

that are simple to understand and least open to subjective interpretation. They will be to:

- Count the number of deaths reported in the first paragraph, as well as the headlines, and include stories from the entire news section, not just the front page.
- Examine the sources for each story. We will count the number of
 - o Column inches devoted to statements from officials on each side
 - o Times each side's officials are quoted first
- Determine whether the specific American connection to the conflict - \$5 billion annual U.S. aid to Israel - is covered fully and accurately. We will
 - o Count the number of times U.S. aid to Israel-Palestine is mentioned
 - o Evaluate the accuracy of this number. How often does it include both major segments of U.S. aid - military aid and foreign aid - as well as additional subsidies such as loan forgiveness programs.

John Stuart Mill said that the most formidable evil is "not the violent conflict between the parts of the truth, but the quiet suppression of half of it."

Conclusions

We are concerned about the results of this preliminary examination. We believe the readers of the San Jose Mercury News, as well as all Americans, are entitled to full and accurate reporting on all issues, including the topic of Israel/Palestine, especially given that Israel is the highest recipient of US aid.

We assume that the San Jose Mercury News is as disturbed as we have been to find these shortfalls in its quest to provide excellent news reporting to its readers. Now that it has been alerted to these distortions in its Israel-Palestine coverage, we encourage the Mercury News to undertake whatever changes are necessary to provide accurate news coverage of this vital issue. We hope that the findings in our next report will show an increased level of accuracy in the Mercury News' coverage of this important issue.

If Americans Knew

Mission Statement

In a democracy, the ultimate responsibility for a nation's actions rests with its citizens. The top rung of government - the entity with the ultimate power of governance - is the asserted will of the people. Therefore, in any democracy, it is essential that its citizens be fully and accurately informed.

In the United States, currently the most powerful nation on earth, it is even more essential that its citizens receive complete and undistorted information on topics of importance, so that they may wield their extraordinary power with wisdom and intelligence.

Unfortunately, such information is not always forthcoming.

The mission of If Americans Knew is to inform and educate the American public on issues of major significance that are unreported, underreported, or misreported in the American media.

It is our belief that when Americans know the facts on a subject, they will, in the final analysis, act in accordance with morality, justice, and the best interests of their nation, and of the world. With insufficient information, or distorted information, they may do the precise opposite.

It is the mission of If Americans Knew to ensure that this does not happen - that the information on which Americans base their actions is complete, accurate, and undistorted by conscious or unconscious bias, by lies of either commission or omission, or by pressures exerted by powerful special interest groups. It is our goal to supply the information essential to those responsible for the actions of the strongest nation on earth - the American people.

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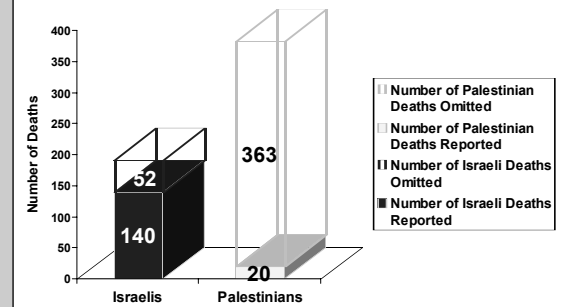
415.460.1882 ~ ifamericansknew@yahoo.com

www.ifamericansknew.org (under construction)

An If Americans Knew Report

Accuracy in Israel/Palestine Reporting

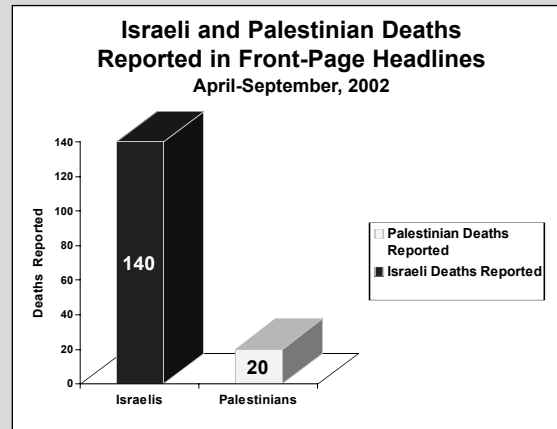
Actual vs. Reported Deaths in Front-Page Headlines
April-September, 2002



