



REPORT DESCRIPTION

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Media Objectivity and the Gaza War: An Israeli Perspective

An Israeli analyst answers a Saudi-hosted forum: Israeli media stayed plural, but Israel lost the online war to Hamas. Also here: three drivers of bias in Gaza war coverage and eight rules for responsible newsrooms.

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In November 2023, seven weeks into the war in Gaza, the Muslim World League convened an international media forum in Jeddah and put six written questions to an Israeli analyst: was Gaza war coverage objective, and did Israel need the forum's new Jeddah Charter for Media Responsibility to guarantee press freedom? This report recasts his answers as a continuous analysis. It was written in the winter of 2023–24 and is published as a dated snapshot of that moment, not a current review of the war.

Bias is a given, pluralism is the test

The report starts from a premise any newsroom veteran will recognise: complete objectivity in war reporting does not exist. The useful question is what produces bias, and the report names three drivers in global coverage of Gaza. The first is the political alignment of owners and funders, with Qatar's Al Jazeera as the clearest case. The second is the commercial weight of an Arab and Muslim audience far larger than Israel's. The third is pressure from publics and interest groups.

Measured against that reality, the test of a media system is whether it is plural and self-correcting, and the author finds that Israeli media passed it: outlets disagreed with one another and readers could compare them. The report does not hide the other side of the ledger. It sets this view against the ethics tribunals of the Israel Press Council, active

since 1963, and against Reporters Without Borders, which ranked Israel 97th of 180 in 2023 and 101st in 2024, and explains why the two measure different things.

Winning on the ground, losing online

“ One qualification must be made, and it is uncomfortable for an Israeli author. In certain arenas Hamas used information tools more effectively than Israel to attract attention and build support among particular audiences. Specifically, Israel lost the information war online and on the platforms of the new mass media: messengers, social networks, video services and the like. The author’s judgement was shared at the time by a number of Western observers; *ABC News*, reporting in late November 2023, quoted analysts who described Israel as losing a social-media contest framed as a battle of victimhood, and *Time* devoted a December 2023 investigation to the Hamas media operation built for real-time, multilingual distribution.

The qualification has limits. This defeat in the new-media space had no material effect on the course of the military operation and did not prevent the IDF from pursuing the objectives set for it. Information wars and ground wars are fought for different prizes, and in the winter of 2023–24 Israel was winning the second while losing the first.

Sergey Konyashin, Media Objectivity and the Gaza War: An Israeli Perspective
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The report traces the gap back to audiences. The developed democracies broadly supported Israel, while Hamas drew its support elsewhere, and media in each camp wrote for their own publics.

Why Israel does not need the Jeddah Charter

The forum’s charter, a thirteen-point document endorsed by delegations from more than 80 countries, calls for the protection of correspondents and for reliance on credible sources. The author’s answer to the organisers is direct: Israel shares these goals but needs no external charter to secure them, because Israeli journalism has worked under its own code of ethics and its own tribunals for decades. Responsible communication, the report argues, is built inside newsrooms, and it closes with eight practical measures for doing so, from written ethical standards and editorial control to transparency, independence and engagement with the audience.

How the report was made

The text is based on the author's written answers to the Jeddah forum, originally in Russian, recast from questions and answers into a continuous analysis and edited in English. References to public sources were added so that the factual claims can be checked, from the Muslim World League and the Israel Press Council to Axios, ABC News and *Time*. Where a passage reflects the author's judgement rather than a verifiable fact, the report says so.

ABOUT

I am Sergey Konyashin, a former Russian diplomat. I spent nearly a dozen years in the Russian Foreign Ministry, with postings in Yemen (2010–2013), Sudan (2014–2018) and Algeria (2019–2021), and left Russia in 2022, after Putin's invasion of Ukraine.

Démarche is my independent journal on Russian policy in the Middle East and Africa: analysis from inside the system, for readers outside it. I also write for *The Moscow Times*, *Republic*, *The Insider* and other independent outlets; see konyashin.com/elsewhere for that work.

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