Israel and the Foreign Media

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By

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This book is dedicated to our mothers

Jeny (Sheindl) Schleifer, o.b.m., a Holocaust survivor,
a true ember plucked from the fire

Hanna Seaman-Gol, who instills in us, her children,
the love of Israel and the duty to uphold the truth

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FOREWORD

I was invited to speak recently at a NATO forum about what have been euphemistically called the "lone wolf attacks," and to present my views garnered from thirty years of research on psychological warfare in the Arab-Israeli Conflict. I spoke about the fact that in a number of cases, the young men and women who approached IDF soldiers with kitchen knives threw them away after a symbolic attempt to stab their victims. In their investigation they admitted that life in Palestinian villages and towns is so bad, that they would prefer an Israeli prison—bringing with it the chance of an academic education, generous funding, and hero status in their families and communities—to freedom. A NATO information officer came up to me (during the break, of course) and asked, "How come we never get to hear about these things?"

What others hear—and don't hear—about the Middle East depends on media representation of events. And the media (though they vehemently deny it) are part and parcel of the delivery channels used by initiators of psychological operations campaigns (PSYOP) to disseminate information and influence their target audiences.

The NATO officer's question triggered action: A manuscript prepared a long time ago with Danny Seaman, a retired Israeli official who headed the Israeli Government Press Office (GPO) for many years, was dusted off, reviewed and restructured, and now published. Preparing the structure of this book was a long, grueling process. We interviewed Danny over a period of eighteen months, moving carefully along a path fraught with emotional issues, past frustrations, and current legal difficulties, working to contain and shape the thunderous flow of information coming from someone who had held the line over such a long period of time, covering some of the most sensitive issues in the history of the state.

None of this would have been possible without the help of the diligent Jessica Snapper, a media and intelligence analyst; Minna Feather, who transliterated a fearful amount of recordings; Vera Resnick my long time

editor and voice of reason; Chaya Silverstone, my longtime copy editor; and many others, especially my wife, Channah, who has put up with my whims of saving the Western world rather than acquiring a proper and standard academic education.

The material that follows in the chapters of this book fulfills several objectives. For Danny, the interviews were a cathartic experience, leaving him more settled when they were completed. An additional important objective was to transform these memoirs into a basic resource for young journalists who wish to become foreign correspondents, an occupation still perceived as high-ranking in the business of information distribution. This book is furthermore intended to give all those who study war, the history of the Middle East, and its coverage a better understanding of the information flow from the Arab-Israeli conflict that has shaped their perception of the conflict, together with a structured, analytical explanation of why they never got to "hear about those things"—whether they are NATO officials, military analysts, or concerned educated citizens.

Much material had to be left out, either out of concern for physical safety, legal considerations, or to preserve objectivity as far as possible in such a personal account. The purpose of this book is to teach, and we have tried our best to serve that purpose. Therefore, after much contemplation, we decided on the following structure. The work is prefaced with a basic introduction and a historical overview of Arab-Israeli media relations over the last century, demonstrating the underpinnings of Israel's current media policy and providing the setting for Danny's account of his work and experiences. Danny's account forms the central body of this book and is presented with minimal additions, which will appear in the form of elements mainly appearing in the more analytical sections of each chapter, footnotes for explanations when needed, and references to theory of similar aspects in past case studies. A theoretical analysis of the Israeli case study will be presented in the final chapter, together with thoughts and conclusions regarding the material presented by Danny.

It is important for us to note that this book is not an indictment against the media for being anti-Israel or pro-Palestinian. It is our intent to provide readers with the information required to understand how the media is failing

to do its job, and how fake news has taken hold. Awareness and understanding are crucial. Whether the journalists in question were anti-Israel is actually irrelevant. What is important is whether they upheld professional standards.

We hope to strike the correct balance. Danny's account is crucial to any person, journalist or otherwise, for whom the facts take precedence over parroting a politically correct opinion or toeing an editorial line. And understanding how such opinions and editorial lines came to be, and how, why, and to what end the gross manipulation of the media has been perpetrated on a gullible public as part of a carefully orchestrated psychological campaign, will lead people to take news items on the Middle East and the conflict with the kilograms of salt they so richly deserve.

Disclaimer: All views expressed in this book are solely Danny's and mine.

Ron Schleifer
August 2022

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid increase in information technology and global interconnectedness, the media has unprecedented influence on how we see the world today. Journalists have become our chief purveyor of information from the outside, playing an important role in creating checks and balances in a democracy. But in the tumult of conflict zones, the media can sometimes get the story horribly wrong. Whether due to personal agendas or predispositions, misplaced good intentions, intimidation from external parties, or an obsession with landing "scoops" that results in ethical shortcuts, journalists can sometimes present narratives to the public that are flagrantly out of touch with reality. If the media has become such a powerful player in shaping the policies and perceptions of the masses, then doesn't the public have a right to know a bit more about its gatekeepers?