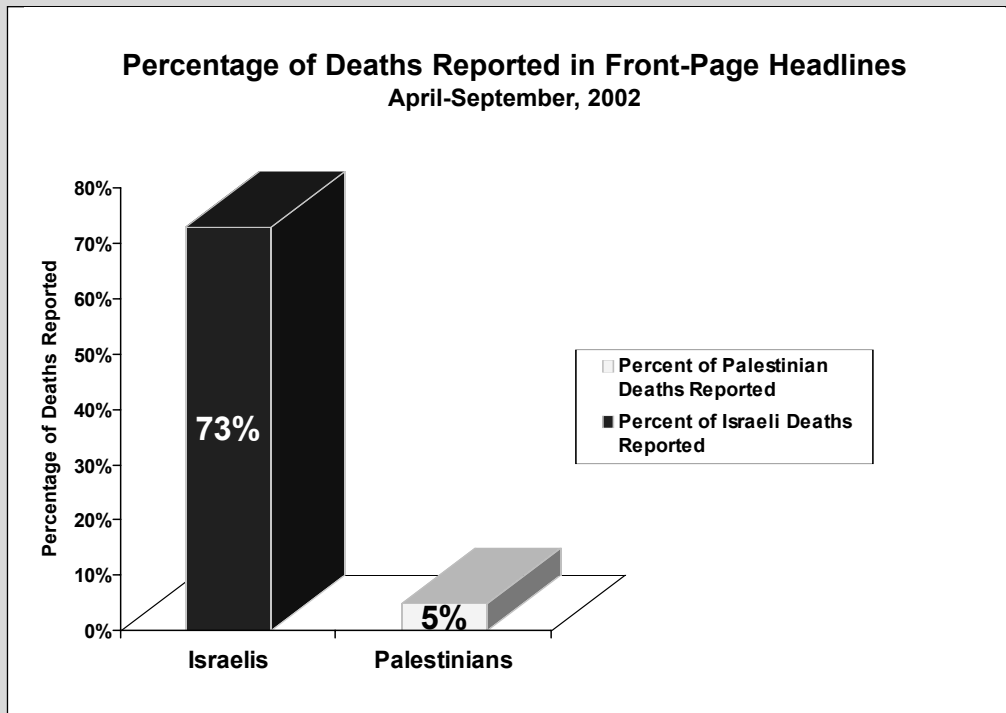
San Jose Mercury News

April-September 2002

Key Findings. From April through September, 2002, 140 Israeli deaths were reported in San Jose Mercury News front-page headlines compared with only 20 Palestinian deaths. During this time, there were actually 192 Israeli deaths and 383 Palestinian deaths (see B'Tselem, Israel's leading Human Rights organization, www.btselem.org).



In other words, while 73% of Israeli deaths were reported in front-page headlines, only 5% of Palestinian deaths were.



Introduction

If Americans Knew aims to issue a quarterly report card to major media across the country on their coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The San Jose Mercury News is the first publication to receive a preliminary report, covering April through September of 2002.

The purpose for issuing this report is that it can help the media to understand where they are failing to accurately portray the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and how they can improve their accuracy in the future.

In addition, we are making these reports public, as a way to help readers evaluate for themselves the reliability of their sources of information on this issue.

Yardstick for Measuring Accuracy

We recognize that reporting on Israel/Palestine has been an exceptionally controversial topic. Therefore, while there are many potential yardsticks for measuring accuracy, for this initial report we chose criteria that could not be construed as at all subjective.

We counted the number of Israeli and Palestinian deaths the San Jose Mercury News reported in headlines on the front page:

- In absolute numbers, and
- As a percentage of total deaths for Israelis and Palestinians respectively

We chose this yardstick because it is simple, quantitative and relatively immune to subjective interpretation. In addition, we wanted to understand if the San Jose Mercury News demonstrates even-handed respect for human life, regardless of ethnic or religious origin.

Our final reason for choosing this yardstick was that front-page headlines are often among the most prominent aspects of coverage that a reader absorbs. We believe they play a disproportionate role in generating an overall impression about the conflict and the relative consequences for Israelis and Palestinians.

Next Steps

In order to better understand reporting on this topic, we will conduct a deeper investigation next time, while maintaining our objective of using yardsticks