



Parahyangan Catholic University

Faculty of Social and Political Sciences

Department of International Relations

Terakreditasi Unggul

SK BAN-PT No. 2579/SK/BAN-PT/AK-ISK/S/IV/2022

**The *New York Times* Agenda-Setting in
2014 Gaza War Coverage**

Undergraduate Thesis

By

Muhammad Naufal Hanif

6091801245

Bandung

2023



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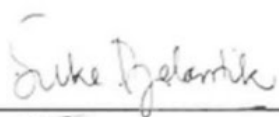
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Hereby state that the content of this undergraduate thesis is the work of my own, and has not been previously submitted for the purpose of acquiring academic degree elsewhere. Works and opinions that are referred to in this thesis have been written in accordance with the prevailing ethics of academic writing.

I have made this statement with full responsibility, and are therefore ready to bear the consequences that are appropriate with the regulations if in the future this statement is proven to be false.

Bandung, January 8th, 2023

A handwritten signature in black ink is written over a pink revenue stamp. The stamp features a QR code, the Garuda Pancasila emblem, and the text 'NETERAI 10000'.

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Abstract

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The Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the most prominent ongoing international conflicts spanning more than two centuries with multitude of problems and dozens of international actors directly affecting the process. One of these actors is the US media, which have major significance in the production and reproduction of images and perspectives of both policy makers and the general public about the conflict. All the information gained by key participants of the conflict are obtained through media and their coverage, which are marred with controversies, inaccuracies, and accusation of biases for Israel and unfair blame-assignment toward the Palestinians. With this, the research question of this thesis would be, what is the New York Times agenda-setting on the 2014 Gaza War coverage? Several researches have pointed out how Palestine became the 'aggressor' and Israel became 'defender' in the coverage of the Times. Nevertheless, most of the attempts to pinpoint the media's agenda on their Israel-Palestine coverage are based on an analysis of regular, hard news reporting and are done so quantitatively. Using agenda-setting theory, this thesis will approach this problem with editorial pieces by the New York Times' throughout the 2014 Gaza War in a descriptive, qualitative method to offer a new angle and perspectives that can be gained on the problem of the United States' media agenda-setting in this conflict. Confirming the previous researches, it is shown that the agenda-setting pertained in regular reports has prevalence in the Times' editorial content, where they can express their stance on the issue. The Times approach in their editorial pieces could be described as heavily criticising Hamas while giving benefit of the doubt toward Israel, while strongly identifying and agreeing with the United States policy in the area. This undoubtedly will have implications toward the audience of the Times which, aligned with agenda-setting theory, will pick up these approaches in their understanding of the 2014 Gaza War.

Keywords: *Agenda-Setting research, New York Times, 2014 Gaza War, content analysis, editorial content*

Abstrak

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Judul : *Agenda-setting* dari *New York Times* dalam pemberitaan Perang Gaza 2014

Konflik antara Israel dan Palestina telah menjadi salah satu konflik yang paling luas di dunia internasional dalam masa modern, meliputi lebih dari dua abad sejarah dengan permasalahan berlapis dan sekian banyak aktor-aktor negara maupun non-negara yang secara langsung mempengaruhi dinamikanya. Salah satu aktor yang berpengaruh dalam konflik ini adalah media-media Amerika Serikat, yang memiliki dampak signifikan dalam produksi dan reproduksi pandangan maupun perspektif dari pembuat kebijakan maupun masyarakat umum tentang konflik ini. Semua informasi yang didapatkan oleh partisipan-partisipan kunci dalam konflik ini diperoleh melalui media massa, beberapa di antaranya media massa AS, yang telah lama dikritik akibat pemberitaannya tentang isu ini dianggap kontroversial, penuh dengan ketidakakuratan, dan tuduhan keberpihakan terhadap Israel dan menyalahkan pihak Palestina secara tidak adil. Dengan penemuan awal ini, skripsi ini mengajukan pertanyaan penelitian yaitu apa *agenda-setting* yang dimiliki oleh *New York Times* dalam pemberitaannya di Perang Gaza 2014? Beberapa penelitian sebelumnya telah menampilkan bagaimana Palestina dipasangkan sebagai 'penyerang' dan Israel sebagai pihak yang 'diserang' dalam salah satu media Amerika Serikat, yaitu *New York Times*. Namun, penelitian-penelitian untuk menentukan agenda media dalam pemberitaan Israel-Palestina sendiri seringkali menggunakan pemberitaan harian yang mengabarkan langsung dinamika di lapangan, dengan pendekatan kuantitatif untuk menganalisis berita-berita tersebut. Menggunakan teori *agenda-setting*, skripsi ini akan melakukan pendekatan berbeda terhadap permasalahan ini dengan menggunakan konten-konten editorial *New York Times* dan analisis kualitatif-deskriptif untuk mengetahui perspektif baru tentang masalah *agenda-setting* media massa Amerika Serikat dalam konflik ini. Selaras dengan penelitian-penelitian sebelumnya, pendekatan baru ini menghasilkan kesimpulan bahwa dalam artikel-artikel editorial mereka terkait dengan Perang Gaza 2014, *New York Times* juga menerapkan bias dan agenda yang sama seperti mengkritik keras Hamas sekaligus memberikan kesempatan Israel untuk 'membela diri' untuk kesalahan yang sama, sekaligus selalu sepakat dan tidak mempertanyakan kebijakan Amerika Serikat dalam kasus ini. Penemuan ini akan memiliki implikasi serius akibat bagaimana teori *agenda-setting* menyebutkan bahwa arah pemberitaan media akan mempengaruhi bagaimana pembaca memahami suatu isu internasional, dalam hal ini Perang Gaza 2014.