In an era of asymmetric warfare, democracies are especially vulnerable to having their liberal institutions used against them, as terrorist groups exploit the media to further their message and goals. The "Goliath" state, with all its firepower and prosperity, is in fact bound by its liberal values—cherished values that if harmed by the state in its fight against terrorism, it would constitute a victory for the terrorists. In the case of Israel, the media war is being fought on an uneven battlefield. While the State of Israel promotes open debate and free media, the Palestinian Authority (PA) unapologetically harasses, manipulates, and restricts the press. Over the course of Danny's career in the Government Press Office (GPO) in Jerusalem, he also witnessed case after case in which the foreign press willingly *cooperated* with terrorists. From assisting suicide bombings to revealing details about missile launches against cities, if Israeli citizens knew what he knows about the behavior of the foreign press, there would be an uproar in the streets.

The Palestinian manipulation of media against Israel is a quintessential case study of psychological warfare, or PSYOP (Psychological Operations), at its most effective. PSYOP has been developed over the years into a highly

effective weapon in long-term, low-intensity conflicts in which the more militarily powerful party is strangled to the effect that it is unable to fully exploit its conventional resources. In asymmetric warfare, it is paradoxically the weaker side that determines the nature of the conflict, influencing both the enemy's perceptions and that of the enemy's supporters. Moreover, the party with superior military capabilities tends to rely heavily on what it perceives as its strongest (conventional) resources while allotting PSYOP a minimal role within its national defense policy.[1] Even if such a psychological warfare campaign is detected, smaller entities are able to react significantly faster and more creatively than the larger, more institutionalized entity, which is burdened by unwieldy bureaucracies. This makes it difficult for a country like Israel to respond to media manipulations by the Palestinians, and to the deterioration of journalistic standards by foreign correspondents operating in the area.

This battle does not involve Israel alone. Many of the problems and paradoxes that Israel is facing when it comes to countering propaganda and manipulation of the press are relevant to other Western democracies struggling to defend themselves in conflict zones today. The old school saying that "sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me" does not apply when it comes to journalists reporting erroneous information from a battlefield. Words have power. They can influence entire populations, alter the policies of governments, and incite thousands to violence on the ground. And this is why serious journalists and other parties interested in the field of media should take a closer look at the gatekeepers of perception, and at the other actors fighting for the hearts and minds of the people. As the British poet William Blake wrote, "If the doors of perception were cleansed, everything would appear as it is."[2]

The foreign media itself is often used as a tool in shifting balances during a conflict. Over time in Israel, an increasing body of evidence has been gathered indicating that the foreign media is used as a tool by the

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[1] August G. Jannarone and Charles G. Doig, "PSYOP is a Nasty Term—Too Bad, Redux," *IO Sphere* (Summer 2008): 8–14.
[2] William Blake, *The Marriage of Heaven and Hell* (CreateSpace, 2014).

Palestinians for winning political victories.[3] Once the foreign media is influenced to report favorably on one party in the conflict, that party is going to receive more funding and political support, among other benefits. At the same time, the party receiving the harsher criticism is more likely to lose its financial and political supporters over time.

Freedom of speech and authoritarian regimes

Freedom of speech and a free press are an innovation developed by democracies, an institution revered by democracies—and a tool for manipulation used most expertly by dictatorships and authoritarian regimes. The manipulation of journalists by dictatorships attained new heights in the USSR during the 1930s. While Stalin's purges were in full swing, the Soviet Union invited journalists and intellectuals living in exile to return to their homeland. Plied with luxuries, benefits, and carefully organized meetings, the journalists delivered the required goods and praised Stalin and the Soviet Union to the skies.[4]

In authoritarian regimes, journalists are always handled by the government. Free speech must be carefully modulated to appear free while undergoing rigorous oversight and limitations. Thus, an authoritarian regime can be made to seem benign, almost avuncular in Stalin's case—while a democracy without such limitations can be torn to shreds in the public eye with no compunction, and no fear of loss of access or other repercussions.

