

The ‘Tectonic Shift’ in Media That Changed Perceptions of Israel: ‘What’s Left Is a System Run by Activists’

“The press has been gutted. The bureaus have shrunk, and into that vacuum have come ideological voices,” says Matti Friedman

Sharon Waxman April 1, 2024



Pro-Palestinian protesters outside The New York Times building protest coverage of the Israel-Hamas War. (Credit: Michael M. Santiago/Getty Images)

JERUSALEM – It gives journalist Matti Friedman no satisfaction to know he was early to realize that a change had come to covering Israel, favoring fixed narratives and activist journalism over a tradition of fact-based reporting.

Friedman, a former reporter and editor at the Associated Press based in Jerusalem from 2006-2011, quit the global news agency after being censored by his editors, and realizing he would have to censor what he and his colleagues knew to be true about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. And what was the case a decade ago is more true now, he told me.

“The press has been gutted. The bureaus have shrunk, and into that vacuum have come ideological voices,” he said. “Now Human Rights Watch gives you a report, in English, and you write a story based on that report. And you end up serving as the media arm of the hard left, the world of NGOs.”



This mattered less when the conflict had fallen out of the headlines. But now that the heated war between Israel and Hamas has come to dominate the global news cycle, this shift has dramatic consequences on regional tension amid a

frightening spike in anti-Israel and anti-Jewish sentiment around the world.

Examples of this shift abound. A [7,000-word](#) piece in The Intercept cast doubt on a [New York Times investigation](#) into the sexual assault and mutilation of Israel women by Hamas on Oct. 7; it was clearly aimed at undermining the credibility of the reporting. Early in the war the Times and others reported that Israel deliberately shelled al-Ahli hospital in Gaza City, allegedly killing hundreds — based on information provided by the Hamas-run Health Ministry — and later learning that it was almost certainly an errant shell from a Gazan military group which killed a small fraction of that number. (Google this and you still cannot get any kind of straight answer.)

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- The Palestinian Health Ministry said the number of casualties was expected to rise. Many civilians were sheltering at the hospital.
- The deadly strike on the hospital came as President Biden was preparing for a visit to Israel as conditions in besieged Gaza grew ever more desperate.

Facing Risky Options for Gaza Hostages, U.S. Turns to Longtime Mediator

Many officials believe a military rescue of hostages held by Hamas would be dangerous, so the U.S. has turned to Qatar to help lead a diplomatic effort.

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Israeli forces again bombarded Gaza with airstrikes on Tuesday, including in the southern cities of Khan Younis, above, and Rafah.



With a wartime visit to Israel, President Biden will face both physical and political risks.

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Hamis members hijacked victims' social media accounts to livestream attacks and issue death threats.

5 MIN READ

New York Times original front page headline on a strike at al-Ahli hospital in Gaza

An Israeli military operation at al-Shifa hospital in recent days that captured a reported 500 Hamas and other fighters and killed nearly 200 (a stunning fact that suggests the hospital isn't just a "hospital") has received only sporadic attention in The New York Times, with headlines focused on civilian casualties for well over a week before the headline on March 28: "[Fighting Rages Around Two Gaza Hospitals as Pressure on Israel Rises.](#)" Previous coverage seemed skeptical that it even was a military raid, noting in the sub headline of a [March 21 article](#): "The military said it had killed dozens of people it described as terrorists. The account couldn't be verified." A second story on March 24 focused on [civilian fears at the hospital](#) that relegated the military raid to the 20th paragraph.

The Times' spokeswoman Danielle Rhoades Ha responded: "In this case of the [al-Ahli] hospital headline, we published a

thorough [editors' note](#) to explain the lapse.” She disputed that the recent Shifa hospital raid was not covered as such. “Your question appears to ignore a larger body of coverage of this raid and mischaracterizes the stories referenced — all of which make Israel’s position, that it is targeting Hamas in a military operation, clear.” (I haven’t found that other coverage, and searched again. There are no images reflecting Hamas’s presence in the hospital, and though Israel [has released](#) names and titles of senior officials captured or killed, they are not included in Times coverage.)

In the midst of this is a full-on vacuum of information about who Hamas is, their rule over 2.2 million Palestinians in Gaza and any sense of accountability for their actions in the current conflict.