

THE ILLUSTRATIONS OF THE CONFLICT BETWEEN ISRAEL AND HAMAS IN THE GREEK CYPRIOT PRESS: THE CASE OF *O PHILELEFTHEROS TIS KYRIAKIS*

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Abstract: On October 7, 2023, the conflict between Hamas-led Palestinian organisations and Israel commenced when armed Palestinian terrorists invaded Israeli territory, marking the most significant act of terrorism since the establishment of the State of Israel. A day later, the Israeli counterattack began, with constant bombardments and a total blockade of the Gaza Strip, as well as clashes in the West Bank and on Israel's border with Lebanon. At the same time, there were many demonstrations around the world against the Hamas-Israel war, while the UN warned that there is a serious risk of genocide in Gaza.

The United Nations and various human rights groups have highlighted that Hamas is guilty of war crimes for targeting civilians and taking hostages during the October 7 invasion. Israel has also been accused of war crimes for imposing collective punishment on Palestinians through civilian deaths, forced evacuations from Gaza City, and the use of bombs.

This paper studies how the Sunday Greek Cypriot press reports on the war crisis between Israel and Hamas from the beginning of the crisis until the end of May 2024. Our aim is to highlight the importance of printed press as a vital source of information for the Cypriot public, particularly in relation to the crisis occurring in close proximity to Cyprus where the armed conflicts are taking place.

The year 1974 marked a significant period of conflict in Cyprus, and its consequences continue to be observed today. Through content analysis, this study aims to examine the overall role of the press during conflicts and draw conclusions accordingly. Newspapers, in addition to being objects of research and study, will be used as historical sources for the period in question. More specifically, the paper focuses on the Greek Cypriot newspaper *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis* (English translation: The Sunday Liberal) and attempts to present its political positions in relation to the conflict landscape in the neighboring region of Cyprus.

Keywords: press; conflicts; Israel; Hamas; Cyprus

ИЛЮСТРАЦИИ НА КОНФЛИКТА МЕЖДУ ИЗРАЕЛ И ХАМАС В ПРЕСАТА НА КИПЪРСКИТЕ ГЪРЦИ

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Резюме: На 7 октомври 2023 г. конфликтът между палестинските организации, водени от „Хамас“, и Израел започна, когато въоръжени палестински терористи нахлуха на израелска територия – най-значимият акт на тероризъм от създаването на Държавата Израел. Ден по-късно започна израелската контраатака с постоянни бомбардировки и пълна блокада на ивицата Газа, както и сблъсъци на Западния бряг и на границата на Израел с Ливан. В същото време по света имаше много демонстрации срещу войната между „Хамас“ и Израел, докато ООН предупреждаваше, че съществува сериозен риск от геноцид в Газа.

ООН и различни правозащитни организации подчертаха, че „Хамас“ е виновен за военни престъпления: за нападенията срещу цивилни и вземането на заложници по време на инвазията на 7 октомври. Израел беше обвинен във военни престъпления: за налагане на колективно наказание на палестинци чрез смърт на цивилни, принудителни евакуации от град Газа и използване на бомби.

Тази статия изследва как неделната гръцко-кипърска преса отразява военната криза между Израел и „Хамас“ от началото ѝ до края на май 2024 г. Нашата цел е да подчертаем значението на печатните издания като жизненоважен източник на информация за кипърската общественост, особено във връзка с кризата, която се случва в непосредствена близост до Кипър, където се водят въоръжените конфликти. 1974 г. бележи началото на конфликт в Кипър, чиито последици продължават да се наблюдават и днес. Чрез анализ на медийното съдържание това изследване има за цел да разгледа цялостната роля на пресата по време на конфликти и да направи съответните заключения. Вестниците, освен че са обект на изследване, ще бъдат използвани като исторически източници за въпросния период. По-конкретно статията се фокусира върху гръцко-кипърския вестник *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis* (в превод на английски: „Неделният либерал“) и се опитва да представи неговите политически позиции по отношение на конфликтния пейзаж в съседния регион Кипър.

