



AN AFSI SPECIAL REPORT

The New York Times Invents a New “Occupation”

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The *New York Times* Invents a New “Occupation”

Has Israel deposed Palestinian Authority chairman Mahmoud Abbas and dissolved the PA’s Parliament? Has an Israeli military administration become the supreme ruling body throughout the PA territories? Are Israeli troops patrolling Ramallah, Tulkarm, Jenin and all the other cities where 98% of the Palestinian Arabs reside? Does the Israeli Army now direct the courts, police, unions, media, and schools in those areas?

Obviously not—yet that’s what the *New York Times* would like us to believe.

In recent weeks, the editors of the *Times* appear to have imposed a new policy, according to which all news reports that refer to the status of the Palestinian Arabs include a line falsely claiming that all of them “live under Israeli military occupation.”

That statement is demonstrably false—yet as of August 2024, it has become a constant part of the *Times*’ reporting about the Arab-Israeli conflict. To publish information that is false in order to advance a political agenda represents a blatant

politicization of Middle East reporting in America.

What the *Times* Used to Say

A detailed examination of the *Times*’ news coverage from April through September 2024 reveals two distinct patterns concerning articles referring to the Judea-Samaria (West Bank) territories.

Prior to August, nearly all references to the status of Palestinian Authority and the Palestinian Arab populace under its rule were essentially factual.

The size of the population was given as 2.7-million, “about 2.7 million,” or “roughly 2.7 million.”¹ That number is consistent with the estimates of sources such as the CIA’s *World Factbook*.

Likewise, the *Times* previously almost always referred to the status of the Palestinian Authority in a factual manner, calling it “the Palestinian Authority, which administers parts of the West Bank.”² Nearly-identical language appeared in article after article, regardless of the author. The bylines appearing on those articles included Israel bureau chief Patrick Kingsley and correspondents Aaron Boxerman, Alan Rappeport, Raja Abdulrahim, Steven Erlanger, Emma

Bubola, and Michael Levenson, among others.

In one instance, a *Times* article went even further—and got closer to the truth—when it referred to “Fatah, the Palestinian faction that controls the Palestinian Authority and with it much of the West Bank.”³ “Much” is indeed the correct word, since the PA rules 40% of the territory, a fact that is seldom acknowledged by the *Times*.

There were a few instances in which the correspondents added some pejorative jargon to their descriptive language. For example, Raja Abdulrahim referred to the population as “more than 2.7 million Palestinians [who] reside in ancestral cities, towns and farming villages in the West Bank, where for generations many have lived off the land.” She seemed to be suggesting (falsely) that Palestinian Arabs have lived there since time immemorial.⁴

In another instance, bureau chief Kingsley, sharing a byline with Natan Odenheimer and Ronen Bergman, referred to the Palestinian Arabs as “subject to Israeli military law.”⁵ Although that description was technically correct, it was misleading. It gave the impression that they are all under military rule, when what it actually means is that if a resident of

the Palestinian Authority areas is arrested for terrorism, he or she is prosecuted in military rather than civilian court. Day-to-day civilian laws are promulgated and enforced by the PA, not the Israeli army.

What the *Times* is Saying Now

Suddenly, in late August 2024, a new description of the Palestinian Arabs’ status began appearing in the *Times*’ news coverage. The identical phrase (with tiny, inconsequential variations) appeared in no less than eight news articles in thirteen days. Referring to the territories, each of the articles called it a region “where three million Palestinians live under Israeli military occupation.”⁶

The fact that the same language appeared in articles by different authors indicated that the wording was dictated by an editor. Either that, or correspondents Aaron Boxerman, Adam Rasgon, Hiba Yazbek, Raja Abdulrahim, and Thomas Fuller were all consciously copying from each other, which seems highly unlikely.

The new dictated text is deeply problematic for two reasons.

First, the change in the number is striking. Overnight, the size of the Arab population grew from 2.7-million

to three million. Since there was no corresponding announcement from the CIA's *World Facebook* or any similar sources revising their population estimates, the probable explanation for the *Times*' decision to significantly increase the number was that it was trying to strengthen the Palestinian Arabs' claim to the territory.

Second, the new *Times* wording is simply false. Millions of Palestinian Arabs do not currently live under Israeli military occupation.

That description would have been true in the first years following the 1967 Six Day War. In those days, an Israeli military governor was in charge of the entire territory, an Israeli military administration managed the Arab residents' everyday lives, and the Israeli Army constantly patrolled the streets of every Arab city and town.

But that all changed with the signing of the Oslo Accords, in which then-Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin agreed to a two-stage end to the Israeli military occupation of the Palestinian Arabs.

The first stage followed the signing of the Gaza-Jericho agreement, in May 1994. Israel withdrew its forces

from the city of Jericho, and from all of the Gaza Strip except for a small area where Jewish communities were located. The Palestinian Authority assumed control of the areas that Israel vacated.

The second stage followed the signing of the Oslo II agreement, in September 1995. Israel gave the PA control over the cities and towns where 98% of the Palestinian Arabs reside.

The Israeli military administration in the new PA areas was dismantled, and Israeli troops no longer patrolled their streets. The PA assumed control over the courts, the police, the unions, the media, and the schools. The PA established its own parliament, and even held a few elections before discarding democracy in favor of indefinite one-man rule by Mahmoud Abbas. Today, the military administration governs only the portion of Judea-Samaria that Israel rules, and where Israelis reside.