Journalists such as Walter Duranty were the creatures of the Soviet regime. Duranty in the 1930s went so far as to be awarded the later title of "Stalin's Apologist," in addition to the Pulitzer Prize he received for whitewashing the dictator's purges and sidelining such small details as

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[3] Dan Diker, "The Influence of Palestinian Organizations on Foreign News Reporting," *Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs* 2, no. 23 (March 27, 2003), https://www.jcpa.org/brief/brief2-23.htm.
[4] Ludmila Stern, *Western Intellectuals and the Soviet Union, 1920–40: From Red Square to the Left Bank* (London: Routledge, 2007).
The honest ones published their disappointment in Richard Crossman's *The God That Failed* (New York: Bantam Books, 1949). Contributors included Louis Fischer, André Gide, Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Stephen Spender, and Richard Wright

Stalin's murderous destruction of the kulaks, the lethal consequences of the Five-Year Plan, and the rigged show trials.[5]

If democracies were to manipulate the media in such a fashion, it would undermine their entire raison d'être, and the very basis of democratic institutions and ideology. Authoritarian regimes have no need for such scruples.

In the Arab-Israeli[6] conflict, a central element is constantly overlooked: The Palestinian rulership, whether the PA or Hamas, is not a democracy. Although theoretically, Hamas was elected, its rulership of its own populace since that time has made a mockery of any vestiges of the democratic process. Summary death sentences for the slightest murmur of dissent or for any hint of collaboration is just one example.[7]

With a vibrant free press including 17 daily newspapers, at least 90 weekly newspapers, more than 250 periodical publications, and a number of Internet news sites—all with the right to express a wide variety of views without any threat of reprisal from the government,[8] Israel might be clearly and objectively categorized as a democracy with freedom of speech. Israel's democratic institutions and processes have withstood the test of time and the furious challenges hurled at it, whether concerning the Palestinians, or the internal divisions between religious, social, and political groups.

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[5] S. J. Taylor, *Frontiers of Lies Stalin's Apologist, Walter Duranty: The New York Times's Man in Moscow* (Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press. 1990).
Nicole Loroff, Jordan Vincent, and Valentina Kuryliw, "Holodomor: Denial and Silences. The Cover-Up: Denials, Dismissals and Silences," HREC Education, accessed March 29, 2022,
https://education.holodomor.ca/teaching-materials/holodomor-denial-silences/.
[6] This book refers to the older phrase of the conflict before it was reframed by the Palestinians after 1967 as "The Israeli-Palestinian conflict," separating "Palestinian" from "Arab" in the public awareness, as discussed later.
[7] AP and TOI Staff, "After Decade of Hamas Rule, Gaza Short on Freedom, Jobs, Power," *Times of Israel*, June 6, 2017, https://www.timesofisrael.com/after-decade-of-hamas-rule-gaza-short-on-freedom-jobs-power/.
[8] "2017 Country Reports on Human Rights Practices," Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor. U.S. Department of State, accessed November 23, 2022, https://www.state.gov/reports/2017-country-reports-on-human-rights-practices/.

The Palestinian approach to the press was shaped and developed by their early patrons, the Soviets, many years ago,[9] but curiously has enough strong similarities to have been modeled on the work of the Hagana and the Etzel forces of the 1940s. These pre-state entities were not democracies and courted the press in much the same ways the Palestinians do now. The parallels are not hard to find: the sailing of the *Exodus* and the Palestinian freedom flotillas; mass demonstrations with women in the forefront—something the Hagana did in their opposition to the British; and, most effective of all, developing relationships with the foreign media, something the Hagana and Etzel did in the 1940s with great élan, and something the Palestinians have been doing superbly since Raymonda Tawil, future mother-in-law of Yasser Arafat, set up the Palestinian Press Service in 1977, funded by the PLO.[10]

The last hundred years: An overview of Arab-Israeli media relations from pre-state Yishuv[11] times to the present

The Arab-Israeli conflict has been going on for a century now. During the first fifty years or so, coverage of Israel was relatively benign. However, over the last fifty years, albeit with a brief lull during the Oslo Accords, the disengagement in the Gaza Strip, and other fruitless peace processes, media coverage of Israel has been unremitting negative, even virulent. Facts are ignored or sidelined—even glaring facts, such as that more Palestinians have been killed by other Palestinians than by Israelis. Objective events are marginalized—such as Israel's attempts to make peace at great risk through the Oslo Accords, which were broken by the Palestinians the day after signing.[12] Israel has been subjected to increasingly intense media scrutiny

[9] Ron Schleifer, *Psychological Warfare in the Intifada: Israeli and Palestinian Media Politics and Military Strategies* (Eastbourne, UK: Sussex Academic Press, 2006), 100.

[10] Jim Lederman, *Battle Lines: The American Media and the Intifada* (New York: Henry Holt & Company, 1992).

[11] "Yishuv" is the term referring to the body of Jewish residents in the land of Israel prior to the establishment of the State of Israel in 1948.