Ключови думи: преса, конфликти, Израел, „Хамас“, Кипър

Introduction

The mass media play an important role in periods of armed conflicts as they take on the graceless role of informing the public about what is happening on the battlefield. They are important sources of information on current events. They

can play a key role in raising public awareness (or not) since, depending on their ownership status, they produce and disseminate news on important conflicts accordingly. At the same time, they promote thinking and reflection, and become agents for influencing public opinion and for resolving conflicts and disputes. The coverage of news by journalists in a particular way can change the whole scenario of an event¹. In the case of the crisis between Israel and Hamas, war news can stimulate actions and emotions, as they mostly describe events in manipulative or vivid ways². On the other hand, the framing of news influences the public's perception of an issue³. News framing contributes to the use of certain words in a news story and to the omission of the rest of the news story depending on the subject matter being dealt with by that media or news agency. Through news framing, the reaction of readers varies. The mass media have many ways of influencing the public by using specific words, phrases, images and cartoons⁴.

Studies on peace journalism regarding the conflict in the Middle East emphasise that news reporting includes propaganda discourse⁵. Such studies also stress that the framing of news covering the recent armed conflict between Israel and Hamas includes news that focuses on the promotion of violence, war propaganda and national security advocacy, which limits the potential for media agencies to support the reconciliation process⁶. However, peace journalism leads to the building global peace by creating an atmosphere conducive to compromise and negotiation rather than war and conflict (Ha et al., 2020).

This paper studies the framing of news related to the Israel-Hamas war conflict by the Cyprus newspaper *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis* (English translation: The Sunday Liberal). More generally, the news coverage relates to the context of peace and war, humanitarian aid, geopolitical plan and connection to the Cyprus

¹ HUSSAIN, I. (2015). News framing on indo-pak conflicts in the news (Pakistan) and times of India: War and peace journalism perspective. *Journal of Mass Communication & Journalism*, 5(8), 272.

² IBRAHIM, F., N. MUSTAFFA, F. AHMAD, P. K. CHANG & W. A. W. MAHMUD (2013). Peace journalism: Implications of war and peace news amongst Malaysian audience. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 23(2), 258–269.

³ ARANDAS, M. F., C. P. KEE, E. M. W. MOHAMAD & S. A. IDID (2018). Framing the Reaction of President Abbas on the Issue of Moving the US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. *e-Bangi*, 15(5), 181–192.

⁴ RAZA, M. R., M. JAN, K. SULTAN & F. AZIZ (2012). Portrayal of war on terrorism in Pakistani print media exploring peace framing in daily nation and business recorder. *Asian journal of social sciences & humanities*, 1(4), 97–108.

⁵ HUSSAIN, S. & A. R. AHMAD (2022). Examining perceptions towards war/peace journalism: A survey of journalists in Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan. *International Communication Gazette*, 84(3), 183–205.

⁶ ATANESYAN, A. (2020). Media framing on armed conflicts: Limits of peace journalism on the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict. *Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding*, 14(4), 534–550.

problem. The paper also helps to explore the direction followed *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis* regarding news coverage with the content mentioned above.

O Phileleftheros daily newspaper has deep roots in the history of the Cypriot press, which is why it has stood firm through the years. The roots of this newspaper go back much further than December 1955, when its first issue was published. The founder of *O Phileleftheros*, Nikos Chr. Pattihis, made several attempts to publish a daily newspaper, starting in 1932 at the age of 24, just after he had finished his studies. *O Phileleftheros* has had loyal readers since 1955, when it was first published, recording in its few pages all the shocking events of the time. The validity of its information, its serious yet critical articles, its independent opinion, without party affiliations, is what established the newspaper *O Phileleftheros* in the minds of its readers. It has made enormous leaps forward since then, making use of new technologies, increasing the number of pages, improving its aesthetic appearance, but above all applying the principles of investigative journalism, with live reports, interviews, features, commentaries, articles and photographs.

