhere an unquantifiable infinity of grief.

Perhaps we might recognize that the idea of measuring with precision how one kind of suffering compares with another may be beyond the power of mortals.

ENDNOTES

[1] When Shipler, on his way to lunch with Lelyveld and Rosenthal, was told of Rosenthal's mistake, he said he laughed so hard he could hardly make it across Broadway. It's unclear why Rosenthal had believed Shipler was Jewish. Some have speculated that it was because of his prophet-like long beard that resembled the kind of beard worn by many Jewish men in Eastern Europe before World War II (or some Orthodox men today in Brooklyn, Israel and elsewhere)

[2] Friedman was not, as is generally believed, the first Jewish correspondent in Israel. In the early 1950's, years before The Times adopted its unwritten policy of avoiding sending Jewish reporters to Israel, the correspondent in Tel Aviv was Sydney Gruson who was Jewish and later became an especially close confidant of the publisher, Arthur Sulzberger.

[3] For this project, about 800 articles were read closely and more than an additional 2,000 were scanned. They ranged from 1949 to 2007, but were mostly in the period after 1964

[4] "U.S. Seeks to Widen Palestine Debate," Apr 13, 1961.
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=96&did=101456048&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1298491756&clientId=11201&cfc=1

"Refugees in a Changing World," Oct. 10, 1960. (Editorial)
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=58&did=99513629&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1298491253&clientId=11201

"Refugees' Benefactor: John Herbert Davis" Dec 5, 1961
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=143&did=118525081&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1298491933&clientId=11201&cfc=1

"UN Appraises Refugee Land," Jul 24, 1964
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=255&did=97406496&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1298492714&clientId=11201

[5] "1948-98: 50-Year Palestinian 'Catastrophe,'" Joel Greenberg, Feb 13, 1998
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=15&did=116653381&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1305576524&clientId=11201

"Muddled thinking on the Middle East," Irving Kristol, Jun 28, 1982.
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=3&did=118605967&SrchMode=2&sid=3&Fmt=12&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1305576833&clientId=11201

"Israel: A Nest of New Problems" Jun 25, 1967
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=388&did=113440557&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1298493536&clientId=11201

"Refugee Solution Held Key to Peace; Gore, Back from Mideast, Sees Israeli Opportunity," Jul 13, 1967.
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=404&did=90372492&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1298493715&clientId=11201

[6] "Israel Marks Progress but has Big Problems; New Nation, Mourning its President, Still Faces Fight for Survival," Nov 16, 1952.
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=38&did=170384162&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1304962933&clientId=11201

"Trees Are Beginning to Spread a Green Canopy Over the Holy Land's Hills," Brooks Atkinson, Jan 8, 1965
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=1&did=94955843&SrchMode=2&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1302886629&clientId=11201

"Maritime Israel: A Prophecy That Once Must Have Seemed Foolish Is Fulfilled," Brooks Atkinson, Jan 1, 1965
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=7&did=106986600&SrchMode=2&sid=5&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1302887024&clientId=11201

[7] "Jerusalem: Surrounded, Outnumbered and Defiant" Feb 8, 1970 http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=294&did=354712782&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1298593766&clientId=11201

"The Long Accounting" Jun 6, 1967
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=351&did=90354442&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1298493401&clientId=11201

[8] "Racial Progress in Israel Lauded" Dec 1, 1957
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=38&did=170384162&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1304962933&clientId=11201

"Transmutation of Dead Land to Living Soil is Proceeding Smoothly in Ilanot," Brooks Atkinson, Jan 15, 1965

http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=9&did=101521968&SrchMode=2&sid=5&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1302887024&clientId=11201

[9] "Lebanon Calls Raid by Israel 'Shocking'" Oct 30, 1965
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=293&did=94998204&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1298492850&clientId=11201

"Israel is Criticized for Policy on Arabs," Sep 8, 1960.
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=52&did=105453189&SrchMode=1&sid=3&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1298491253&clientId=11201

[10] The term "nakba'' was used beginning in 1949 by Arabs after it was part of the title of a book by Constantine Zurayk, a professor at the American University of Beirut, said Rashid Khalidi, the Edward Said Professor of Arab Studies at Columbia University.

