

"Il live streaming era una prova fondamentale": traccia degli attacchi agli edifici della stampa di Gaza

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Un giornalista palestinese che segue la guerra dall'alto della Torre Tabaa, Striscia di Gaza, 23 ottobre 2023. (Mohammed Zaanoun)

L'esercito israeliano ha colpito le principali istituzioni mediatiche a Gaza nonostante le garanzie di sicurezza, e sembra aver deliberatamente preso di mira le telecamere che trasmettevano l'offensiva militare, mostra una nuova indagine.

Da [Léa Peruchon](#) 26 giugno 2024

In collaborazione con

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Secondo il Comitato per la Protezione dei Giornalisti, 103 giornalisti e operatori dei media sono tra le oltre 37.000 vittime palestinesi del bombardamento israeliano della Striscia di Gaza dal 7 ottobre. Di fronte alla guerra più mortale per i giornalisti nella storia moderna, Forbidden Stories – la cui missione è continuare il lavoro dei giornalisti che vengono uccisi sul lavoro – iniziare a indagare sugli attacchi presi di mira dalla stampa a Gaza e in Cisgiordania.

In una collaborazione unica, Forbidden Stories ha riunito 50 giornalisti provenienti da 13 organizzazioni mediatiche di tutto il mondo. Il consorzio ha analizzato quasi 100 casi di giornalisti e operatori dei media uccisi a Gaza, così come altri casi in cui Israele avrebbe preso di mira, minacciato o ferito membri della stampa negli ultimi otto mesi. Impossibilitati a riferire liberamente dall'interno della Striscia, i membri del consorzio hanno contattato da remoto oltre 120 giornalisti e testimoni di attività militari a Gaza e in Cisgiordania; ha consultato circa 25 esperti di balistica, armi e audio, incluso Earshot; e ha utilizzato immagini satellitari di Planet Labs e Maxar Technologies.

Oggi, dopo quattro mesi di lavoro collaborativo, pubblichiamo insieme “The Gaza Project”. Di seguito è riportato uno dei due articoli del progetto che +972 sta co-pubblicando con Forbidden Stories ([leggi l'altro qui](#)). Per l'elenco completo degli articoli che compongono “Il Progetto Gaza” e ulteriori informazioni sulla collaborazione, fare clic [qui](#).

Abbonati a La rete fissa

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Erano le 2 del mattino del 10 ottobre quando Adel Zaanoun, giornalista dell'Agence France-Presse (AFP), fece una telefonata preoccupata ai suoi superiori. La squadra dell'AFP aveva appena ricevuto l'ordine dall'esercito israeliano di evacuare i propri uffici nella Torre Hajji, nel cuore di Gaza City, segno che l'edificio potrebbe essere bombardato.

Solo poche ore prima, il presidente e amministratore delegato dell'AFP Fabrice Fries aveva condiviso in una lettera l'indirizzo dell'edificio con il portavoce militare israeliano, per evitare qualsiasi possibile bersaglio.

“Should we evacuate or remain in the building?” Zaanoun asked Marc Jourdier, AFP’s Jerusalem bureau chief, on the other end of the line. “Don’t waste a minute – evacuate,” Jourdier responded. “I’ll call the army and get back to you as soon as possible.”



Inside the AFP offices located in the Hajji Tower, Gaza City, 2015. (AFP)

The building was ultimately spared that day, but an Israeli strike a few hundred meters away killed three Palestinian journalists who had come to cover the expected attack. The Israeli military called Marc Jourdiar back later that night to say that the Hajji Tower was now classified as “not to be targeted.” Less than a month later, Israeli tanks fired on the offices.

This is not the first time journalists have been ordered to evacuate their offices in Gaza due to the threat of Israeli bombing. “The Israeli military has a history of attacks on media structures,” Carlos Martinez de la Serna, program director at the Committee to Protect Journalists, explained in an interview.

In May 2021, for instance, three Israeli missiles destroyed the Al-Jalaa Tower in Gaza City, which housed offices of Al Jazeera and The Associated Press (AP). The Israeli military cited an imminent threat posed by Hamas’ presence in the building, but when questioned publicly, provided no evidence to support this claim.

Since October 7, in response to the Hamas-led attack on southern Israel, the Israeli military has relentlessly bombarded the Gaza Strip. As a result, media infrastructure has been destroyed at an unprecedented rate and scale, and news coverage from within the besieged enclave has been highly constrained.