Theoretical Background

The mass media can describe the influence exerted on the public due to the angle used when news is presented to them, i.e. in the case of newspapers, journalists create their own news headlines which are published and then read by readers⁷. The news frames are intended to lead to interpretation, influence, reflection and discussion of events based on the news published. Framing brings enormous influence on both public opinion and politicians, decision-making bodies and policy-makers⁸. The media also plays an effective role in shaping public opinion and therefore “the press may not be very successful in telling us what to think about, but it is extremely successful in telling us what to think about”⁹.

On the other hand, Entman argues that framing encourages thinking, reflection and understanding of news¹⁰. This is achieved through concepts, keywords, visual images, symbols, etc. that are published in a news story. News framings are related to certain characteristics of news, such as the importance of the news, the place and also the time of origin to make the news more prominent than

⁷ COHEN, B. (1963) *The Press and Foreign Policy*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

⁸ TUCHMAN, G. (1978). *Making news: A study in the construction of reality*. New York: Free Press. Politiki.

⁹ COHEN, B. (1963) *The Press and Foreign Policy*, Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

¹⁰ ENTMAN, R. (1991). Framing U.S. Coverage of International News: Contrasts in Narratives of the KAL and Iran Air Incidents. *Journal of Communication*. T. 41, No. 4, 6–27.

other topics¹¹. This is why journalists working in the media decide what should be included in the news and what should be excluded¹². The news framing has power to influence public opinion. For example, if the framing of a news story is negative then the readers' opinion will be negatively influenced, whereas if it is positive, it will positively influence their opinion¹³. Here, the importance of the media that publishes the news in terms of influencing the public should also be emphasized. This is why the media is responsible to provide information to the citizens about news that affects their lives. The media are considered important social institutions that influence people's perceptions, knowledge and attitudes¹⁴.

News framings help to influence readers' opinions. Particularly when framing a political news story in which readers are first asked to understand the news¹⁵. Through news framing, audiences can learn about leaders, nations and their societies, lifestyles, institutions etc.

This paper explores *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis* for the news framings on peace, war, humanitarian aid, geopolitical plans and making the connection to the Cyprus problem. This newspaper was chosen based on the fact that it is the most popular newspaper in Cyprus with island-wide circulation. Considered an independent daily newspaper that has completed 69 years of life, *O Phileleftheros* is always at the forefront and informs people directly about events and developments concerning Cyprus and abroad.

Research Method

The paper includes a news content analysis of its Sunday edition and covers the eight-month period from October 2023 to May 2024. The period began with the Hamas terrorist attack on Israel, until the end of May 2024 when the clashes continue. The quantitative part of this study focused on the descriptive statistics of the framings of peace, war, humanitarian aid, geopolitical plans and connection to the Cyprus problem, while the qualitative part focused on how these framings were used. A total of 154 news items were selected and analysed. The items were collected through the news published in *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis*. The collected news items were then coded in a coding sheet.

¹¹ MOKHTAR (2018)

¹² EZE, V. C. & O. ELEGBE (2018). Trends in media framing of China's engagement in Africa and other parts of the world. *Journal of Pan African Studies*, 11(2), 92–103.

¹³ FOUNTAIN, A. (2008). It's all in the words: Determining the relationship between newspaper portrayal of rape victims and reader responses. *Undergraduate Review* 4(1), 33–38.

¹⁴ SANDBERG, H. (2007). A matter of looks: The framing of obesity in four Swedish daily newspapers. *Communications*, 32 (4), 447–472.

¹⁵ BERINSKY, A. J. & D. R. KINDER (2006). Making sense of issues through media frames: Understanding the Kosovo crisis. *The Journal of Politics*, 68(3), 640–656.

The news was selected by focusing on certain keywords such as “Palestine”, “Israel”, “Hamis”, the names of the presidents, “peace” and “war”. This process has been guided by Ibrahim et al. by focusing on headlines and subtitles, the first three paragraphs, illustrations, tables, figures, captions and photographs¹⁶. These news items were then examined in detail. The framing of news on peace and war, the conflict, the final settlement, humanitarian aid, geopolitical planning and the framing of the link to the Cyprus issue refer to the coding, news categorisation and analysis.

