Journalism Under Siege: Interlocking Physical, Legal, Political, Digital, and Psychological Risks in Gaza War Coverage (January–June 2025)

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Abstract

Mass media, especially journalism, is an important part of armed conflicts, helping to make the world aware of them or write the history, yet contemporary wars create serious risks to the safety and professionalism of journalists. The 2025 war on Gaza provided an exemplary hostile environment of ongoing violence, limited access and information control. The paper explores several dangers to journalism during the conflict based on qualitative content analysis of news reports, including physical risks, political intimidation, legal limitations, digital threats, and psychological pressure. The results indicate that journalists had to work in an interdependent and perilous environment where violence was combined with structural and informational constraints, restricting independent coverage and access to credible information by the population, with grave consequences to press freedom and documenting history. The research concludes that protective mechanisms of journalists need to be empowered in order to ensure that truthful reporting is preserved in the future conflicts.

Keywords: War, Gaza, Journalism, Risks, War on Gaza 2025

Introduction:

It has always been known that journalism plays an important role in the societies in the periods of war. Reporting makes the journalists deliver the news concerning the current events, voice of the oppressed groups, and help in forming the social conscience both on the local and international levels. During a conflict situation, journalism can be taken as a source of news but also a form of accountability and documentation. The availability of journalists in war zones enables the conflicts to be observed, documented and analyzed in future (Sturken, 1994). Over the last few decades, armed conflict has taken a new dimension. The contemporary wars are not being fought on the battlefields as before, but they are now being fought in the highly populated cities. This has been changing the line between civilian and military spheres and has put the journalists in higher danger. Simultaneously, the battle has extended to the informational domain, where the power to shape and affect the perception of the population has become an instrument of policy. Therefore, journalism has ceased to be a neutral practice that exists on the periphery of war, but it is a disputed space in war (Feinstein et al., 2002). In this complicated environment, the war on Gaza in 2025 was developed. The constant military actions, the devastation of infrastructure, and the limitation of movement preconditioned the situation when journalists were in constant danger. Gaza demanded journalists to operate under uncertain, resource-limited, and personal safety conditions to report. These facts point to the increasing susceptibility of journalism in the modern conflict zones (Allan et al., 2024). The risks to which journalists who covered the war on Gaza in 2025

were exposed went far beyond the battlefield. Violence as a physical exposure was routine, but there was also the political pressure and intentional efforts to influence or manipulate their coverage in a manner that influenced popular cognition. Controversies about coverage were commonplace, and reporters were often labeled as biased or fired as illegitimate due to the nature of stories they had written. Combined, these pressures contributed to creating a situation where journalistic activity was becoming more constrained and more tightly controlled (Fahmy et al., 2024). Legal and administrative limitations added to those conditions. Guidelines to the freedom of reporters were usually vague, changing, or quite restrictive, to the effect that they restricted their freedom to move, collect facts and publish freely. This resulted in practice in fostering intimidation and spurring self-censorship, since journalists calculated the potential consequences of their writing and submitted them beforehand. Simultaneously, online technology increased the sphere of threats: surveillance, cyberbullying, and interference with the delivery of news or its blocking became another, consistent threat (Tasseron, 2023). This paper is devoted to the way the dangers of journalism in the 2025 Gaza war became more interdependent and complicated. Instead of manifesting as individual issues, physical threat, political coercion, legal limitation and cyber-vulnerability intertwined to become one large system of containment, which conditioned commonplace reporting. This interlocking risk environment is critical to understand how journalism worked in the course of the conflict and how information eventually leaked to broader publics. It is valuable because the research does not consider the war as the primary object of interest but journalism itself. The analysis of the circumstances of journalists provides research to the wider discussions of press freedom, media security, and the evolving role of reporting in war areas. The example of the 2025 Gaza case, in particular, can provide a hint of how modern wars challenge and perhaps reinvent the longstanding expectations regarding what journalism can and ought to be doing. The project methodologically employs the qualitative content analysis to analyze news reports generated in the midst of the conflict. This method would enable the recognition of recurring themes and patterns regarding journalistic risk by means of a systematic reading of the coverage itself, without using outside reports or other scholarly commentary. By doing so, the research follows the representation of risk in the stories of journalists and its impact on the reporting.