Kata Kunci: Penelitian agenda-setting, New York Times, Perang Gaza 2014, analisis konten, konten editorial

Preface

It is almost a truism to say that the press must be free, whether it is from external influence or from a reporter's bias. It is expected, or even demanded, that the press work as objective as possible, to report in such a clear and meaningful way on issues that have pressing importance for the public. In a way, this thesis adds to the long tradition of questioning everything that can be questioned about this assumption, from whether newsroom truly works as free as possible from bias and pressure to whether it has adequately perform their duty in democratic society to held officials responsible and for policies to be accurate and meaningful for the general public. Using a framework started by McCombs and heavily influenced with Lippmann's *Public Opinion*, this thesis analyses the editorial content of the *New York Times* during their 2014 Gaza War coverage to see the *Times*' response toward United States' foreign policy in Palestine.

Needless to say, this thesis has various limitations due to the limited capability of the author—an undergraduate student working on a research paper for the purpose of finishing his study. For example, there are no mass-interviews common in first-level agenda-setting researches, and there are only implications about the second-level agenda-setting that is what influences the press in their international coverage. Hopefully these constraints would not deter anyone who has an interest in reading more about this topic.

Jakarta, 9th of January, 2023

Muhammad Naufal Hanif

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As I do not have stellar work ethics, nor do I have anything worthwhile to offer, I can only give the most sincere gratitude toward all parties who have, in any way or form, involved, participated, helped, supported, or even simply acknowledged what I've been through in the process of finishing this thesis.

Among many, specifically it would be **Mbak Suke**, in which without her help I wouldn't even be capable of writing coherent thoughts that would later evolved to be this paper, both of my **parents, Father and Mother** whose always patiently believes in my capability to finish my study convincingly, and **Lily**, who knew and understand me better than anyone else.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background of Issue

The Israel-Palestine conflict is one of the most persistent international conflicts in the modern era, spanning from the birth of Zionism at the late 19th century¹ until today, and has no sign of stopping anytime soon². Located in the heart of the Middle East, both Israel and Palestine have histories that involve support from great powers and middle powers alike. Palestine saw support from all the Arab societies³ and the whole anti-colonialist nations post-WWII as far as Indonesia and Malaysia⁴ while Israel is a protege from the North Atlantic nations such as France⁵, United States⁶, and Germany⁷, to name a few. The Israel-Palestine conflict is multifaceted, ranging from geopolitics to religious

¹For the birth of Zionism, (Theodor Herzl, *The Jewish State* (New York, United States: Dover, 1988)), Accessed 26 June 2022,. For the history of the conflict, (Edward W. Said, *The Question of Palestine* (New York, United States: Vintage Books, 1980). Accessed 26 June 2022.

²The latest conflict in the area happened as late as mid-August (Raja Abdulrahim, "Palestinian Rights Groups Raided by Israeli Soldiers," *The New York Times* (The New York Times, August 18, 2022), <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/08/18/world/middleeast/israel-palestinian-groups-raid.html>.) Accessed 31 October 2022.