[12] Efraim Karsh, "Arafat's Grand Strategy," *Middle East Quarterly* (Spring 2004): 3–11, https://www.meforum.org/605/arafats-grand-strategy.

over the last fifty years, which makes the total lack of perspective even more anomalous.

The name and framing of the conflict changed in 1967. Initially, the conflict was termed the "Arab-Israeli conflict," or even the "Arab-Jewish conflict." The underdog, the smaller entity in the conflict, was glaringly apparent. However, after the Six-Day War, the Palestinians reframed the conflict overnight. It now became the "Israeli-Palestinian conflict," referencing a group of Arabs who only began calling themselves Palestinians after 1967. In fact, prior to 1947, local Arab leaders had denigrated the term "Palestinian," decrying it as "a term the Zionists invented" and insisting that "our country was for centuries part of Syria."[13] However, after 1967, the term "Arab" was no longer to be used, only "Palestinian," separating the Palestinians from the Arabs in the public awareness.

This ability to reframe the conflict and its protagonists points to some expert strategic advice, and bears comparison with Ho Chi Minh's methods for defeating the Americans in Vietnam, another asymmetric battlefield. Faced with the brunt of US military power, Hanoi chose to defeat the enemy on a different battlefield. Its primary objective was "to inflict sufficient casualties on the Americans to undermine the army's morale, and support for the war at home."[14] Also a highly mobilized, autocratic society, it chose to use "people as an instrument of war. The mystique surrounding it involved the organization, mobilization, and motivation of people… Violence is necessary to it but not its essence. The goal is to seize power by disabling the society, using special means, i.e., assassination, propaganda, guerrilla warfare mixed with conventional military operations, chiefly organizational."[15]

From the mid-1980s, Palestinians meticulously cultivated an image of nonviolence. Violent operations, such as the Munich affair in the 1970s,

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[13] Auni Bey Abdul Hadi's testimony to the Peel Commission of 1937, quoted in Mitchell G. Bard, "Myths and Facts." Jewish Virtual Library, accessed March 29, 2022, https://www.jewishvirtuallibrary.org/myths-and-facts-exclusives#226.
[14] James A. Warren, "The Genius of North Vietnam's War Strategy," *The Daily Beast*, November 18, 2017.
[15] Former State Department officer Douglas Pike, cited in Warren, "The Genius."

were cleverly attributed to a seemingly dissident Black September Organization but were controlled in practice by Arafat. This image was aimed at garnering the world's attention after regrouping in 1968 under Arafat's leadership, as the organization was aware that a nonviolent image would bring more political gains than using violence. The nonviolent image prevailed until 1994—the Oslo accords could not have been achieved without it. With the Palestinian army (aka "police force") granted by the accords, levels of violence rose dramatically, mainly through suicide bombers, as the PLO began to compete with Hamas on the local and international stages. From the 1987 Intifada, an increase in what I will term "camouflaged violence" was seen. Reference was made in the press to stone throwing, inadequately reflecting that the projectiles included heavy rocks and even curbstones thrown from a height. In the current Gaza conflict, the camouflaged violence includes explosive-carrying kites and balloons. However, since "kites" and "balloons"—even when packed with explosives— are far removed from the terminology of violence, the Palestinian image of the essentially nonviolent victim of the conflict is still holding its own in the awareness of the West.[16]

By contrast, Israel's image over the last one hundred years, from its pre-state beginnings till today, has been far less coherent and consistent. The reasons for this are embedded in its roots, in the nature of its Jewish population, and in its vibrant liberal democracy.

Israel: A fragmented society

There is an old joke told of tourists traveling through the jungle in Borneo, where they are captured by local cannibals and placed in a pot for dinner. Only after the fire was lit beneath the cauldron did the Israeli member of the group pull out a micro Uzi, shooting the cannibals and freeing his fellow group members.

"Why did you wait so long?" asked the others.

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[16] Wendy Pearlman, *Violence, Nonviolence, and the Palestinian National Movement* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

"We Israelis never shoot first," responded the Israeli.

While the Palestinians are an extremely mobilized compact autocratic society, with direct and rapid decision-making capabilities, Israeli society is highly fragmented. Apart from the Six-Day War, where not to take preemptive action would have been tantamount to suicide, Israel rarely preempts, as this requires complex and near consensual decision-making. This is part of the difficulty underlying any cohesive public relations campaign, and why Israel's *hasbara* (public diplomacy) is so weak.

The Jewish people by nature are highly factionalized. Their move from the communities of the Diaspora to one homeland and state was unprecedented. The State of Israel has been molded almost against its will, built on a series of catastrophes occurring from the beginning of the twentieth century. The Holocaust was not the cause of the establishment of the State of Israel, an idea frequently put forward by the Left, the Palestinians, and German apologists. It was merely another—albeit huge—factor in the Jewish response to the anti-Semitism of the twentieth century.

