

Press Files

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · 1 October 2026

Truth, and the press badge used as cover

Update, 2 October 2026: According to the IDF, its Press Files list has since grown from the first ten cases to 170 people in Gaza who, it says, were presented as journalists while serving as terror operatives.

Truth, and the press badge used as cover

Aryeh Leib Thorne Toren · Yerushalayim · Sukkot 5787 / October 2026

A press vest is a promise. It tells everyone on a battlefield that the person wearing it carries a notebook, a camera or a microphone, and nothing else. That promise protects journalists, and through them it protects the public's right to know what is happening in a war. It works only if it is true.

What the IDF says

On 1 October the IDF Spokesperson launched a dedicated website called "The Press Files". According to the IDF, it presents the first ten cases of people in Gaza who were presented as journalists but who, it says, were in fact operatives in the military wings of Hamas, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and other terrorist organizations. The IDF says more cases are coming soon.

The same day the IDF announced several strikes carried out on 30 September. According to the IDF:

- It killed Muhammad Najar, whom it describes as an operative in Hamas's military wing who took part in the 7 October 2023 infiltration of Israel. The IDF says that after his death he was presented as a journalist and his military affiliation was left out.
- It killed Ammar Mahmoud Muhammad Sharafi in the Gaza City area, whom it describes as a Hamas platoon commander.
- It killed Bilal Mahmoud Suleiman Samiri in the Khan Yunis area, whom it describes as an operative in the rocket array of Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and who it says carried out ambushes against Israeli troops.

The IDF says these men were advancing attacks in violation of the ceasefire, and that before the Gaza City strike it took steps to limit harm to civilians, including precision munitions and aerial surveillance. These are the IDF's claims. Readers should weigh them against the evidence the IDF publishes and against any reply from those concerned.

Two kinds of harm

If the IDF's account is borne out, two different wrongs are tangled together here.

The first is the obvious one. A man who fights and is then presented to the world as a journalist turns a war of weapons into a war of information. Every such case is designed to convince audiences abroad that Israel targets the press, and it works because most people cannot check.

The second wrong is quieter and in some ways worse. It falls on real journalists. When the press badge becomes cover, it stops being protection. Every genuine reporter, camera operator and fixer working in Gaza is put in greater danger by the people who borrow their identity. Those who abuse the vest are not friends of journalism. They are its parasites.

Defending journalism by defending the truth

So I want to say two things at once, and I mean both.

Journalism matters, in war more than ever. Reporters, Palestinian and Israeli and foreign, who tell us what they see, at real risk to themselves, deserve protection and respect. A state at war has a heavy duty to tell them apart from combatants, and to show its evidence when it says it has done so.

And the line between journalist and combatant must be real. When a news organization employs or memorializes someone, it owes its readers an honest account of who that person was. When a military says it has exposed a fighter behind a press badge, it owes the public the evidence. The Press Files is a claim, made openly. The right response is to examine it, case by case, not to wave it away and not to swallow it whole.

The seal of truth

The Torah commands, “Distance yourself from a false word” (Exodus 23:7), and “You shall not carry a false report” (Exodus 23:1). The sages taught that the seal of the Holy One is truth (Shabbat 55a). The word for truth, *emet*, uses the first, middle and last letters of the alphabet. Truth has to hold from beginning to end.

This week we finish the Torah on Simchat Torah and begin it again at Bereishit, where the world is made through speech. Words create worlds. That is why lying in the name of the press is so corrosive, and why honest reporting is so precious.

Defend the press. Expose its abuse. Ask for the evidence every time. Those three commitments do not compete. Together they are what taking the truth seriously looks like.

All glory to the Ribono shel Olam · Errors are mine

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