Literature Review

The scholarly debate on journalism during war time stresses on the idea that the war conditions essentially redefine journalistic practice. War reporting has long been linked to risking life, not knowing, and moral ambiguity, but recent wars show that there has been a serious increase in the level and the type of risks involved to the journalists. The investigations of the media and communication industries underscore the fact that journalists are now more vulnerable to not just physical harm, but also to political influence, legal restrictions, and psychological pressure (Miladi, 2025). A major theme in the literature has been how journalists have become strategic targets instead of being observers. Media coverage in contemporary conflicts is tightly intertwined with political legitimacy and perception on the international level. Consequently, journalists have been perceived as actors who shape the thinking of people other than being impartial information presenters. Such perception adds to the atmosphere where the journalists are viewed with suspicion and aggression, especially when their stories interfere with prevailing narratives (Crowley-Vigneau et al., 2025). The other significant line of scholarly thought is concerned with the evolving form of war as such. The modern wars are marked by the long-term violence, urban war, and the absence of borders between the civilian and military worlds. These situations pose high levels of risk to the journalists, as they usually operate without any visible lines of defense or safe places. According to the literature, these conditions make traditional safety norms and protective measures

effective towards media workers less effective (Jorgenson et al., 2025). The political aspect of risk in war journalism has also been highlighted by scholars. Political pressure may manifest itself through censorship, access control, or even de-legitimization of the work of journalists. Studies show that the governments and military-like actors continue to seek to regulate narratives by labeling specific forms of reporting as partisan, malicious, or dangerous. This framing weakens the credibility of journalism and may be used to motivate limitations on media operations (Guerrero et al., 2025). Another key area of focus in the literature is legal risks. Research on media law and conflict reporting indicates that journalists tend to have loose or restrictive legal protection in the event of war. Movement, publication, or intimidation of journalists can be curtailed by emergency regulations, laws affecting security and administrative controls. Such legal influences have led to self-censorship and decreased multidimensionality of the views presented to the wider masses (Schleicher, 2025).

Increasing significance of digital risks is also mentioned in the literature. As digital journalism and social media grow, stalking, internet harassment and content removal are some of the threats that journalists experience. Digital technologies supporting reporting also subject journalists and their informants to surveillance and reprisals. According to the scholars, such risks are especially critical in conflict areas, where digital communication can be closely monitored (Sampaio-Dias et al., 2024). Psychological, emotional risks are becoming one of the key concerns in the research of the topic of war journalism. Empirical studies on trauma and media labor show that long-term exposure to violence, loss, and suffering of humans leave permanent traces on the psychological well-being of journalists. Journalists who report on wars are commonly stressed, experience burnout, anxiety, and moral challenges that test their professional identity and well-being (Fancy Comma, LLC & Azma, 2024). The other new idea that is developing in the literature is the blurring of professional and personal boundaries when journalists operate in their own communities in the event of a conflict. Local journalists can assume the role of reporters and be personally involved in the war unlike the foreign correspondents who are only observers. This two-fold position adds to the emotional burden and brings the issue of objectivity, detachment, and responsibility to the forefront of ethics (Hassan et al., 2024). In general, the current scholarly discourses indicate that the threats to journalism in war are interrelated and multifaceted. Physical threat, political influence, legal limitations, cyber threats, and psychological abuse do not act independently but strengthen each other. The present research is informed by this theoretical knowledge by using content analysis of news reporting of the war on Gaza in 2025, where the reasoning is to look at how these interrelated risks were captured in the journalistic reports on the war.

Methodology
The research methodology is a qualitative content analysis to analyze how the risks to journalism were expressed and reflected in news reporting on the war on Gaza in 2025. Such a study will be best examined through content analysis since this method permits the systematic exploration of media texts with the view of identifying patterns, themes, and meanings that are instantiated in the journalistic reporting. The methodology places an emphasis on the contents of news articles and not outward assessment or institutional records. The research is developed to examine journalism in the form that it was practiced during the conflict. News texts were considered the primary data, as the boiled down representation of the lived experiences of the journalists, the obstacles, and limitations that they had to deal with. The research is based on the news content and therefore is not dependent on academic literature or formal reports but on the findings of the journalistic output during the conditions of war. This research uses qualitative approach, allowing thorough analysis of language, framing and narrative news structure. This approach allows to analyze reporting,

implication and normalization of risks. In addition, it also allows how journalists accurately report conflict conditions.

Search Process and Data Selection
The data collection process was conducted through manual online searches of publicly accessible news content related to the war on Gaza in 2025. The search process relied on general keywords such as *war on Gaza 2025*, *journalists in Gaza*, *media coverage during war*, and *reporting under conflict conditions*. These keywords were used to identify news articles that discussed both the events of the war and the conditions under which journalists were operating. Selection of news items was restricted to those that had a relation to the research goal. Articles were added when they described journalistic work, mentioned the danger that reporters were exposed to, or reflected on the reporting challenges in the conflict. All articles that did not deal with either journalism or reporting conditions, or were duplicated, or were irrelevant to the analysis, were not included in the analysis. The research also concentrated on text news only as a way of ensuring consistency of the data set. Social media posts, videos, and visual media were excluded. This choice made it possible to conduct a narrowed study of written journalistic accounts and language.