The population of Israel includes those who went there following socialist anti-Semitism in the 1920s, seeking to create a socialist paradise for Jews in Israel, and as a result of European anti-Semitism in the 1930s, bringing a more middle-class mélange of German and Polish Jews to the country in search of a safe haven. The socialist founders brought the "New Jew" into being, born in the kibbutz, growing up free and strong, despising those who went like lambs to the slaughter in the concentration camps, to the point of referring to them as *sabonim*—soap bars.[17] The split between the socialist founders and the "bourgeoisie" exists until today. After Israel's foundation, a stream of Holocaust survivors entered the country. Following its declaration of independence, Jews arrived who had been driven out of Arab countries in droves.

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[17] Chemi Shalev, Full Interview with Holocaust Historian Deborah Lipstadt, *Ha'aretz*, December 16, 2011, https://www.haaretz.com/jewish/1.5220157.

The impact of catastrophe

As a country built upon and marked by a series of catastrophes, survival is perhaps the central unifying concept, underpinning most of its political directions, and the only issue capable of rallying and mobilizing the entire public, in times of war, for example.

However, survival is seen in different ways depending on cultural background and religious attitudes. This impacts strongly on the concept of an ideal state, and on what image to portray, whether strength or weakness, cooperative (and even appeasing) or independent in action and deed.

As the walls of the ghetto were crumbling during the enlightenment, a current emerged in Jewish society representing the need for love and approval from the gentile. This current has given strong leverage for Israel's enemies over the years in obtaining one-sided concessions with no return, except temporary global approval, and remains very powerful to this day. In terms of Israel's image, when harnessed to the fear of anti-Semitism experienced by many Jews (both Israeli and influential Jews abroad) leading to hesitancy in action, it has been particularly destructive. It has led to the projection of images of Israel which are tantamount to presenting a country which must constantly justify its existence, constantly claim that "we have done nothing wrong." This has been the case, even when it should be self-evident, such as in situations where rockets are raining down on the country and Israel retaliates with force in its defense of its citizens. There is an underlying belief which finds actual expression in the far left and in the extreme ultra-Orthodox that it would have been better to continue living under foreign rule, to exist as a community under the British, rather than be self-determining as a state. The Christian world has been training the Jew for two millennia to accept that he is essentially a sinner and doomed to wander for eternity. The image of the placating Jew, the Jew as the underdog, is certainly more acceptable to the West.

By contrast, the New Jew, emerging from the kibbutzim and strongly reflected in the continuous political control of the socialists from the 1920s to the 1970s, did not care at all how others saw him. The New Jew was cocky, perhaps even shallow, secular, and articulate, with a gun when

necessary. He believed that everyone understood the harsh conditions under which Israel came to be. His attitude swung between the belief that the entire world was against Israel and that everyone should love Israel for its amazing achievements. Either way, he did not believe it was necessary to appease the gentile.

These two streams represented the central dilemma in the portrayal of Israel to others. Weak or strong? Independent or appeasing? And in taking preemptive action in the media, the New Jew, who feels he should not have to take action, clashes with the Old Jew fearful of anti-Semitic response, who does not dare stir the pot.

The socialists in Israel controlled the mass media and all elements of foreign relations from the 1920s to the late 1970s, including the Foreign Ministry, the tourism industry, and all agencies dealing with international relations. The image projected was predominantly secular, with occasional touches of tradition.

Development of Israel's foreign media approach after the Six-Day War

Israel first really opened up to the world in the aftermath of the Six-Day War in 1967. Contact between Israelis and the outside world increased, and after the Yom Kippur War, many young people left the country, traveling the globe. Although Israel became more exposed to the opinions of others, the New Jew beliefs regarding the irrelevance of presenting an image or even learning English still prevailed. Cosmopolitanism was a bourgeois value. It had no place in the socialist kibbutz-bred leadership.

Some sensitivity to what was written about Israel did emerge during this period in the Foreign Ministry. However, a strong feeling of superiority pervaded the state's message to the outside world, especially toward the local Jewish communities abroad. This created a split between Israel and the Diaspora, despite the euphoria following the Six-Day War.

Whenever an unfavorable representation appeared in the foreign media, the knee-jerk reaction during this period was to condemn it as anti-Semitism. The state's political rulers had experienced limited contact with

the foreign world and lacked knowledge of how to handle the media. For the later versions of the New Jews, everything was still self-evident, and therefore no explanation was necessary.

