



BAD NEWS FROM ISRAEL

*'This superb study...
is extensive in scope,
and scrupulously fair.
It will be a landmark.'*

EDWARD HERMAN

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GLASGOW UNIVERSITY MEDIA GROUP



Bad News From Israel

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Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	vii
<i>Preface</i>	viii
<i>Final Status Map</i>	x
1 Histories of the Conflict	1
Introduction	1
Zionist Roots and the First Wave of Jewish Immigration into Palestine	2
Theodor Herzl and the Emergence of Political Zionism	3
The Second Wave of Jewish Immigration into Palestine	4
The Balfour Declaration and the British Mandate	5
American Politics and the Settlement of the Holocaust Survivors	13
The End of the Mandate	16
The United Nations Debates the Future of Palestine	17
The Unofficial War	18
The First Arab-Israeli War	20
Post-War Negotiations: Peace Treaties, Borders and Refugees	22
1956: The Suez Conflict	27
1967: The Six Day War	29
Resolution 242 and the War of Attrition	34
Settlement Building and Economic Integration	36
Military Occupation/Administration	41
Nationalism and the Rise of the Opposition Movements	42
1973: The October War	47
Conflict in Lebanon	48
Diplomacy and the Camp David Accords	52
1982: The Invasion of Lebanon	54
1987: The First Intifada	61
The Beginning of the Oslo Process	67
The Declaration of Principles	69
The Cairo Agreement and Oslo II	72
The Netanyahu Administration	76
The Barak Administration	81
The Camp David Final Status Talks	83
The Sharon Administration	88

2	Content Studies	91
	Introduction	91
	Content Analysis: Methods	94
	Samples and Results	99
	Sample One: 28 September to 16 October 2000	99
	Additional Content Samples: October–December 2001, March–April 2002	156
	Sample Two: October–December 2001	160
	Sample Three: March 2002	182
	Sample Four: Jenin, April 2002	192
3	Audience Studies	200
	Introduction	200
	Samples and Method	200
	Focus Group Methods and Questions Asked	202
	Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches	204
	The Questionnaires	207
	<i>Results</i>	209
	Memories, Images and Associations	209
	Sources of Information Used	210
	Origins, History and Causes of the Conflict	212
	The News Writing Exercise	225
	Beliefs About Casualties	231
	Cultural Identification and Empathy	236
	Understanding and Interest in News	240
4	Why Does it Happen?	244
	Factors in Production	244
	Claims that the Media are Biased Against Israel	250
	The US Connection	252
5	Conclusion	257
	Appendix 1: Answers to Questions on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict by Student Groups	261
	Appendix 2: Answers to Questions on the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict by Focus Groups	270
	Appendix 3: Black Holes of History: Public Understanding and the Shaping of Our Past	276
	<i>Notes</i>	286
	<i>References</i>	300
	<i>Index</i>	305

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Preface

This is a study of TV news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and of how this coverage relates to the understanding, beliefs and attitudes of the television audience. The work was undertaken with support from the Economic and Social Research Council whose help we would like to acknowledge. In producing this study our intention was not to 'monitor' the media or to criticise individual journalists. Our intention was to discuss the pressures and structures within which they work, to show the effects of these on news content and to examine the role of the media in the construction of public knowledge. It is a very extensive study with an audience sample of over 800 people and a detailed analysis of TV news over a two-year period. This work also raises a series of important theoretical issues in mass communications. The main focus in the book is on giving a clear exposition of our methods and results, but the theoretical concerns are latent and there is a more detailed discussion of them in other work by the Media Group.¹ We begin this book with an account of different histories of the conflict to illustrate the extraordinary range of conflicting beliefs and opinions which exist in this area. The second chapter of the book is a study of television news content. We analyse large samples of news from September to October 2000, at the outbreak of the intifada and then later samples from October to December 2001 and March to April 2002 – a total of 189 bulletins. We also look at other areas of television and the press for purposes of comparison. In Chapter 3 we examine processes of audience reception of how television viewers understood and responded to news about the conflict. For this, we questioned large groups of students from Britain, the US and Germany and also engaged in detailed discussions in focus groups. There were 14 of these groups whose participants were drawn from the population as a whole and 100 people took part in this way. This part of our work raised a number of issues such as the relation between viewers' understanding of news and their level of interest in it. We also looked at the role of television in informing mass audiences and asked the young people in our samples a range of questions on international issues in order to assess their levels of knowledge. We found sharp differences in this between those from different countries. In Chapter 4 we discuss the key factors which

affect the production of news about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict including the impact of lobbying and public relations. Chapter 5 draws some conclusions from the study.

In bringing together the processes of production, news content and audience reception, this research developed into one of the most extensive studies ever undertaken in this area. We were given invaluable help in it by a large number of journalists and media practitioners, whom we interviewed and who gave us comments and sometimes detailed accounts of stories on which they had worked. Some also took part in the research by sitting in on focus groups and playing an active role in the discussions. This level of collaboration between academics and media practitioners is unusual in media studies and we hope that it points the way to further useful developments in the conduct of research. Academics and broadcasters certainly have much to learn from each other.