Type of News and Time Frame of Analysis
The types of news content analyzed were varied in order to provide a general picture of journalistic practice throughout the conflict. These were breaking news stories about the war zone, field notes prepared by journalists on the ground, analysis news stories about media situations and opinion or feature pieces prepared by journalists who were directly impacted by the war. This diversity enabled the research to investigate the way risks were depicted in various journalistic formats. The news material chosen spanned between January 2025 and June 2025 which is the most active phase of the war and the immediate aftermath of the war. This is the period selected due to the fact that it reflects long-term exposure to conflict situations instead of the one-time occurrences.

Data Analysis Process
The news texts were then coded thematically after data collection. In order to discover similar themes concerning journalistic risk, articles were read several times. These were physical danger, political pressure, legal restrictions, digital threats, and psychological pressure. The coding procedure enabled patterns to emerge naturally through the data as opposed to being forced during coding. The following section is based on the identified themes on which the results have been presented.

Results
The qualitative content analysis of the news coverage of the war situation in Gaza in 2025 presented a multifaceted and interconnected system of threats to the journalists. These threats were found regularly in the various categories of news stories and ways of reporting, meaning that they were not isolated accidents but recurring characteristics of the journalism landscape at the time of the conflict. Physical danger was the first and most evident type of risk that was detected in the news content. Journalists often wrote about working in places that were open to constant airstrikes, devastation, and abrupt increases in violence. It was reported that there were no safe places where journalists could work, homes, offices, and communication infrastructure were also destroyed. Physical risk had been put across as a norm rather than an unusual situation and it influenced the way journalists conducted their duties day in day out. The second category was political pressure and narrative control. The coverage of the news broadcasted on the media showed how the

reporters could be accused of being biased or illegitimate due to the information they presented. Challenges to accessing information, restrictions on movement, and efforts to control how the events were framed were also often described in articles. Such pressures influenced the independence of the journalism and restricted the possibility to represent the different points of view. Another theme was legal and administrative risks. Reporters said they were working by vague or constraining regulations that left it uncertain what might be published and from where they could report. Such legal uncertainty added to self-censorship and riskiness in coverage, as journalists were balancing professional and possible future ramifications.

The other important finding of the content analysis was digital risks. The news stories outlined issues concerning surveillance, cyber bullying, and the limitations on the spread of digital information. Freelance journalists feared that digital communication tools would reveal their locations or their sources and therefore they could not collect information safely. Reporting, in a number of situations, focused on the deletion or blocking of the journalistic material on Internet resources, ensuring the minimization of the coverage of the news. Throughout the news pieces that were examined, there were always psychological and emotional dangers. They were written about as exhaustion, trauma, and emotional strain caused by the long-term exposure to violence and human suffering on the part of journalists. The necessity to remain professionally detached and at the same time be involved in the conflict as one of the affected populations was echoed in many reports. This emotional load affected the content and the tone of the journalistic reports. In general, the findings indicate that the journalists working in the war on Gaza in 2025 worked in a multidimensional risk environment. The risks physical, political, legal, digital, and psychological were closely interrelated and supported each other. Such pressures, as a whole, affected journalistic practices, reporting choices, and curtailed freedom and safety of journalism to operate throughout the conflict.

Discussion

The results indicate that the war coverage of Gaza in January-June 2025 was a risk ecology, not a series of discrete risks. Physical threat, political fear, legal uncertainty, online vulnerability and psychological stress were present in the news texts as mutually supporting forces that influenced what could be written, how it could be checked and how safe it could be delivered. This interlocked nature is important analytically since it transforms the substantiation of limited coverage out of the individual choice, or the solitary occurrence and into a structural state of wartime information creation. In this respect, the findings of the study are consistent with the literature that does not view conflict reporting as a disinterested practice of observation, but rather as a disputed arena in which a bottom of power in terms of narrative becomes a strategic goal (Feinstein et al., 2002). Physical risk became a direct life threat, as well as an indirect limitation to the collection of newsgathering. When reporters speak of the lack of safe spaces, of devastated houses, offices, and communication infrastructure, the implication does not only become an increase in mortality in danger but also the breakdown of material preconditions of professional reporting: steady workspaces, archives, connectivity, and routines. This loss probably shrinks reporting horizons to short, response cycles and reduces verification practices, since mobility and time, which are necessities to corroboration, become limited. The fact that the coverage has normalized the danger further suggests a shift toward the risk habituation, where extraordinary exposure is resold as a norm. Although habituation may perpetuate further reporting, it can also blur inflating risks and diminish institutional urgency to mitigate, particularly when external audiences define persistent danger as background, not as a crisis of press freedom. The forces of political influence and narrative control emerged as the redefiners of credibility itself. The continual portrayal of journalists as biased, illegitimate, or partisan refers to a delegitimization relationship: instead of