At governmental levels, the philosophical undercurrent together with the total lack of foreign media know-how came together to create an attitude of derision toward the foreign media, leading to neglect of any outlets other than the major players, such as the American networks, the *New York Times* and their peers. During the 70s, and especially in the aftermath of the Six-Day War, Israel became a global story, and tremendous interest gathered around the activities of the fledgling state.[18] A huge influx of volunteers arrived at the kibbutzim, many from the Jewish Diaspora but also many Europeans. These non-media representatives of the outside world generated a lot of stories, and media outlets sent their journalists to cover those stories, some of them stationing permanent staffers in the region. At that time, many local Israelis worked as journalists for foreign media outlets. The central players of the foreign media maintained a constant presence in the state.

The state now was hosting a huge corps of journalists, highly disproportionate to the size of the country. This press corps needed to be cultivated but were largely left to their own devices. The Government Press Office, whose job it was to handle the media, did not have sufficient funds or staff to do the job effectively. Israeli journalists who did connect strongly with the media presence during that time were primarily liberal-secular, such as Tom Segev and Amos Elon from *Haaretz*, and Yehuda Litany from *The Jerusalem Post*.

The vacuum was immediately filled by the Palestinians, who had been trained by their Eastern Bloc mentors to recognize the invaluable importance of propaganda. Each of the four main Palestinian factions had its own media outlets, creating an enormous network of connections and interest.[19]

The fractionalization of Israel's attitude to the media, and its very democracy that dictates changes every few years in those at the helm of

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[18] Lederman, *Battle Lines*.
[19] Lederman, *Battle Lines*.

government agencies connected to foreign media, has led to a policy toward the media that can at best be called vacillating. Even the Israel Defense Forces has learned nothing in thirty years of being in the eye of the storm. Although the IDF Spokesperson's Unit has been ramped up, it is still far from having the ability to deal with ongoing situations. And it is hampered by the same dilemma that beleaguers every Israeli political and even cultural institution: what image Israel should present.

This lack of coherence and cohesion regarding Israel's image has opened up the field for the manipulation of the media regarding the nature and activities of the state. Furthermore, those manipulating the media are strongly aware of the strong undercurrent among Israelis of the desire to be loved and approved of, leading to increasing pressure of concessions in return for global approval, where peace is not really part of the agreement.

An element further complicating the situation that must be mentioned here is the lack of that strongest and most ancient of emotional motivators: hatred. Jews, whether Israeli or not, are poor haters. For the Old Jew, the Diaspora Jew, hatred was irrelevant. The dispersal of the People of Israel was the result of their sins, they believed; exile and hardship were a natural state to be contended with. This lack of hatred has been passed on to the New Jew. Israelis do not hate during wartime; the emotional motivator is protection of loved ones rather than subjugation of a hated enemy.

This reduces the desire to take preemptive media action, and prevents any strategy intended to arouse hatred for the Arab, while the Arab world, and elements strongly embedded in the Western world, have no such scruples in inciting hatred against the Jew. This is perhaps one of the least understood elements of the conflict, where foreign spectators and media assume a cycle of hatred, much as they assume a cycle of violence.

The State of Israel thus represents a huge mixture of cultures and philosophies, unprecedented over the last two millennia. The "melting pot" metaphor is often used to describe such situations, but the differences in communities and cultures of origin persists till today, resulting in difficulty coming to a consensual agreement of what Israelis as a whole want. What

should a Jewish state look like? What image should the State of Israel project?

Israel's incoherence in terms of its image and its public diplomacy have turned it into a prime target for systematic manipulation. Together with a cataclysmic degradation of journalistic standards, as will be brought to light in the account below, the information delivered to the world regarding the Israeli-Palestinian conflict has been skewed perhaps beyond repair. Ironically, the "big lie" technique is being used against Israel. Used in Nazi propaganda, it was described, no less, by Adolf Hitler in *Mein Kampf* as always having

> a certain force of credibility; because the broad masses of a nation are always more easily corrupted in the deeper strata of their emotional nature than consciously or voluntarily; and thus in the primitive simplicity of their minds they more readily fall victims to the big lie than the small lie, since they themselves often tell small lies in little matters but would be ashamed to resort to large-scale falsehoods.

> It would never come into their heads to fabricate colossal untruths, and they would not believe that others could have the impudence to distort the truth so infamously. Even though the facts which prove this to be so might be brought clearly to their minds, they will still doubt and waver and will continue to think that there might be some other explanation. For the grossly impudent lie always leaves traces behind it, even after it has been nailed down, a fact which is known to all expert liars in this world and to all who conspire together in the art of lying.[20]

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[20] Adolf Hitler, *Mein Kampf*, vol. I, ch. X, Project Gutenberg Australia, accessed August 23, 2008, https://gutenberg.net.au/ebooks02/0200601.txt.