³Thomas Mayer, "Arab Unity of Action and the Palestine Question, 1945–48," *Middle Eastern Studies* 22, no. 3 (1986): pp. 331-349, <https://doi.org/10.1080/00263208608700669>. Accessed 26 June 2022

⁴ A. Appadorai, "The Bandung Conference," *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs* 11, no. 3 (1955): pp. 207-235, <https://doi.org/10.1177/097492845501100301>. Accessed 26 June 2022

⁵ Gadi Heimann, "From Friendship to Patronage: France–Israel Relations, 1958–1967," *Diplomacy & Statecraft* 21, no. 2 (2010): pp. 240-258, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09592296.2010.482472>.

⁶ Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "The United States and Israel since 1948: A 'Special Relationship'?", *Diplomatic History* 22, no. 2 (1998): pp. 231-262, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-7709.00115>. Accessed 26 June 2022.

⁷ Lily Gardner Feldman, "The Principle and Practice of 'Reconciliation' in German Foreign Policy: Relations with France, Israel, Poland and the Czech Republic," *International Affairs* 75, no. 2 (1999): pp. 333-356, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.00075>. Accessed 26 June 2022.

zealotry. In terms of geopolitics, the direct supporters of either party control the wider area that contains most of the world's supply of oil and gas. Due to this, it can be said that the Israel-Palestine is one of the most prominent modern international conflicts that is thoroughly 'global' in nature, spanning multiple issues and multiple actors, state and non-state.

Previously, international relations study regarding international conflict has primarily inquired strictly about the role of state actors and their action inside the conflict. This includes the many facets of actors inside the Israel-Palestine conflict. However, starting from the end of the Cold War, non-state actors entered researchers' consideration, for example mass media. Focus toward the role of media in international conflict starts with the underlying understanding that the only way the general public receives valuable insight about international conflict, enough to form political opinions and commit political activities such as rallying, protesting, lobbying, and participating in an election is through reports from international media⁸. For example, those who believe that Mahmoud Abbas and the Palestinian Authority is the main obstacle toward making peace in the Middle East, they will not be friendly toward policies that press Israel to 'do more' on the peace process⁹. This would lead to the basic agenda-setting assumption that the media agenda on a certain issue affects the reader's perspective to be more negative or positive. In the Israel-Palestine conflict, the mass media has been

⁸ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, United States: Free Pr. u.a., 1965). Accessed 26 June 2022.

⁹ Sudeshna Roy, "Culturally Unconscious: Intercultural Implications of The New York Times Representation of the Israel-Palestine Conflict in 2009 and 2011," *International Communication Gazette* 74, no. 6 (2012): pp. 556-570, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048512454823>. Accessed 26 June 2022.

repeatedly analysed as it will show below to have a various effect and role on the situation, starting from the way they frame their coverage to their role in peace journalism.

The root of the mass media role in international conflict came from the seminal work of Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion*. In his writings, he made it clear that all information about international conflicts—advancement of war, peace process, troops deployed and victim tolls, atrocities committed, etc—can only be obtained from the media¹⁰. Due to limited resources and even more limited words that can be written on a piece of news, it is inevitable that the media choose a frame¹¹, for example who shot first in the conflict, and agenda-setting¹², for example who has more legitimate claim in a territory, on their depiction of conflict. This framing and agenda-setting will carry on toward the audience's understanding of such conflict, and thus they will participate in elections, have foreign policy preferences, and organise rallies and demonstrations based on what they read on the papers. In other words, the media has a complete influence on public understanding of international conflict¹³. To continue on with these findings by Lippmann, it can be said that the media has a significant role in the shaping of international conflict and the foreign policy surrounding it.

¹⁰ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, United States: Free Pr. u.a., 1965). Accessed 26 June 2022.

¹¹ Robert M. Entman, "Framing Bias: Media in the Distribution of Power," *Journal of Communication* 57, no. 1 (2007): pp. 163-173, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2006.00336.x>. Accessed 26 June 2022.

¹² Maxwell McCombs, "A Look at Agenda-Setting: Past, Present and Future," *Journalism Studies* 6, no. 4 (2005): pp. 543-557, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616700500250438>. Accessed 26 June 2022.

¹³ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, United States: Free Pr. u.a., 1965). Accessed 26 June 2022.

While it will not be operated explicitly in this thesis, another concept introduced by Lippmann in his work is manufacturing consent. In democratic states, public consent toward a policy is tantamount and public officials should not go against it even if they firmly believe in the solutions they offer¹⁴. However, due to how the public form their opinions through mass media, in turn media are conditioned to inform the public as to how the government sees the issue and how they want to solve it. This practice is, quite literally, manufacturing the consent of the public, putting up a facade of a working democratic cycle even though it is a work of massive manipulation so that policymakers can get what they want. In other words, to obtain the public's approval toward a policy, the media intentionally or unintentionally reports through angles that *will* approve proposed policy, angles that emphasises evidence that supports the government's stance while minimises opposing voices. This would be the implication of media's agenda-setting that would be further pronounced below.