challenging certain facts, actors challenge the credibility of the reporter to speak. This trick has worked well especially in polarized conflict situations as it changes the reception of the audience such that even correct reporting takes on a suspicious motive. The limitation of movement and access to information as in the coverage is used here as instruments of narrative as much as it is used as elements of security: preventing where reporters can go also prevents what they can observe and therefore what can become known to the populace. What is lost is not merely a volume of coverage but a narrow spectrum of facts that can be known, which influences both short-term popular comprehension and long-term historical documentation that press can aid in the creation of. Legal and administrative risks played in the texts not as well-defined prohibitions but as uncertainty regimes. The chilling effect is compounded when journalists present unclear or evolving rules since uncertainty compels them to continually engage in self-evaluation and preemptive compliance. It is a time-honored self-censorship route: the logical reaction to vague enforcement is evading borderline subjects, places or frames. The findings of the study then indicate that, legal pressure must be interpreted not just in terms of the formal legislation but in terms of the perceived predictability, due process and perceived probability of sanction on the part of journalistic actors. In these circumstances, freedom is not proclaimed as much as practiced ability to publish freely without any out of proportionate personal repercussions.

Digital threats in the results expand the battlefield to the informational and infrastructural space. The fears of surveillance, internet harassment, content removal, and blocking are not only threats to the personal safety of the journalists; they threaten the credibility of sourcing and persistence of distributing. When reporters perceive that digital tools provide ways to reveal location or sources, they will think rationally and minimize contacts, minimize digital footprints, and even evade documentation that can be used in the future to hurt them. In the meantime, platform moderation and takedowns, justified or not, add a gatekeeper layer to local editorial judgment. This may form asymmetries in conflict environments with some narratives spreading more easily than others not just due to access and safety but also due to algorithmic visibility and platform policy execution. It suggests that technical resilience and platform governance are now factors affecting the freedom of the press, and not only the actions of the state or military. The psychological aspect in the coverage needs to be considered as a substantive aspect that determines journalistic production, and not as an issue of professional health. Long-term exposure to death, deprivation and personal loss may change tone, framing, and risk tolerance, and may also shorten ethical deliberation in the state of fatigue. The results that the journalists faced exhaustion, trauma and tension between professional detachment and community involvement are of particular importance when they have to report about a war that impacts their families and neighbourhood. Such dual positionality disrupts traditional principles of neutrality by showing that the concept of objectivity is not merely a professional rule but a resource and is reliant on safety, distance, rest, and institutional backing. Instead of understanding emotional proximity as an inadequacy, a stricter reading is that proximity generates specifically evidentiary access and moral interest, and that it demands greater protection against burnout and coercion.

Collectively, the interdependence experienced among the categories of risks suggests that protective interventions cannot be siloed. Legal indeterminacy that promotes self-censorship undermines physical safety measures, inadequate digital safety measures that limit movement, inadequate trauma care that does not allow the journalists to rest or escape reliably. It suggests a layered approach that includes: practical safety (protective equipment, safe transport, contingency planning), legal advocacy and clarity (open accreditation, predictable rules, documented due process), digital resilience (safe communications training, anti-doxxing and harassment response, redundancy in publishing channels), and psychosocial support (peer support structures, rotations, access to counseling, and organizational recognition of trauma exposure). The news-based data of