CHAPTER 1

PARADISE LOST:
ISRAEL IN THE SPOTLIGHT

The streetlamp effect

One of the pitfalls of being a democracy is that it is vulnerable to the very journalistic freedoms that a democracy must promote. As far as media coverage of the Middle East is concerned, Israel is by far the best show in town: It's convenient, it's accessible, it's comfortable, there is a great story, and there is an abundance of stories. Not only that, but you can be as critical as you want of the host country while its government continues to assist you with press credentials and other amenities.

I find that parables can be useful when describing certain phenomena in a place as hectic as the Middle East, so bear with me. Late at night, a man was walking down the street when he saw a motorist on his hands and knees under a streetlamp, obviously searching for something—his car keys, as it turned out. The man offered to help, but after several hours on their hands and knees, it was obvious that the keys were not there.

"Are you sure you lost the keys under the streetlamp?" the man asked.

To which the motorist responded, "I probably lost the keys somewhere in the middle of the street, but this is the only place around here where there's any light."

This is very much how the media is operating in the Middle East. Where is the "light" in the Middle East? Israel is the one location that provides access both internally and to the rest of the region. Which means that a conceptual framework is already set in place in which Israel is what matters. As a result, many of the problems that Israel is facing today with the media are a function of this "streetlamp effect."

To illustrate this concept with statistics, consider the following: When you take the population of various countries and divide it by the number of times they are referenced in the news, you can determine a measurable index of media coverage per number of people. In 2012, a random assessment disclosed that there is one citation on Google News for every 50,000 Chinese or Indians, 20,000 Bangladeshis, 8,000 Pakistanis, 5,000 Russians, 3,400 Egyptians (during the height of the soccer riots), and 1,200 Syrians. But when it came to Israel, it only took *300* Israelis per Google News item.[21]

At the most basic level, this is evidence that the State of Israel receives a disproportionate amount of attention when it comes to international media coverage. Meanwhile, the outright massacres and displacement of thousands to millions of people in neighboring Syria, Libya, and Sudan go almost entirely unnoticed in the international press by comparison.

So, why does the international community allocate disproportionate media coverage, bloated monitoring, and ultimately vast wasted resources to a country that makes up 0.11 percent of the world's total population?[22] There are a variety of reasons, including a trajectory of natural phenomena as well as deliberate campaigns aimed at undermining the State of Israel.

Since the modern state's establishment in 1948, Israel has contended with hyper-media coverage and a massive presence in international political discourse. There are a lot of theories about why Israel has always received this hyped-up attention: Some attribute it to historical anti-Semitism. Others claim it's due to the country's significance as a religious-historical center for the three major monotheistic religions. Others will point to the fact that Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East.

For whatever reason, Israel is considered special.

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[21] Chemi Shalev, "West of Eden," *Haaretz*, February 3, 2012, http://www.haaretz.com/blogs/west-of-eden/don-t-always-knock-the-media-s-bias-and-double-standards-on-israel-you-ll-miss-them-when-they-re-gone-1.410895.
[22] Numbers referenced from 2012 World Bank estimates by "Israel Population," Trading Economics, accessed March 29, 2022, http://www.tradingeconomics.com/israel/population.

The hyper-attention surrounding Israel could also be related to the country's history of high-profile events and relations with the international community. For starters, Israel is considered one of the most advanced countries in Southwest Asia in economic and industrial development.[23] In addition to its close bilateral ties with the United States, Israel maintains diplomatic relations with 158 countries, as well as 107 diplomatic missions across the globe.[24] Israel has also experienced a staggering number of wars within a short time frame. After the Six-Day War (1967) and Yom Kippur War (1973), Israel's dramatic and unexpected victories began to change the worldview of the Jewish state from the struggling David to a formidable Goliath.

During Israel's younger days, the majority of foreign press centers were based in either Cyprus or Lebanon (in addition to Israel). However, Cyprus was less accessible to the Arab world and Lebanon was rife with unpredictable spikes in violence. So, for an extensive period of time, there were more journalists stationed in Israel per capita than any other location in the world. The result was that journalists were covering the story of Israel more intensely than any other place in the world, and mainly one element of it: the Arab-Israeli conflict.