1.2 Problem Identification

In the context of the Israel-Palestine conflict, the people of the United States can expect to have a clear idea of the Israel-Palestine conflict, to then decide what correct course their government can pursue, or what mistakes they have made. One of the example is how the modern US administration's treatment of 'both sides have their own share of blame' is misguided due to how one party has much more political and military power than the other, making the conflict

¹⁴ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, United States: Free Pr. u.a., 1965).

asymmetrical in the first place¹⁵. If the media turns out to report the story as a symmetrical conflict and approaches it with even-handedly blaming both sides for the conflict, then it can be said that the agenda-setting of the media do not sufficiently inform their audience, the general public that participates in the democratic process of the United States. In other words, an agenda-setting of a media in their coverage of international conflict directly influences the formation, acceptance, and rejection of a foreign policy by the general public.

With this heavy responsibility, it is concerning that the history of media coverage in Palestine is marked with Orientalism, bias, and stereotypical caricaturization. Historically, US media has a track record of superficial reports, de-romanticization, reversing the role of victim and perpetrator, and even portrayal of Arabs as backstabbing, greedy womanisers¹⁶¹⁷. Even in the modern era, massive media outlets such as *New York Times* continue journalistic practice that favours Israel rather than Palestine¹⁸. Often the media emphasise the ‘self-defence’ alibi offered by the *Israel Defence Force* (IDF) to protect themselves from Palestinian missiles¹⁹, that is, with military equipment offered by the United States. Furthermore, the situation after 9/11 stipulates the Islamic

¹⁵ Giorgio Gallo and Arturo Marzano, “The Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflicts: The Israeli-Palestinian Case,” *Journal of Conflict Studies* 29, no. Spring (January 1, 2009). Accessed 31 August 2022.

¹⁶Dina Ibrahim, “The Middle East in American Media,” *International Communication Gazette* 71, no. 6 (2009): pp. 511-524, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1748048509339793>. Accessed 26 June 2022.

¹⁷ Jack G. Shaheen, “Media Coverage of the Middle East: Perception and Foreign Policy,” *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 482, no. 1 (1985): pp. 160-175, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0002716285482001010>. Accessed 26 June 2022.

¹⁸ Holly M. Jackson, “The New York Times Distorts The Palestinian Struggle: A Case Study of Anti-Palestinian Bias in American News Coverage of the First and Second Palestinian Intifadas. S,” *Journal of Palestine Studies*, May 19, 2021. Accessed 26 June 2022.

¹⁹ Julie Peteet, “Language Matters: Talking about Palestine,” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 45, no. 2 (January 2016): pp. 24-40, <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2016.45.2.24>. Accessed 26 June 2022.

world as an enemy opposite to the Western world, and reports on Palestine are affected with this²⁰. With this, it can be said that there are problems in media coverage in the Israel-Palestine conflict that can lead to many implications about the relationship between mass media and the general public.

Furthermore, the problem is what agenda a media has on their coverage in a given conflict. In this context, this means questioning the media agenda on their coverage in the Israel-Palestine conflict. If the US media cannot adequately inform the general public on the failing and one-sidedness of United States foreign policy in the Israel-Palestine conflict, then the agenda-setting of the media may prevent this. For example, an American citizen who reads that Hamas are continuously attacking Israel and that Israel is ‘defending’ themselves from the relentless aggression of Hamas will have no qualm in the massive military package assistant that the United States gave yearly toward the Israeli military posture. In the opposite, if the US media emphasise the disproportionate damage suffered by Israeli and Palestine civilians and that the Israeli military sometimes shows little to no restraint to make sure that they don’t hit civil targets using America-given weapons and technologies, then the audience would perhaps at least questions the current state of the United States relationship with Israel.

²⁰ Susan Dente Ross, “Framing of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict in Thirteen Months of New York Times Editorials Surrounding the Attack of September 11, 2001,” *Conflict & Communication Online* 2, no. 2 (2003). Accessed 26 June 2022.

1.2.2 Problem Limitation

This thesis will focus on the problem of the media's *agenda-setting* on the Israel-Palestine conflict, more specifically the 2014 Gaza War, due to the multitude of problems surrounding the media agenda on a given issue. This means that the main topic of research is limited to the media's agenda as it can be known through content analysis. The implications, such as media effect to public opinion or to public policymaking are outside of the limitation of this research.