“When you look at the conflicts around the world ... you would usually have the international media on the ground,” said Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression. “None of them have been allowed access [to Gaza since October]. Or [if they are] they’re embedded within the IDF.”

In the absence of international newsdesks and reporters, Gazan journalists alone have provided first-hand accounts of what is happening inside the Strip, while they simultaneously struggle just to survive the war. Yet in many cases, their places of work no longer exist. According to the Palestinian Journalists’ Syndicate, around 70 press facilities, including local radio stations, news agencies, transmission towers, and journalist training institutes, have been partially or completely destroyed since October 7.

In collaboration with AFP, Arab Reporters for Investigative Journalism, Le Monde, Paper Trail Media, and other international outlets, Forbidden Stories investigated several of these cases. Supported by the analyses of ballistics and audio experts, the investigation reveals that Israel’s destruction of press infrastructure in Gaza appears to be part of a broader strategy to stifle information coming out of the Strip.



AFP’s server room located on the 11th floor of the Hajji Tower, which was partially destroyed by an Israeli strike on November 2, 2023. (AFP)

A broadcast goes dark

On Oct. 13, 2023, the Israeli military ordered 1 million people residing in the north of the Gaza Strip to evacuate southward. Three days after having fled their offices in the middle of the night in response to the army’s phone call, AFP’s employees abandoned the Hajji Tower. The team comprised eight Palestinian reporters, photographers, video journalists, and other staff members who have worked for years with AFP, one of the few international agencies to have offices in the Strip.

But before leaving the building, AFP mounted a camera on a tripod to film from the 10th floor, powered by solar panels. Although occasionally interrupted by technical problems, the 24/7 broadcast was one of the last sources of live images of the Strip. As such, it was monitored constantly by global media.

On Nov. 2 at 12:09 p.m., as the camera was filming the plumes of smoke emanating from buildings in the north of Gaza, and its microphone picked up the hum of nearby aircraft, the video shook suddenly and smoke blocked the lens. It had just captured live footage of a strike only a few meters away — footage that would be seen around the world.

Exclusive images shot by AFP, a partner in “The Gaza Project,” illustrate the scale of the destruction: shards of glass and debris litter the floor of the agency’s office, computer servers balance precariously on a shelf, and a gaping hole in a wall reveals a glimpse of the southeastern Gaza Strip.



The Hajji Tower the day after the strike, showing a gaping hole on the 11th floor, and the camera on the 10th floor, positioned underneath the hole (right hand side), November 3, 2023. (AFP)

As with multiple other media offices, hospitals, and humanitarian sites in the Gaza Strip, the coordinates of the building had been passed on to the Israeli military on several occasions. “The location of this office is known to all and [the Israeli government] has been reminded of it multiple times over the past few days, precisely to prevent such an attack and to allow us to continue providing images on the ground,” Fries, the AFP CEO, was quick to say on X (formerly Twitter).

But questioned by AFP at the time, the Israeli military denied any strike on the Hajji Tower itself. “It appears there was an IDF strike near the building to eliminate an immediate threat,” a spokesperson said in a statement. And when contacted as part of this investigation, the Israeli military spokesman reiterated: “The offices of the AFP agency were not the target of the attack, and damage to them could have been caused by the shock wave or shrapnel.”

Yet despite the military’s denials, Forbidden Stories and its partners discovered that on Nov. 2, there were at least two direct hits on the building housing the AFP offices between 11:55 a.m. and 12:09 p.m. local time. Live footage of both strikes shows the lightning-quick flash on the horizon and an explosion nearly four seconds later.