Paralleling these historical events was the development of a measured campaign of psychological warfare by the Arabs to achieve their political aspirations. Following the Arab defeats of the 1967 and 1973 wars, a realization was brewing among the Arab leaderships: In the face of inferior firepower, Israel could not be defeated by conventional means alone.[25] After each conflict with the Israelis, the Arabs conduct fresh assessments to

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[23] "Israel's Accession to the OECD," Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, September 2010,
http://www.oecd.org/israel/israelsaccessiontotheoecd.htm.
[24] "Israel's Diplomatic Relations Abroad: Status of Relations," Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 2018,
https://mfa.gov.il/MFA/AboutTheMinistry/Pages/Israel-s%20Diplomatic%20 Missions%20Abroad.aspx#note.
[25] Emmanuel Navon, "Soft Powerlessness: Arab Propaganda and the Erosion of Israel's International Standing," Working Paper submitted for the Herzliya Conference. Lauder School of Government, Diplomacy and Strategy at the IDC Institute for Policy and Strategy, January 21–24, 2006.

determine what works and what doesn't. In the aftermath of the Yom Kippur War, former chief of Israeli intelligence Yehoshafat Harkabi described a situation where the Arabs realized they could not eliminate Israel through conventional warfare alone and so would turn to (public) diplomacy, propaganda, and other soft power weapons to undermine Israel in an incremental process.[26] This subtle "millimeter-by-millimeter" war has been taking place for several decades now, with its latest phase in BDS (Boycott, Divestment, Sanctions) and claims of apartheid, and Israel has fallen behind.

In addition to the lessons learned from the conventional wars, one of the biggest lessons the Arabs gained from the Second Intifada (2000–2005) is that world opinion can go against them when they employ a level of violence deemed unacceptable in the international community. Although this lesson was certainly understood in assessing previous conflicts, the Second Intifada encouraged revived efforts as they realized they could hit Israel harder and get much better results using nonviolent techniques, via media relations and public diplomacy.

Prior to the First Intifada (1987–1993), Palestinian psychologist Mubarak Awad began advocating nonviolent resistance as "a powerful, concentrated, and successful campaign" to gradually erode Israeli resolve and isolate the state in the international community. His words below sum up what would eventually become the basis of an effective millimeter-by-millimeter campaign of psychological warfare that was adopted by the Palestinians:

> The Israeli soldier is a human being, not a beast devoid of conscience and feeling. He has an understanding of right and wrong to which it is possible to appeal. Similarly, he can be demoralized. He constantly needs a reasonable justification for his activities… At another level, the Israeli government is sensitive to public opinion, both local and international. It constantly needs international support and aid, and it has an image it wishes to project… Israel does not possess the internal resources which will enable

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[26] Yehoshafat Harkabi, *Arab Strategies and Israel's Response* (New York: Free Press, 1977).

it to bear international isolation for a long time, as is the case with the racist government of South Africa, for example.[27]

The Arabs thus set out to develop a long-term "war of attrition" on both the strategic and tactical levels: on the strategic level, the use of soft power would become a central aspect of their political activities with the aim of facilitating the achievement of political goals. On the tactical level, PSYOP would intensify the effect of military operations, manipulating images and portrayals of events as a means to furthering the strategic-political goals.[28] Viewed from this perspective, the local and international media are merely another tool in the Arab PSYOP arsenal—and the "Palestinian cause" is the ultimate channel. Dominating the media is just one more milestone (albeit a significant one) in a larger operation. And a big part of that is ensuring that Israel remains in the spotlight of the international press.

Forced into this spotlight, Israel must handle an onslaught of fictitious and critical reports. Academics are increasingly documenting evidence of how Palestinians regularly disseminate fabricated information and photographs to defame Israel as part of their propaganda campaign.[29] Some of the most recent and obvious examples are the pictures of gruesome casualties circulated by Hamas during Operation Pillar of Defense (2012) that were later discovered to be the result of misfired Palestinian rockets.[30] Most of the real issues plaguing the Middle East are abstract, so that the superficiality of a photograph cannot possibly capture the true story unfolding on the ground. At the same time, a heart-wrenching photograph of dead civilians is a cheap and easy way to win the sympathy of the international community. Such tactics naturally force Israel into a constant

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[27] Mubarak E. Awad, "Non-Violent Resistance: A Strategy for the Occupied Territories," *Journal of Palestine Studies* 13, no. 4 (1984): 22–36.
[28] Ron Schleifer, *Psychological Warfare in the Arab-Israeli Conflict* (Hampshire, UK: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014).
[29] Jonathan Dahoah Halevi, *The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict Reflected Through the Internet* (Amsterdam, NL: IOS Press Inc., 2010).
[30] Raphael Ahren, "UN Clears Israel of Charge it Killed Baby in Gaza," *Times of Israel*, March 10, 2013,
http://www.timesofisrael.com/un-clears-israel-from-charge-it-bombed-11-month-old-baby/.