The fact that the PA has nearly vanished from the new *Times* vocabulary suggests that the change was motivated by political bias. In all but one of the August-September articles, the PA was no longer mentioned. By removing the PA from view, the *Times* effectively made it

seem as if millions of Arabs are being ruled by Israel, when the truth is that those millions are actually ruled by their own government, the Palestinian Authority.

Why the Change?

The critical question is: Why?

Why have the editors of the *Times* committed themselves to promoting the false narrative of an Israeli military occupation?

There are three apparent reasons:

– **It makes Israel look mean.**

That fits the simplistic narrative to which the *Times* generally adheres, that Israel is the bad guy and the Palestinian Arabs are the good guys.

– **It justifies Palestinian Arab violence.**

If the Arabs are subjected to an inherently unjust military occupation, then violent resistance is seen by many as justified. That is not to say the *Times* supports violence, only that it sees Palestinian Arab violence against Israel as rooted in a right to resort to force.

– **It advances the agenda.**

By generating sympathy for the Palestinian Arabs and making the status quo seem unfair, inventing a fake “occupation” advances the policy position that the publisher and editors of the *Times* advocate: the creation of a Palestinian Arab state in Israel’s back yard. Slanting the news to promote a political position may be effective propaganda, but it’s bad journalism.

About the author

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NOTES

¹ Aaron Boxerman, Christopher F. Shcuetze and Julia Jacobs, “Tensions Flare in West Bank After Israeli Teenager Is Found Dead,” *New York Times* (NYT), April 14, 2024, p.9; Aaron Boxerman, “Settlers Kill 2 Palestinians In West Bank,” NYT April 17, 2024, p.9; Isabel Kershner, Adam Rason and Julian E. Barnes, “U.S. Is Considering Sanctions For Israeli Military Battalions,” NYT, April 22, 2024, pp.1,8; Ben Hubbard, “As War Rages Over in Gaza, Settlers Expand Their Domain,” NYT, June 2, 2024, p.14; Ephrat Livni, “West Bank Settler Violence Draws Ire From Israeli Allies,” NYT, July 17, 2024, p.8.

² Patrick Kingsley, “Israel Weighing Deal with Arabs in Postwar Gaza,” NYT, May 4, 2024, pp.1,6; Aaron Boxerman, Emma Bubola and Michael Levenson, “Three in Europe Back Statehood for Palestinians,” NYT, May 23, 2024, pp.1,5; Alan Rappeport, “Yellen Urges Keeping ties To Economy Of West Bank,” NYT, May 24, p.8; Aaron Boxerman and Adam Rasgon, “Israel’s Finance Minister Agrees to Release Funds To Palestinian Authority,” NYT, June 29, 2024, p.9; Ephrat Livni, “Israel Moves to Legalize 5 Settlements in Occupied West Bank,” NYT, June 30, 2024, p.10; Aaron Boxerman, “Trapped Since Shutdown Of Gaza Border Crossing,” NYT, July 21, 2024, p.8; Steven Erlanger, “In West Bank, Residents Cling to Livelihoods,” NYT July 28, 2024, pp.1,6; Raja Abdulrahim, “After an Assassination, a Show of Support for Hamas in Its Rival’s Backyard,” NYT, August 10, 2024.

³ Farnaz Fassihi, Ronen Bergman and Eric Schmitt, “Iran is Flooding the West Bank with Weapons,” NYT April 10, 2024, pp 1,6.

⁴ Raja Abdulrahim, “A Family Flees and a Mother Mourns as Israeli Settlers Attack a West Bank Village,” NYT, August 19, 2024, p.8.

⁵ Natan Odenheimer and Ronen Bergman and Patrick Kingsley, “On Tape: Bid to Cement Israel’s West Bank Hold,” NYT, June 22, 2024, pp.1,6.

⁶ Aaron Boxerman, Adam Rasgon, Raja Abdulrahim, and Thomas Fuller, “Israel Escalates Raids On West Bank Targets As Third Front Grows,” NYT, August 29, 2024, p.1; Aaron Boxerman, “Allies Move To Condemn Israeli Raid In West Bank,” NYT, August 31, 2024, p.5; Aaron Boxerman, “As Israel Preses West Bank Raids, Residents Survey the Damage done,” September 1, 2024, p.7; Raja Abdulrahim, “Israeli Raids Trap Fearful Palestinians in Their Homes,” NYT, September 6, 2024, p.12; Raja Abdulrahim, “10-Day Israeli Blitz Leaves Ruin West Bank,” NYT, September 7, 2024, pp.1,5; Aaron Boxerman, “Palestinian Officials Blame Israeli Forces for American’s Death in the West Bank,” NYT, September 7, 2024, p.5; Raja Abdulrahim, “10-Day Israeli Blitz Leaves Ruin West Bank,” NYT, September 7, 2024, pp.1,5; Aaron Boxerman, “Palestinian Officials Blame Israeli Forces for American’s Death in the West Bank,” NYT, September 7, 2024, p.5. Adam Rasgon, “Israeli Military Says It ‘Unintentionally’ Shot American Activist in West bank,” NYT, September 11, 2024, p.7; Hiba Yazbek, “Israeli Forces Launch New Attacks Against militants in West Bank Cities,” NYT, September 12, 2024, p.8