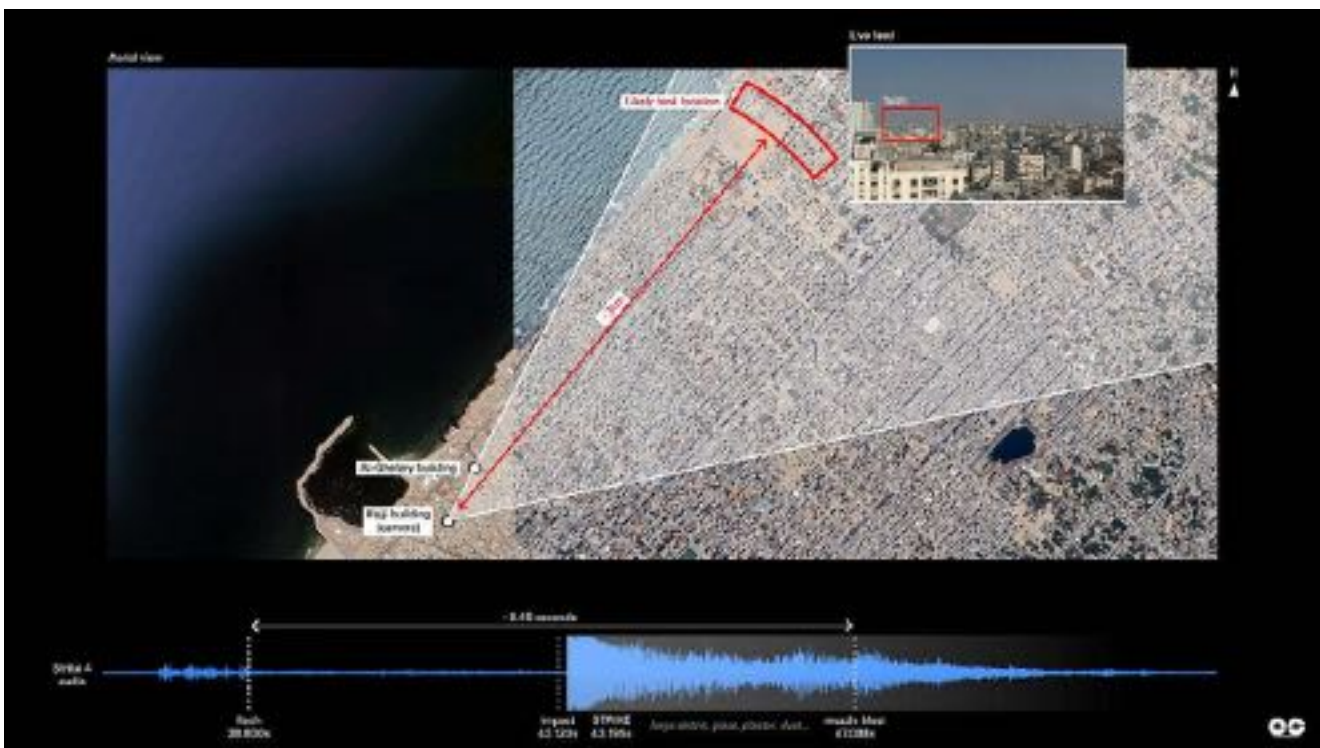
Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/JbFwAAPU73k>

Thanks to the open-source investigative work of our partner Le Monde, supported by Earshot, an organization that conducts audio investigations in defense of human rights, we were able to pinpoint the origin of the strikes: a deserted area approximately 3 kilometers

away, with a clean line of fire to the tower. Further analysis of the speed and features of ammunition concludes that they were most likely fired by a tank.

Adrian Wilkinson, a forensic explosives engineer who regularly works for the United Nations, noted that “it is almost certain that the AFP office was shot at by an Israeli tank,” and ruled out the possibility of accidental hits. At least five other experts, including the independent weapons and conflicts researcher known as War Noir and former U.S. Army explosive ordnance disposal technician Trevor Ball, agreed.

Analysis of two satellite images shared by Planet Labs on Oct. 31 and Nov. 3 confirms the presence of tanks in the area at that time. Another satellite image from the same day belongs to Maxar Technologies, which did not wish to share precise information that would allow us to locate the Israeli tanks. Maxar declined to comment by the time of publication.



Estimated position of the tank 3 km away from the camera on November 2, 2023, geolocated by Le Monde and corroborated by Earshot’s analysis. (Earshot)

Are live feeds targeted?

The analysis of the live footage led to another discovery. A few minutes before the two strikes on the AFP offices, another explosion occurred at the neighboring Al-Ghifari Tower.

On the 16th floor of this building — one of the tallest in the Gaza Strip — the Palestinian Media Group’s (PMG) offices offer an unobstructed view of Gaza. Just before 10 a.m. on Nov. 2, several cameras positioned at the office’s north, south, east, and west windows were sending live images to several international news services, including Reuters and Al Arabiya, when an explosion sounded.