[11] "The Trust" Susan E. Tifft and Alex S. Jones (Little Brown, 1999)

[12] Orvil Dryfoos, a son-in-law of Iphigene and Arthur Hays Sulzberger, was briefly publisher from 1961 until his death in 1963.

[13] Tifft and Jones

[14] "Buried by The Times'' Laurel Leff (Cambridge University, 2005)

[15] "50,000 Jews Reported Killed," Nov. 29, 1943, as noted in "The Holocaust and Collective Memory,'' by Peter Novick (Bloomsbury, 1999)

[16] "Security for Israel," Anthony Lewis, Mar 27, 1975
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=8&did=76341165&SrchMode=2&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1304983468&clientId=11201

"A Choice for Israel," Anthony Lewis, Apr 5, 1976
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=10&did=75586784&SrchMode=1&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1304983545&clientId=11201

"Which Israel?" Anthony Lewis, Feb 10, 1983
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=249&did=112314297&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1298663089&clientId=11201

[17] "Arabs Recount Severe Beatings By Israel Troops," John Kifner, Jan 23, 1988.

http://www.nytimes.com/1988/01/23/world/arabs-recount-severe-beatings-by-israel-troops.html?src=pm

[18] "Refugees in Lebanon Fear They Face Life of Exile," James M. Markham, Mar 20, 1978
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=13&did=110809844&SrchMode=2&sid=6&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1304985359&clientId=11201

"Palestinians Cling to Vision of a Homeland," John Darnton, Feb 20, 1978
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=110931747&SrchMode=2&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1305308108&clientId=11201

"In Kuwait, Palestinians Thrive in the Economy but Feel Bias as Aliens," Marvine Howe, Feb 19, 1978
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=100&did=112776251&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1305310973&clientId=11201

"Despite Diplomatic and Battle Scars, P.L.O. Is the Palestinians' Only Voice," James M. Markham, Feb 21, 1978
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=124&did=110932099&SrchMode=1&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1305311320&clientId=11201

[19] Interview with H.D.S. Greenway

[20] Sam Pope Brewer was an example of the pre-Shipler Middle East correspondent who covered Israel. He was not only not Jewish, but someone whose expertise was in the field of Arab politics. Brewer became ultimately best known for having his wife, Eleanor, leave him to live with Kim Philby, at the time a British newspaper correspondent in the Middle East. Eleanor followed Philby to the Soviet Union when he defected after being discovered to have been an important Soviet mole in the senior ranks of British intelligence for many years.

[21] "Grief for War Dead in Israeli Cemetery," David K. Shipler, May 7, 1981
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=112220175&SrchMode=2&sid=7&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1304985680&clientId=11201

[22] "Israelis Worry Over What Some View as a Tendency to 'Growth of Fascism,'" David K. Shipler, Jun 25, 1981.
http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=0&did=112235283&SrchMode=2&sid=1&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1305580999&clientId=11201

[23] "Quest for Mideast Peace: How and Why it Failed," Deborah Sontag, Jul 26,2001. http://proquest.umi.com.ezp-prod1.hul.harvard.edu/pqdweb?index=3&did=366526872&SrchMode=2&sid=2&Fmt=10&VInst=PROD&VType=PQD&RQT=309&VName=HNP&TS=1305581145&clientId=11201

[24] "The Bullets in My In-Box," Ethan Bronner, Jan 24, 2009. http://www.nytimes.com/2009/01/25/weekinreview/25bronner.html

[25] "Too Close to Home," Clark Hoyt, Feb 6, 2010. http://www.nytimes.com/2010/02/07/opinion/07pubed.html

[26] On The Media, NPR, interview Feb. 12, 2010

[27] Exposing this has become the specialty of the highly useful group MEMRI, The Middle East Media Research Institute, which documents meticulously the abundance of hate speech from parts of the Arab world. Its work enriches the debate as to whether an overlooked obstacle to peace in the region is the unrelenting and despicable hate speech prevalent in the Arab world.