The main object of research or media of choice is the New York Times, the highly regarded and one of the most important and popular international media. It is also regarded as a national 'newspaper of record' with an authoritative voice on what happened and not regarding certain issues or cases²¹. The *Times* has been very active on international reporting and has been present on conflicts around the world, including the Israel-Palestine conflict. It also has a digitised library that can be easily accessed, making it easier to obtain the data needed for this research. With these considerations, this research will analyse the journalistic products of the *Times*, mainly its front-page publications.

The research problem is the Israel-Palestine conflict, confined to the 2014 Gaza War. More specifically, the 2014 Gaza War as it is understood here is the culmination of months of escalating tension that led to the death of several Israeli teenagers that sparked an attack from the Israeli forces. This is chosen due to its

²¹ Encyclopædia Britannica, "The New York Times," Encyclopædia Britannica (Encyclopædia Britannica, inc., March 26, 2015), <https://www.britannica.com/topic/The-New-York-Times>. Accessed 31 October 2022.

significance as a truly international problem as it has been described before. Due to the multitude nature of this problem, this research will limit itself to active conflict that contains direct military contact, that is, between the *Israel Defence Forces* (IDF) and the militia of Palestine from the *Palestinian Liberation Organization* (PLO). One of the conflicts that fits this definition is war, more specifically the 2014 Gaza War. This war is one of the most recent major conflicts in the Israel-Palestine conflict, yet still far enough that all the information surrounding it can be obtained with convincing certainty without constant change.

As for the period itself, this research will start from the retaliation of Hamas toward the death of their militants in the hand of Israeli Air Forces on Monday, 7th July of 2014, and ends on Tuesday, 26th August of 2014 as the date of the agreed cease-fire between Israel and Palestine. This means that the object of research would be reports from the *Times* dated in this period.

1.2.3 Research Question

The research question will be **What is the *New York Times* agenda-setting on the 2014 Gaza War coverage?** The *New York Times* will be the main object of research, with the main problem located on the media agenda, and the 2014 Gaza War as the limitation of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

1.3 Research Purpose

This research purpose is to find the media agenda of the *New York Times* in their coverage of the 2014 Gaza War. Using content analysis toward NYT coverage, the agenda-setting of the *New York Times* will be determined in the context of whether it is slanted toward the United States official position on the war, slanted *against* it, or neutral.

1.3.1 Practical Use of the Research

The practical use of this research would serve as requirements for graduation. Specifically, this research would be used as part of the International Relation undergraduate program of Universitas Katolik Parahyangan.

1.4 Literature Review

There are several notable researches that have been done about the United States media agenda in their Middle East coverage, some of them even explicitly analysing the *New York Times* content. For example, Zelizer has questioned the *Times* status as a newspaper of record due to how many of its editorial team have pro-Israel stance and with strong antipathy toward the Palestinian Liberation Organization.²² While the *Times* has adopted the stance that both parties—Israel and Palestine—have their share of blame in the conflict, oftentimes they put the burden of blame toward the Palestinian side more than the Israeli side. This

²² Barbie Zelizer, David Park, and David Gudelunas, "How Bias Shapes the News: Challenging the New York Times' Status as a Newspaper of Record on the Middle East," *Journalism* 3, no. 3 (2002): pp. 283-307, <https://doi.org/10.1177/146488490200300305>. Accessed 26 June 2022.

furthermore led Zelizer and others to criticise the *Times* status as historical record, which implicitly do not take into account the slanted *Times* coverage toward Israel. This is corroborated in further research of Jackson. Using machine-assisted content analysis, the *New York Times*' coverage during the First and Second Intifadas employed heavy bias against the Palestinian struggles, for example the use of passive voice to refer toward violent actions against Palestinians and the use of negative rethorics in reference toward the Palestinians²³. Furthermore, Jackson said that the characterisation by the *Times*' coverage are 'distorting' the Palestinian Struggle, painting them as the 'aggressor' side of the conflict. From this it has been already known that the *New York Times* has a history of tendency toward bias against Palestine and the Palestinians.

