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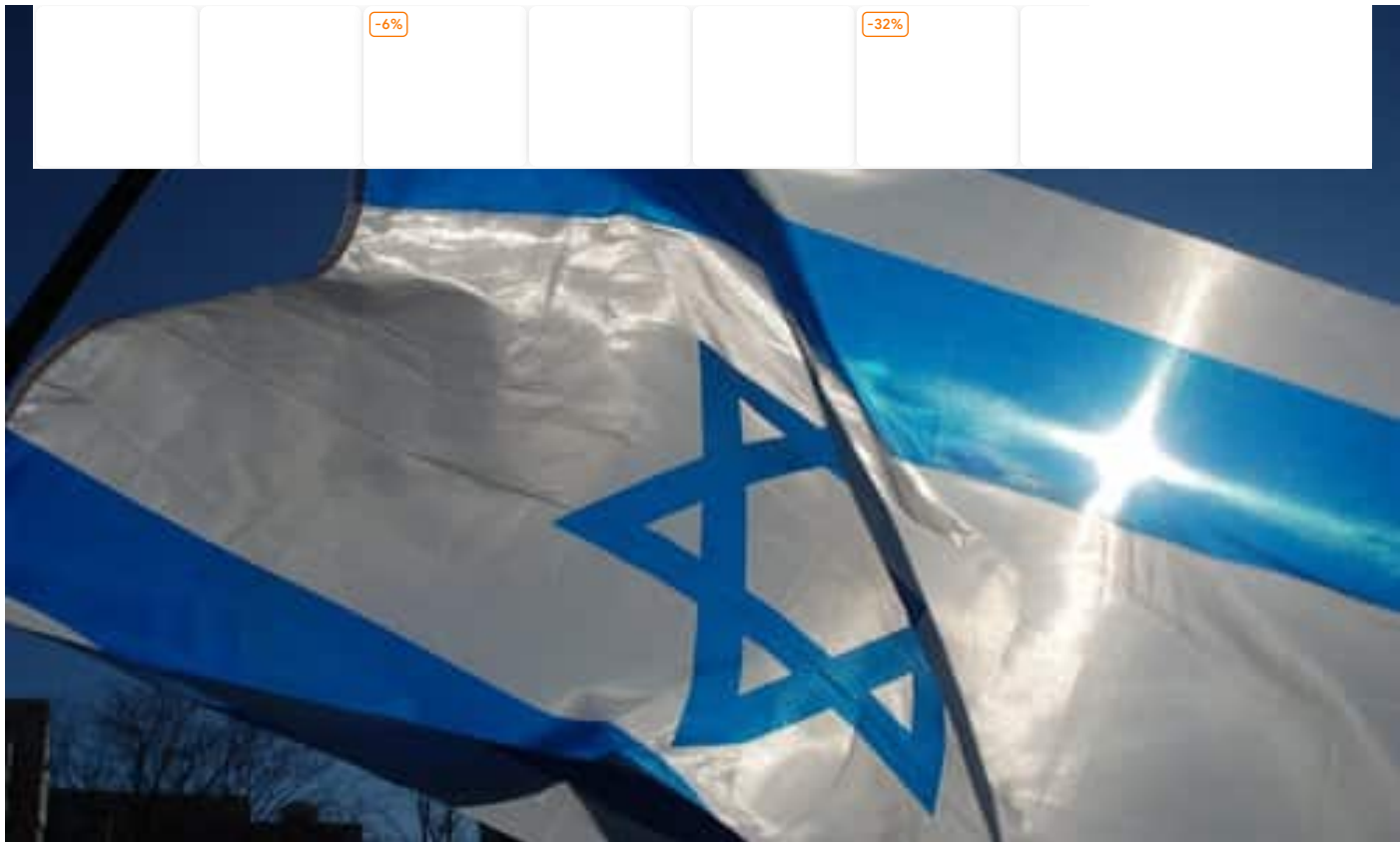


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## ARTICLE

The Architecture Of Obsession: How Media Coverage Warps Israel's Reality





BY ADAM ELIYAHU BERKOWITZ/ISRAEL 365 NEWS JANUARY 22, 2026

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When Samuel Hyde set out to explain why Israel dominates global media coverage, he knew the debate would begin where it always does--with arguments over words. Critics and defenders alike fixate on whether journalists write "settlement" or "neighborhood," whether the barrier is labeled a "security fence" or "apartheid wall."