Results

On Sundays, most of the printed press is published in a higher number of pages compared to other days of the week. That is why the Sunday edition has richer material, in greater quantities. This is also the case today for many newspapers. Therefore, we present the news in *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis* regarding the Israel-Hamas conflict separately by month.

Table 1. Amount of news items and percentages in *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis*

SUNDAY News Items Period 8.10. – 26.05.	<i>Number of News Items</i>	<i>%</i>
October	70	45%
November	27	17%
December	14	9%
January	6	4%
February	3	2%
March	15	10%
April	9	6%
May	10	7%
Total	154	
%		100%

Table 1 shows the monthly number of news items that cover the terrorist attack in Israel in *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis*. Here we observe that in October 2023 when the terrorist attack took place, there is a continuous, intense and rich

¹⁶ IBRAHIM, F., N. MUSTAFFA, F. AHMAD, P. K. CHANG & W. A. W. MAHMUD (2013). Peace journalism: Implications of war and peace news amongst Malaysian audience. *Journal of Asian Pacific Communication*, 23(2), 258–269.

news coverage, while in the following months the news coverage on the subject decreases.

October has the most news with 45% since it is the month when the terrorist act took place. This is followed by November, i.e. the next month in which the conflicts became more widespread in the region, with a percentage of 17%. In the following months of December 2022, January and February 2023 the percentage decreases to 9%, 4% and 2% respectively ,as the continuous fighting in the region continues and is part of the daily news. In the month of March 2023 we observe the news percentage rising to 10%. In our opinion, this is due to the humanitarian aid offered by the Amalthea sea corridor to the civilian population in Gaza and the involvement of the Republic of Cyprus to bring humanitarian aid to the area. In April and May, news items are provided with 6% and 7% respectively.

Table 2. Size of News Items

Size of news item Period 8.10. – 26.05.	<i>O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis</i>	%
Small	34	22%
Medium	48	31%
Large	72	47%
Total	154	
%		100

In the variable “Size of news item” (table 2), large news items account for 47%, medium news items for 31% and small news items for 22%.

Table 3. Drafting of News Items

Drafting of news items Period 8.10. – 26.05.	<i>O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis</i>	%
Signed	136	88%
Unsigned	14	9%
International News Agency	4	3%
Total	154	
%		100%

In the variable “Drafting of news items”, we note that 88% are signed articles and 8% are unsigned, while 3% are articles by International News Agencies.

Table 4. Type of Published Items

Type of Published Item Period 8.10. – 26.05.	<i>O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis</i>	%
Main article/Editorial	4	3%
Opinion/ Analysis/ Commentary	95	62%
Reportage	27	17%
Interview	14	9%
Simple news item	14	9%
Other	–	–
Total	154	
%		100

In the variable “Type of publication” (table 4), we observe that from the 154 articles collected, Opinions/Analyses/Commentaries are the most common with 62%, Reportages follow with 17%, while Interviews and Simple News Items both receive 9%. Main articles/ editorials appear in 3% of the items studied.

Table 5. Origin of Sources

Origin of Sources Period 8.10. – 26.05.	<i>O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis</i>	%
Cyprus	118	77%
Greece	–	–
Washington	7	4%
Anonymous	25	16%
International Agencies	4	3%
Total	154	
%		100

In the variable “Origin of sources” (table 5), we observe that most items originate from Cyprus at a percentage of 77%. Anonymous sources follow with 16% and Washington accounts for approximately 4% and international agencies account for 3%.

Table 6. Accompanying Visual Material

Accompanying Visual Material Period 8.10. – 26.05.	<i>O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis</i>	%
Images	118	98
Tables	–	–
Political cartoons	2	2
Others	–	–
Total	120	
%		100

In the variable “Accompanying visual material”, we observe that 98% of accompanying visual materials are images and 2% are political cartoons.