the study especially highlights the fact that institutional solutions are needed to make the protection of journalists an ecosystem issue and not a personal one. The implication and limitations related to the methods also indicate themselves in this discussion. Since the research is based on qualitative content analysis of publicly accessible news texts, findings indicate what newspapers and sources could and did publish during the war conditions. Certain dangers might be underreported exactly due to the reason that addressing them might add to risk, damage sources, or create legal consequences. Also, the dataset selection method, which is described as manual searching of key words, can unintentionally favor English-language or internationally syndicated reporting and may underrepresent local organizations, smaller publications, or articles that are paywalled. These constraints do not rule out the findings, but instead support the main argument that the risk itself makes risk shape the information environment. The use of triangulation could be enhanced in the future through the combination of content analysis and the interviews, newsroom policy manuscripts, safety organization reports, or platform transparency information to help more clearly delineate the threats experienced, editorial decisions, and externally dictated restrictions. Lastly, the implications of the findings on the Gaza war remembrance and study are related. Journalism under continued interlocking pressure would provide an incomplete historical record that subsequently is discussed by scholars, judicial and popular opinion, and which could be biased and patchy in the verifications that it provides. The analysis hence justifies the thesis that the issue of journalists protection is not merely a question of professional health and entitlement but a question of integrity of knowledge of the population and the evidentiary foundation of the history record. Organizational secrecy is strategic in conflicts where the narrative control is central, and the future becomes inextricably linked to the ability to rebuild what occurred, who it occurred to and under what circumstances.

Conclusion and Recommendations

The research investigated the functioning of journalism under compounded pressures in the coverage of Gaza war in January 2025 to June 2025 through qualitative content analysis of news coverage in the specified period. The results suggest that journalists did not face risks as distinct categories but as an interconnected mechanism where physical risk, political, legal, and digital threats, and psychological pressure were mutually reinforcing. In a more practical sense, this implied that insecurity was not merely a matter of survival of the body; it also determined verification, locomotion, sourcing, editorial autonomy and future of the publication. The wider effect is a narrowed informational space whereby the general population has less access to credible, plural reporting and where the documentary history of the war is to some degree refracted through coercion and interference and weariness. The Gaza case thus exemplifies one of the most important problems of modern warfare, that journalism is both a witness of violence and a place where violence, government, and platform power converge so as to restrict what can be known and shared. In the light of the discussed events, certain recommendations could be made. To begin with, journalism protection should be regarded as a system of multiple layers, instead of isolated safety measures. The physical security planning should be coupled with legal advice, digital security procedures, and psychosocial assistance, since the susceptibility in any of them makes the others more vulnerable. The newsroom level procedures, risk assessment, assignment rotation, and clear stop reporting thresholds should be paired with safety training, protective equipment and evacuation/relocation options when the conditions become more than acceptable risk.

Second, legal and administrative protection must be more evident and enforceable. In cases of accreditation, travel allowances, or publication restrictions, reporters need clear principles, well-known procedures, and referents to appeals. Law literacy of reporters, quick-response legal counsel, and systematic records of prohibitions and alleged restrictions should be the priorities of

media houses and press freedom groups, as ambiguity is itself a mechanism which generates self-censorship and imbalanced reporting. Third, digital security should be considered as primary infrastructure in conflict reporting. Secure communication practices, location-safety precautions, and source-protection norms should be embraced by journalists and outlets to consider surveillance and doxxing risks. Distribution disruption should also be planned by the editorial teams through redundancy strategies (mirrors, multiple publishing channels, and safe archiving) in order that reporting is less prone to blocking, takedowns, or coordinated harassment. It also requires platform-facing attention: news organizations and civil society actors must demand more transparent, responsible moderation and appeals procedures of conflict-related journalism as the lack of consistent enforcement can serve as an extra level of narrative control. Fourth, psychological protection must be institutionalized and not personalized. Trauma-informed practice Newsrooms and commissioning editors must adopt a specific set of practices, such as regular debriefing, confidential counseling, peer-support, and workload management that minimize sustained without a break exposure. As far as the local journalists have to cover the local issues, the support should specifically identify the conflict between professional obligations and personal loss, and should afford practical alleviation (leave, compensation, family safety planning) to allow the journalist to continue coverage without habituation to harm.

Fifth, the purity of the historical record must be considered as a policy result of journalist protection. Media houses, media studies departments, libraries and human rights documentation agencies can join forces to securely preserve journalistic content, metadata, and field notes where feasible, with due care to source security. Establishing secure repositories and safeguarding measures during or shortly after conflicts will decrease the impact of destruction of infrastructure, erasing of data, and even terror upon the future researcher to confirm something. Lastly, triangulation should be furthered in the future with regard to non-published news materials. Although the methodology of the presented study reflects the way of how the risks were reflected in the reporting, the further methods, i.e. interviews with journalists and editors, newsroom safety policies analysis, access restriction mapping and platform transparency data, would be more effective in terms of identifying the difference between the reported experiences and editorial constraints and outside imposed suppression. This work would also assist in determining which efforts are best suited to minimize harm without undermining the independence and evidentiary standard of conflict journalism.

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