These findings are consistent with other researches that analyse US media content in general. Still in the coverage of the Second Intifada—a major development in the Israel-Palestine conflict, US media characterise bottom-up violence from the Palestinians as 'terrorism' while it do not sign the same quality to attacks by the *Israeli Defence Forces*²⁴. This is further confirmed in coverage about Israel and Jenin, when the US media characterisation of bottom-up violence as 'terrorism' left out institutional and political violence sanctioned by Israel, and nowhere near assigning it the same term as the Palestinians—'terrorism'²⁵. Even

²³ Holly M. Jackson, "The New York Times Distorts The Palestinian Struggle: A Case Study of Anti-Palestinian Bias in American News Coverage of the First and Second Palestinian Intifadas. S," *Journal of Palestine Studies*, May 19, 2021. Accessed 26 June 2022.

²⁴ Amani Ismail, "Mission Statehood: Portraits of the Second Palestinian Intifada in US News Media," *Media, War & Conflict* 1, no. 2 (2008): pp. 177-201, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635208090956>. Accessed 26 June 2022

²⁵ Amani Ismail, "When the 'Fortress Crumbled': The Israel-Jenin Story in U.S. News Media," *Communication, Culture & Critique* 3, no. 1 (2010): pp. 66-84, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1753-9137.2009.01058.x>. Accessed 26 June 2022

in several instances when US media tells explicitly the statistics of death and economic loss—and the massive disparity in it—of Israel and Palestine victims, language of the press still paint Palestine as aggressor with sentences such as ‘thousands of missiles raining Israel’²⁶. All of these researches point out to one conclusion, that even in the modern times and with more available information, the *New York Times* and the US media still shows slanted—and oven unfair—bias toward Israel and against Palestine with distorted assignment of role between victim and assailant.

Furthermore, US media analysis of the Israel-Palestine conflict often uses sensationalist angles, for example providing context about land disputes, even if it is not adequate to explain the conflict. This sensationalist, simplistic agenda by US media continues in their coverage of Israel’s wall in the West Bank²⁷. While the previous research concludes that the *Times* has an agenda that favours the Israeli side, research about the simplistic nature of this coverage could significantly affect the agenda-setting of the *New York Times* in their coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict.

Moreover, several researches have pointed out the parallel between the United States government stance and the US media agenda. In the case of Gulf War, mass media in the US will not pursue further any coverage of a particular issue or criticism toward how US government handle such issue if it has reached

²⁶ Peteet, Julie. “Language Matters: Talking about Palestine.” *Journal of Palestine Studies* 45, no. 2 (2016): 24–40. <https://doi.org/10.1525/jps.2016.45.2.24>. Accessed 26 June 2022

²⁷ Amani Ismail, “Making Sense of a Barrier: U.S. News Discourses on Israel’s Dividing Wall,” *Journal of Communication Inquiry* 34, no. 1 (2009): pp. 85-108, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0196859909338408>. Accessed 26 June 2022

bipartisan support²⁸. In the case of Israeli-Palestine conflict, US media assign the United States as an impartial ‘third party’²⁹. On the case of Abu Ghraib torture, which will be described further below, the United States press only actively pursues coverage and assigning the word ‘torture’ to their coverage when this issue gained traction in the United States government, in this instance when Senator McCain explicitly said that the case is torture due to his history of being a Prisoners of War in Vietnam³⁰. From this it can be inferred that along with pro-Israel, anti-Palestine bias, the US media and the *New York Times* has tendency to have a similarity in their coverage agenda with the official US government position on a given international affair, regardless of intention.

The research gap in the literature is the scarcity of research utilising qualitative tools and using editorial—not regular reports—as data collection method. While there is much research already written on the media agenda in the Israel-Palestine conflict, it is almost always utilised quantitative tools, some even using machine-assisted article ‘coding’, for example in the Intifada coverage research by Holly Jackson. This is despite agenda-setting can be done with both qualitative and quantitative tools, and this thesis will use narrative, descriptive methods to find the agenda-setting of the *New York Times*. Furthermore, most of the literature cited above uses regular reports or news features while almost none

²⁸ Jonathan Mermin, “Conflict in the Sphere of Consensus? Critical Reporting on the Panama Invasion and the Gulf War,” *Political Communication* 13, no. 2 (1996): pp. 181-194, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10584609.1996.9963106>. Accessed 26 June 2022

²⁹ Robert L. Handley and Amani Ismail, “Territory under Siege: ‘Their’ News, ‘Our’ News and ‘Ours Both’ News of the 2008 Gaza Crisis,” *Media, War & Conflict* 3, no. 3 (2010): pp. 279-297, <https://doi.org/10.1177/1750635210364690>. Accessed 26 June 2022

³⁰ W. Lance Bennett, Regina G. Lawrence, and Steven Livingston, *When the Press Fails: Political Power and the News Media from Iraq to Katrina* (Chicago, United States: University of Chicago Press, 2008). Accessed 26 June 2022.

analysed editorial content. This thesis will use editorial content as it is the only section in which the newsroom of the newspaper is allowed to explicitly give their stance, their opinion on the situation, and their policy advice. Through analysing the *Times*' coverage in Gaza from their Editorial Board and adding the regular report they have done on the war, it can help better to see what exactly is the agenda that the *Times* maintains and how exactly the Editorial Board of the *Times* maintains such a perspective.