Discussion

The position of *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis*

From the analysis of the data in *O Phileleftheros newspaper*, during the months of October 2023 to May 2024, the following emerged:

- large-sized news items in the newspaper accounted for 72% compared to medium-sized news items that accounted for 31%;
- news items in *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis* included images from the conflict between Israel-Hamas at a massive percentage of 98%;
- in the eight months studies, sources from Cyprus account for approximately 77%;
- regarding the type of publication, 62% are opinion articles and 17% are reportagesM
- signed articles account for 88% and unsigned articles account for 9%.

Regarding the topics dealt with by *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis*, we observe that 154 news items that focus on the war conflict between Israel-Hamas. Regarding the categories of news items, we selected the six framings used by the newspaper at the time, which are presented in more detail below.

1. The newspaper publishes news items of a peacekeeping nature in the region. More specifically *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis* reports:
 - “Humanity in a perineal state” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October, 2023)
 - “Nicosia bears messages to the EU” (*O Phileleftheros*, 22 October, 2023)
 - “Communication channels to defuse the crisis” (*O Phileleftheros*, 22 October 2023)

- “Ceasefire: An immediate priority” (*O Phileleftheros*, 22 October 2023)
- “Everyone’s goal is to end the war” (*O Phileleftheros*, 29 October 2023)
- “US interest for aid to Gaza via Cyprus” (*O Phileleftheros*, 3 March 2024)
- “Foreign Minister optimistic about Operation ‘Amalthea’” (*O Phileleftheros*, 10 March 2024).

2. Reporting news on the war conflict. The newspaper reports:

- “Heavy blow of Hamas on Israel” (*O Phileleftheros*, 8 October 2023)
- “B. Netanyahu: We are at war and we will win” (*O Phileleftheros*, 8 October 2023)
- “Shock and fear over the side effects” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
- “New data from the new clash” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
- “Hamas’s attack rewrites the rules in the Middle East” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
- “Shut the door of hell” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
- “What cannot be solved, is slaughtered” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
- “The Middle East continues to burn” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
- “The Hamas’s mastermind behind the invasion of Israel” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
- “Hamas’s deadly financing” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
- “Gaza has turned to hell” (*O Phileleftheros*, 29 October 2023)
- “The normality of terror” (*O Phileleftheros*, 29 October 2023)
- “How Hamas managed to thwart Netanyahu’s plans” (*O Phileleftheros*, 29 October 2023)
- “The anarchic international environment and Cyprus. Hamas’ terrorist attack against Israel on October 7 was not only the result of hatred for the Jewish state but also had political goals” (*O Phileleftheros*, 5 November 2023)
- “Ronen Zeidel: The presence of paramilitaries is a carcinoma for the Middle East region” (*O Phileleftheros*, 5 November 2023)
- “New bombings after the ceasefire” (*O Phileleftheros*, 3 December 2023)
- “Israel continues the war against Hamas” (*O Phileleftheros*, 10 December 2023)
- “Hecatombs in Rafah” (*O Phileleftheros*, 4 February 2024)
- “Israeli response hurts. New bombings in Gaza Strip following the judgement of the International Court” (*O Phileleftheros*, 26 May 2024).