That morning, journalist Ismail Abu Hatab was preparing his coffee and downloading the previous day's footage, after sleeping in the PMG office. "I grabbed the camera, and then I didn't see anything. I couldn't hear anything. All I remember is a yellow line of light," Hatab said in an interview with the consortium.

Another journalist filmed the scene: thick smoke flooded the offices, through which a camera tripod, still standing in the distance, is vaguely visible. Hatab was wounded in the leg and quickly transported to Al-Shifa Hospital, which was still operational at the time.



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/5IGpV0uH7jg>

Israeli tanks had arrived in the north of Gaza on Oct. 31, and according to PMG CEO Hassan Madhoun, they specifically targeted the 16th floor of the Al-Ghifari Tower to prevent the PMG from broadcasting Israel's destruction of north Gaza. "We broadcast the image as it is," Madhoun explained in an interview with the consortium. "We don't comment on it. But the image seems to bother the Israeli military."

When contacted about this incident, the IDF Spokesperson replied that the army "is not aware of a strike in the location and date provided."

After the Nov. 2 attack, an administrator for the Hajji Tower asked AFP to pause its livestream, fearing additional strikes. With no one able to return to the offices to restart the broadcast, it shut down for good on Nov. 12 at 10:31 a.m. — the last live broadcast of images from Gaza.

“We really need Israel to come back and explain what their policy is around live feeds in different locations, and if in any way they are seen as legitimate targets, because there’s enough circumstantial evidence to make us suspect that is how they are working,” Phil Chetwynd, AFP’s chief of information, said in an interview with the consortium.

The strikes on the exact location of PMG’s cameras and just meters away from the AFP camera in the Hajji Tower provide circumstantial evidence — if not formal proof — of an Israeli military strategy. On May 21, the Israeli authorities also seized equipment belonging to an Israel-based team from AP on the pretext that the journalists had violated a new media law by providing live images to Al Jazeera. Shortly before the equipment was seized, the journalists had simply been filming and broadcasting a general view of northern Gaza from Sderot, a city in Israel less than a kilometer from the Strip.

“Where there is strong potential for a war crime being committed, obviously, the livestream becomes critical evidence,” Irene Khan, UN Special Rapporteur on the promotion and protection of the right to freedom of opinion and expression, added.

“By intentionally destroying media outlets, the IDF are not only inflicting unacceptable material damage on news operations,” Reporters Without Borders said on its website back in 2021, when the Al-Jalaa Tower housing Al Jazeera and AP was destroyed. “They are also, more broadly, obstructing media coverage of a conflict that directly affects the civilian population.”



Smoke rises after an Israeli airstrike hits Al-Jalaa tower, which houses apartments and several media outlets including the Associated Press and Al Jazeera, Gaza City, May 15, 2021. (Atia Mohammed/Flash90)

The destruction of the AFP and PMG offices — which provided journalists with crucial logistical support and, for many, a second home — represents a significant loss for their employees. Yahya Hassouna, a journalist with AFP since 2009, described the Hajji Tower in an interview with the consortium as “the place where all my dreams were – my future, my life, my office.”

The AFP offices were “a place where [staff] were able to go without fear” Chetwynd commented, adding that the attack has had a significant psychological impact on his colleagues. The feeling among staff, he said, is that “if they are able to hit our office, our place of safety, we have no other place of safety in the whole of the Gaza Strip.”

A refuge decimated

The Press House in Gaza City’s Rimal neighborhood was once a sanctuary for journalists: a place to meet up with colleagues, to eat and rest between outings, and to borrow protective vests. For Shuruq As’ad, a spokesperson for the Palestinian Journalists’ Syndicate, “it was really one of the safest places for journalists” in the Strip before the latest Israeli offensive began.

After Hamas prevailed over Fatah in the 2006 Palestinian legislative election, and consolidated its control over Gaza following the civil war that ensued, journalists in the Strip came to be seen solely in terms of their political allegiance. Ibrahim Barzak, former correspondent for the AP in Gaza and a member of the Press House’s board, explained that the project arose out of a need for a “place or structure for independent journalists, people who are not affiliated at all.”

When Palestinian journalist Bilal Jadallah established the Press House in 2013, it was a “huge breakthrough,” according to Hikmat Yousef, Jadallah’s friend and editor-in-chief of Sawa News, an independent media outlet housed at the institution. Jadallah was known as the “sheikh of journalists,” Yousef told the consortium, for providing them with a refuge from political pressures in Gaza.