1.5 Theoretical Framework

Traditional approaches in International Relations such as Realism and Liberalism were mainly concerned with state actors, but this paradigm has been shifting since the end of the Cold War. Due to how international relations and international conflict are understood as affairs between nations, for a long time studies of international conflict followed the 'three images' approach by Kenneth Waltz³¹. Nevertheless, this approach has been heavily criticised during the aftermath of the Cold War, with emphasis shifting toward non-state actors such as mass media. The importance of media was pronounced with a shifting paradigm from quantifiable objects of research such as weapon arsenal and economic growth toward cultural behaviour that is heavily influenced by images and perception³² or more known as the Constructivist camp. In constructivist thought, it is important to know what the actors perceive of the issue or of their allies and

³¹ J. David Singer, "The Level-of-Analysis Problem in International Relations," *World Politics* 14, no. 1 (1961): pp. 77-92, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2009557>. Accessed 31 October 2022.

³² Filiz Coban, "The Role of the Media in International Relations: From the CNN Effect to the Al-Jazeera Effect," *Journal of International Relations and Foreign Policy* 4, no. 2 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.15640/jirfp.v4n2a3>. Accessed 31 October 2022.

enemies, and how that perception materialises in the first place. In turn, mass media plays a critical role in the formation and dissemination of these images and perceptions, which influence the decision-making of international actors³³. With this shift, media positions in International Relations can be positioned in an effort to understand perception and images pertained by states, world leaders, and other actors that lead them to a certain action or foreign policy.

The role of media in International Relations study has since been widely recognised and utilised among many researchers³⁴. This role of media utilise researches starting from Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion*³⁵ that continues in Bernard Cecil Cohen's *Press and Foreign Policy*³⁶ which would eventually be developed further by Maxwell McCombs in **agenda-setting theory**. The principle behind this line of thought is simple: mass media decides which (international) problems are worth paying attention to and which ones are irrelevant or even neglectable. Furthermore, in a particular topic, the media will bring what information they deemed important, which sources they deemed capable and trustworthy, and what frame they deemed correct to assess a certain situation, all of which will have a profound effect on public opinion³⁷.

³³ Allan Thompson, "The News Media and International Relations: Experience and the Media Reality," *Canadian Journal of Communication* 13, no. 1 (January 1987): pp. 39-54, <https://doi.org/10.22230/cjc.1987v13n1a440>. Accessed 31 October 2022.

³⁴Melike, Yagmur Savrum and Leon Monroe Miller. "The Role of The Media In Conflict, Peace-Building, and International Relations." (2015). Accessed 31 October 2022.

³⁵ Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (New York, United States: Free Pr. u.a., 1965). Accessed 26 June 2022.

³⁶ Bernard Cecil Cohen, *The Press and Foreign Policy* (Princeton, NJ, United States: Princeton University Library, 2015). Accessed 31 October 2022.

³⁷ Maxwell E. McCombs and Donald L. Shaw, "The Agenda-Setting Function of Mass Media," *Public Opinion Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (1972): p. 176, <https://doi.org/10.1086/267990>. Accessed 31 October 2022.

In the context of this thesis, agenda-setting will be utilised to find what exactly is the information the *Times* emphasised in their coverage of 2014 Gaza War. One of the examples is information on the death of several Israeli teenagers that set the stage for the war. In the following chapters, coverage of the *Times* on the death of the Israeli teenagers will be part of the analysis to determine what agenda-setting the *Times* has. Another example would be whether the *Times* prominently reports the United States involvement in this war, from the Israeli military equipment that is part of US military aid or the shuttle diplomacy of John Kerry.

Content analysis will be used in this thesis as it is frequently used by other scholars analysing the role of media in international conflict³⁸. Before, content analysis was mainly used in other fields of social sciences such as communication studies and literary studies. However, in International Relations, there is an increasing interest in searching meaning and image within a text to contribute toward an understanding on a given international conflict³⁹. This task is primarily conducted with content analysis, with historically IR has integrated this approach since the late 1980s⁴⁰. Therefore, this thesis will continue to utilise content analysis to provide understanding toward images and meanings surrounding the Israel-Palestine conflict.