3. News items referring to a final settlement. *O Phileleftheros* tis Kyriakis reports:

- “Operation to clear terrorists inside Gaza (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
 - “Israel’s goal is the complete annihilation of Hamas (*O Phileleftheros*, 29 October 2023)
 - “Oren Anolik: We must ensure that Israel’s security is not compromised again” (*O Phileleftheros*, 19 November 2023)
 - “The goal of destroying Hamas is becoming distant” (*O Phileleftheros*, 26 January 2024)
 - “Netanyahu factor is key” (*O Phileleftheros*, 21 April 2024).
4. News items referring to humanitarian assistance in the area. The newspaper reports:
- “Humanitarian assistance to Gaza” (*O Phileleftheros*, 22 October 2023)
 - “Cyprus ready to provide assistance to Gaza” (*O Phileleftheros*, 29 October 2023)
 - “Cyprus present and playing a peace-making role” (*O Phileleftheros*, 5 November 2023)
 - “The second phase of the Gaza initiative. Cyprus is in dialogue with experts and is also discussing its conversion into a base for floating hospitals” (*O Phileleftheros*, 12 November 2023)
 - “In the second phase of planning for assistance. Cyprus is in contact with experts and some countries want it as a base for floating hospitals” (*O Phileleftheros*, 12 November 2023)
 - “Amalthea on track for implementation” (*O Phileleftheros*, 10 December 2023)
 - “The humanitarian corridor is being implemented” (*O Phileleftheros*, 3 March 2024)
 - “Humanitarian corridor to Gaza via Cyprus” (*O Phileleftheros*, 10 March 2024)
 - “Multiple benefits from ‘Amalthea’” (*O Phileleftheros*, 17 March 2024)
 - “‘Amalthea’ is proving significant in practice” (*O Phileleftheros*, 17 March 2024)
 - “Republic of Cyprus shares on the rise after the ‘Amalthea’ plan” (*O Phileleftheros*, 17 March 2024)
 - “‘Amalthea’ brings multiple political and diplomatic benefits to the Republic of Cyprus” (*O Phileleftheros*, 17 March 2024)
 - “With ‘Amalthea’ many doors that were closed have been opened and the Presidential Office and the Foreign Ministry know what to do” (*O Phileleftheros*, 17 March 2024)

- “New attempt to send humanitarian aid to Gaza” (*O Phileleftheros*, 28 April 2024)
 - “‘Amalthea’ fully operational” (*O Phileleftheros*, 19 May 2024)
 - “How the aid will be transferred to Gaza” (*O Phileleftheros*, 19 May 2024)
 - “Aid to Palestinians. The first 310 pallets were uploaded on the first platform in Gaza as part of the ‘Amalthea’ initiative” (*O Phileleftheros*, 19 May 2024).
5. News items referring to the geopolitical position. The newspaper reports:
- “Highlighting the importance of Cyprus in the region” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
 - “8 observations on the new war in the Middle East” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
 - “Geopolitical twists and turns with Cyprus in the equation” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
 - “Let’s prepare for turbulence from a global diplomatic earthquake” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
 - “The geopolitical games are many, the interests are big and involve major players. But those who will pay are the peoples of peace” (*O Phileleftheros*, 15 October 2023)
 - “The US can no longer ignore the Middle East region” (*O Phileleftheros*, 22 October 2023)
 - “Cyprus’s security is affected by developments” (*O Phileleftheros*, 22 October 2023)
 - “The new planetary geopolitical balances” (*O Phileleftheros*, 12 November 2023)
 - “Gaza’s opportunity for Cyprus” (*O Phileleftheros*, 10 March 2024)
 - “Gaza’s humanitarian corridor through Cyprus” (*O Phileleftheros*, 10 March 2024)
 - “Turkey and Egypt want more aid to Gaza” (*O Phileleftheros*, 21 April 2024).
6. In the final category, we identify news items that make the connection with the Cyprus problem. The newspaper reports:
- “Movements under the shadow of war. The Cyprus problem through the new world order arising from the crisis in the Middle East” (*O Phileleftheros*, 29 October 2023)
 - “‘Amalthea’ and the Cyprus problem” (*O Phileleftheros*, 31 March 2024).

Conclusion

From our research we reached the following conclusions.

a) The newspaper *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis* contains 154 news items based on current events, urgency, proximity, relevance, human interest of the news and, of course, its social impact.

b) Written news in the press were divided according to subject matter based on criteria such as thematic reference, drafting of news article, type of publication, etc., in order to form a picture of the scene of the war conflict.

c) On the one hand, the most important news items, which appear in the press as opinion articles, receive priority on the first pages. This indicates the stance and position of the newspaper on the conflict, humanitarian aid and peace landscape which shows that the press is guiding public opinion. On the other hand, the text published by *O Phileleftheros tis Kyriakis* is edited according to the ideological politics expressed by the newspaper that includes it in its columns. This method proves the intention of the printed medium to make a specific interpretation, which is related to the position and political line of the printed medium, as well as the position of the newspaper towards the Israel-Hamas conflict.

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