These semantic battles feel forensic, as if the correct noun might finally settle the great drama of the Middle East. But Hyde, a South African-Israeli writer and fellow at the Jewish People Policy Institute, identifies these disputes as exactly what they are: a distraction. Words matter, he writes, but they keep us arguing on the surface while deeper, more corrupting structures remain untouched and unseen.

In a Jerusalem Post editorial and on his Substack, Hyde exposes two distortions so massive they become strangely invisible. The first is the sheer scale of attention--not criticism, but attention--directed at Israel. The second is the systematic reduction of regional warfare into a localized Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Together, these forces explain why Israel occupies such an outsized and morally charged place in Western media's imagination, and why that coverage has become both obsessive and fundamentally dishonest.

How does disproportionate media coverage transform Israel from a country into a symbol--and what reality gets erased in that transformation?

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Hyde begins with numbers that expose an obsession defying rational explanation. In the first nine months following October 7, 2023, The New York Times published 6,656 articles about the Gaza war. Compare that to 80 articles covering the American-led battle to free Mosul,

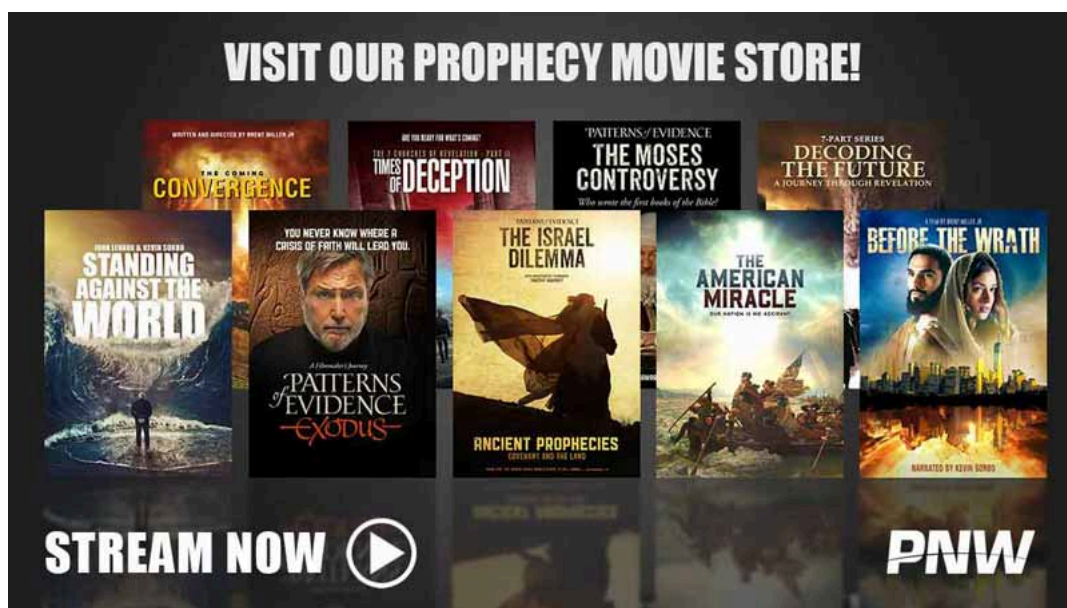
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The Friedman revealed that AP employed more full-time journalists covering Israel than it assigned to China, India, and Russia combined. Israel received more dedicated staff than all of sub-Saharan Africa--an entire continent encompassing dozens of countries, hundreds of millions of people, multiple wars, famines, mass displacement, and genocidal violence. As Hyde writes, "You cannot plausibly cover Israel more than an entire continent without warping the reader's sense of reality."

This is not journalism as rational analysis. Even if news were merely meant to cover suffering, power, and danger on Earth, this allocation of resources would be indefensible. The pattern reveals something else entirely: a systemic fascination bordering on obsession with covering Israel as though it were the gravitational center of world affairs.

Hyde identifies the consequence of this saturation: "This saturation coverage creates the illusion of centrality." Audiences learn that whatever they see most frequently must be the most important event in the world. Israel transforms from one nation among many into "a kind of moral index of the age--a stage upon which the world's conscience is imagined to be tested and revealed." Meanwhile, catastrophes of far greater scale and brutality flicker briefly across screens before disappearing into silence.