³⁸ Jrg Matthes and Matthias Kohring, "The Content Analysis of Media Frames: Toward Improving Reliability and Validity," *Journal of Communication* 58, no. 2 (2008): pp. 258-279, <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1460-2466.2008.00384.x>. Accessed 31 October 2022.

³⁹ Hamid Mowlana, "The Role of Media in Contemporary International Relations: Culture and Politics at the Crossroads," *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 11, no. 1 (2015): pp. 84-96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2015.1032296>. Accessed 31 October 2022.

⁴⁰ Arash Heydarian Pashakhanlou, "Fully Integrated Content Analysis in International Relations," *International Relations* 31, no. 4 (2017): pp. 447-465, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0047117817723060>. Accessed 26 June 2022.

1.6 Research and Data Collection Method

1.6.1 Research Method

This research will use **content analysis** in the context of international relations. While stemming from other social science studies, content analysis has been consistently used in IR studies due to its strength in uncovering implicit and explicit meaning⁴¹. International journalism studies, such as agenda-setting research that this paper will do, rely on content analysis to unearth what the media meant in their coverage⁴². In this context, the agenda of the *Times* and influence of this agenda by its sourcing can only be done by utilising content analysis. Through agenda-setting, *Times* coverage about the war that has salience can be discovered and ascertained.

1.6.2 Data Collecting Method

Content analysis research is used primarily to analyse text. While there is much flexible data that can be analysed under content analysis in international relation context, such as speeches, foreign policy, exchange of letters, and other multimedia, this research will use newspapers as its research data. More specifically, due to the various arrangements of news articles, this research will exclusively analyse editorial letters throughout the period sent by the *New York Times*' editorial board. The reasoning to choose solely editorial letters is due to the qualitative nature of this research. Analysis of editorial letters has been variously

⁴¹*Ibid.*

⁴² Audie Klotz and Deepa Prakash, *Qualitative Methods in International Relations: A Pluralist Guide* (Basingstoke, United Kingdom: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011). Accessed 31 October 2022.

conducted before by content analysis scholars due to its capability to directly gain understanding about a newspaper position on any given issue.

For secondary data, this research will use literature study of content analysis toward mass media in their coverage of Israel-Palestine conflict, more specifically coverages that involve the *New York Times* or other US newspaper. This will be laid out before the agenda-setting analysis to function as a backdrop for the rest of this thesis, which is to find specifically the *Times*' agenda in 2014 Gaza War coverage.

1.7 Research Structure

Previously in **Chapter I**, the core problem of international actors' reliance toward mass media for information of the war and other international conflicts are established, with brief background on the Israel-Palestine conflict and the rationale behind choosing this particular conflict. Moreover, a literature review has been explained to see what has already been researched on the topic of media agenda in the Israel-Palestine conflict in particular and in Middle East reporting in general, yielding a considerable initial conclusion that the US media has a tendency to be lenient toward Israel, heavily criticised Palestine, and supporting US stance in the area. However, another approach will be utilised in this thesis, such as the usage of editorial content and qualitative-descriptive nature of the analysis.

In **Chapter II: *New York Times* and Israel-Palestine Conflict Coverage**, first the brief profile of the *Times* will be explained, mainly its role in international

journalism starting from the beginning of the *Times* itself. Moreover, the role of media in the United States will also be explained briefly. From that, the explanation will pivot toward a track record of mass media reporting on the Middle East issue in general and Israel-Palestine Coverage in particular. At last, as a backdrop toward knowing the media agenda in the Israel-Palestine conflict, previous research that has contributed on this issue will be discussed.

In **Chapter III: The *New York Times* Editorial Content on the 2014 Gaza War**, the content analysis will commence to see, with agenda-setting theory and through the lens of the *Times* editorial team, what information salience the *Times* has and what exactly are their position on their coverage in Gaza. This section will also bring official statements from related parties such as the *Department of State*, the *Israeli Defence Forces*, and the *Palestinian Authority*, to bring conclusion toward to whom the *Times* agenda is more in agreement.

In **Chapter IV: Conclusion**, the implication of the findings from chapter III will be briefly discussed. Afterward, this section will be going into the conclusion about what exactly is the *Times* agenda in their coverage in the 2014 Gaza War. Future research that can stem from this will also be outlined.