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Hyde argues this is not accidental. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict occupies a peculiar and disproportionate place in Western political imagination, unmatched by deadlier or more brutal conflicts. Israel is small enough to be grasped symbolically but complex enough to absorb endless projection. "It is intimate, familiar, and endlessly legible to Western eyes in a way that 'distant' tragedies are not," Hyde writes. "And so it becomes over-seen, over-examined, intensely dissected, and uniquely moralized until the examination itself becomes both activism and a substitute for understanding."

The second distortion operates at the conceptual level. Media coverage routinely frames Israel's wars as "the Israeli-Palestinian conflict," as though the entire story were a localized struggle between two neighboring peoples--one strong and one weak, one powerful and one victimized. Hyde calls this framing "tidy, emotionally resonant, and yet profoundly misleading."

The reality is stark: "Most of Israel's wars have not been fought against Palestinians but against Egyptians and Jordanians, Syrians and Lebanese, Iraqis and, increasingly, Iranians." Israel's most significant enemy today is the Islamic regime in Iran--a non-Arab, non-Palestinian regional power pursuing nuclear and strategic ambitions. During the recent war, rockets fired at Israel came from Gaza, Lebanon, Yemen, Iraq, and Iran itself.

Hyde offers a powerful image: "Imagine for a moment a satellite photograph that does nothing but trace the arcs of ballistic missiles and rockets fired at Israel over the past years--a dark map illuminated by red lines streaking inward from multiple directions. Such an image would reveal instantly what the dominant narrative conceals: the contours of a regional war."

But that is not how the story gets told. A vast regional struggle involving state and non-state actors, militias and proxies, ideologies and regimes stretching across the Middle East gets reduced to a single pairing: Israelis versus Palestinians. In this reduction, Israel is cast as the

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template." The result is a narrative both emotionally compelling and intellectually impoverished--a morality play where Israel embodies the worst sins of the modern age while broader regional dynamics dissolve into abstraction.

Once established, this narrative becomes self-reinforcing. The more Israel is covered, the more it seems to matter uniquely. The more it is framed as the central actor in a simplified conflict, the easier it becomes to load it with symbolic meaning. "Israel ceases to be a state acting within a volatile region and becomes instead a metaphor for everything the imagination fears about power and injustice," Hyde writes.

This explains why disputes over terminology feel so intense yet change so little. The problem is not word choice. "It is that the story being told is already too small to hold the truth, and too large to escape moral projection. It magnifies Israel until it eclipses the region, and then isolates it until it bears responsibility for forces far beyond its control."

Matti Friedman, who spent years inside the machinery of international journalism as an AP reporter, has documented how this obsession operates from within news organizations. His observations confirm Hyde's analysis with the weight of insider testimony. The disproportionate allocation of journalistic resources to Israel is not merely a statistical anomaly--it reflects editorial priorities that treat Israel as uniquely deserving of scrutiny and moral judgment.

Friedman's revelation about AP staffing levels exposes the concrete decisions behind the abstraction of bias. When a news organization assigns more reporters to cover Israel than to cover China, India, and Russia combined--nations that together represent billions of people and possess nuclear arsenals--the organization is making a choice about what matters.

When that same organization dedicates more resources to Israel than to all of sub-Saharan Africa, it is declaring through its actions that one small nation in the Middle East deserves more attention than an entire continent experiencing wars, genocides, and humanitarian catastrophes.

These staffing decisions create a feedback loop. More reporters produce more stories. More stories train audiences to believe Israel is more important. The belief in Israel's importance justifies assigning more reporters. The cycle continues until the coverage itself becomes the story, and Israel's conflicts--real but limited in scale--loom larger in global consciousness than wars killing hundreds of thousands elsewhere.

When media coverage magnifies Israel until it eclipses an entire region, then isolates it until it bears responsibility for forces beyond its control, journalism becomes a form of false testimony.

CAMERA, the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis, has tracked similar patterns at CNN and other major outlets. The obsession transcends individual journalists or specific editorial decisions. It is systematic, structural, and self-perpetuating.

Hyde's analysis is not about denying Palestinian suffering or sanctifying Israeli policy. It is about demanding "proportionality, context, and intellectual honesty--qualities without which journalism becomes a kind of secular theology, assigning sin and virtue according to narrative convenience rather than reality."

The coverage of Israel feels uniquely charged, moralized, and obsessive because it is. Until we confront the media structures producing this obsession--the imbalance of attention and the fiction of a purely local conflict--we will continue arguing over words while missing the story those words were meant to describe.



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