



# **The Life Line Convoy [Viva Palestina] and clashes at the Palestinian-Egyptian Border**

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## Introduction

In January, 2010, on the eve of the Viva Palestina Life Line convoy's arrival, which was carrying humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip from 17 countries, the Palestinian-Egyptian border became the scene of clashes and confrontations between the Egyptian security forces and Palestinian protestors. The Palestinians were protesting the ban on the convoy entering the Strip, which at the time resulted in the death of one Egyptian soldier and the injury of dozens of protestors. The two sides exchanged accusations over responsibility for the death of the Egyptian soldier and the ensuing clashes and injuries on the Palestinian side. At the time and until today, it has remained unclear which side was responsible for the unrest and the ensuing repercussions, especially the soldier's death. This event was chosen for its significance and its impact on the Palestinian arena including its ramifications regarding the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, especially the Israeli siege on the Gaza Strip.

### How did the three Palestinian papers cover this event?

There was a clear discrepancy between the three newspapers in their coverage of this event, whether in terms of where on the front page of each newspaper the news item about the event was placed and the choice of headline. There were also differences in the content and accuracy of the news material. The largest discrepancy was between Al Ayyam on the one hand and Al Hayat Al Jadida and Al Quds on the other.

In Al Ayyam, for example, the news item was the lead headline, placed on the right hand side of the front page, since it was the most significant event of the day. Its headline was comprised of three lines:

**The Life Line [Viva Palestina] Convoy Reaches Gaza Strip – subtitle**  
**Clashes Erupt in flames at the Egyptian-Palestinian border– main headline**  
**Killing of an Egyptian policeman and injury of dozens of Palestinians**

قافلة شريان الحياة تصل إلى القطاع

**الحدود المصرية - الفلسطينية تشتعل صدامات**  
**مقتل شرطي مصري وإصابة عشرات الفلسطينيين**

In reference to the event itself, we find that the newspaper chose a subtitle for the part about the convoy reaching the Gaza Strip, which is a sound editorial decision given that the arrival of the convoy as an event is less in importance than the clashes, which resulted in a death and several injuries. However, for its second title, it chose a misplaced phrase, which was slightly exaggerated: "**Clashes erupt in flames**". This suggests to the reader that there were confrontations that erupted fiercely. A headline of less intensity could have sufficed, which sum up the incident such as:

**"Life Line Convoy arrives in Gaza"**

**Killing of an Egyptian policeman and the injury of dozens of Palestinians in clashes at the border**

**Accusations fly over responsibility for the regrettable incident and the outcomes of these clashes.**







Although the newspaper did not hold any one Palestinian party responsible for these clashes in its headline, it did so in the following attached photo, which showed demonstrators climbing over the border wall, which suggested that the responsibility falls on Hamas supporters.



(أ ب)

رفح - أنصار حركة حماس يرشقون رجال الشرطة المصريين المتواجدين على الحدود بالحجارة خلال صدامات وقعت أمس.

**Rafah – Hamas supporters pelt Egyptian policemen at the border with rocks during yesterday's clashes.**

Furthermore, the text of the news piece on the front page spoke firstly about the killing of the Egyptian policeman **"by a Palestinian bullet"** and later spoke about "Palestinian demonstrators chanting slogans such as **"We need only to depend on God for justice"** as they waved green Hamas flags. Several of them pelted Egyptian soldiers at the border with stones...". This suggested that the official Palestinian side held Hamas responsible, even though the text also indicates that **"...the Egyptian security fired shots in the air and shot teargas canisters at the young men."** However, nowhere in the report does it prove that the soldier's death was a result of a bullet shot from the Palestinian side or from Hamas-affiliated activists. The second paragraph of the report quotes eyewitnesses saying, **"Members of the Hamas-run national security and police dispersed the demonstrators with nightsticks and prevented them from reaching the border strip..."** However, the report does not indicate to any shooting from the Palestinian side so why did the newspaper adopt the narrative of one party against another about the incident? Especially since it is not clear on whose shoulders the responsibility lies in light of Hamas' denial of responsibility for the events and the exchange of accusations with the Egyptian side. Still, the story gave Hamas' response to the incident according to two of its leaders, Sami Abu Zuhri and Salah Bardawil, while indicating that the "Interior Ministry in Gaza" – **without noting that it is the deposed government** – had announced the opening of an investigation into the events.

كما قال شهود، ان المتظاهرين الفلسطينيين ردوا هتافات منها «حسبنا الله ونعم الوكيل»، وهم يرفعون رايات «حماس» الخضراء وقام عدد منهم برشق الجنود المصريين المتواجدين على الحدود بالحجارة، فرد الامن المصري بإطلاق النار في الهواء وإطلاق قنابل الغاز المسيل للدموع على الشبان.

وافاد شهود عيان بأن عناصر من الامن الوطني والشرطة التابعين لحماس قاموا بتفريق المتظاهرين بالهراوات ومنعهم من الوصول الى الشريط الحدودي.

In other words, the story lacks accuracy, or perhaps it purposely chose not to disclose the accurate information so that the reader would understand it in the way the editor wanted by phrasing the story in this way. Nevertheless, we found that to the left of its lead story, the newspaper highlighted another news piece about the same subject with the headline:

**The Presidency and the government express their utmost regret for the martyrdom of the Egyptian soldier**

## الرئاسة والحكومة تعبران عن بالغ أسفهما لاستشهاد الجندي المصري

رام الله - «وفا»: عبرت الرئاسة الفلسطينية عن بالغ أسفها لاستشهاد الجندي المصري أحمد شعبان محمد مصطفى على الحدود مع قطاع غزة برصاص أطلق من داخل القطاع.

وقالت الرئاسة: إن هذا العمل غير مسؤول ويستهدف الجهود

The news piece included the full name of the Egyptian soldier – Ahmad Shaban Mohammed Mustapha who, "was martyred on the border with the Gaza Strip by a bullet coming from inside the Strip." This suggests that the responsibility for his death lies with the Palestinian side, particularly with Hamas, even though the text of the article links the killing of the Egyptian soldier with the efforts to achieve Palestinian reconciliation as seen in this phrase referring to



the shooting: **"an irresponsible act that targets the Egyptian efforts to achieve reconciliation"** at a time when Hamas was being accused of hindering the efforts for this reconciliation.

What is noteworthy here is that Al Ayyam chose the confrontations at the border between the Gaza Strip and Egypt as its leading headline on the front page as opposed to Al Hayat Al Jadida and Al Quds, which both chose another local and political event as headlines, which was: the acceleration of Jewish settlement building in Jerusalem. The varying levels of attention towards these two events and their significance and gravity reflects the priorities of each newspaper towards their ramifications and relationship to the internal Palestinian level – especially in terms of the reconciliation and the impasse in the political process, which was accompanied by Israeli political and practical measures.

This discrepancy is very apparent in the lead headline of Al Hayat Al Jadida. It merges the two events and highlighted them in the middle of the front page. It chose the Israeli escalation in Jerusalem settlements and placed it to the right of the page given its importance and gravity. It then highlighted in bold what happened at the Egyptian-Palestinian border, but like Al Ayyam, it chose an interesting headline for the clashes: the first subtitle read, **"Hamas responsible for demonstrations in Rafah."** while the second main headline referred to the killing of the Egyptian policeman, saying: **"he was killed by a Palestinian bullet."** The third headline read, **"The presidency and the government in Ramallah denounce this incident,"** considering it irresponsible and targeting the Egyptian efforts to achieve conciliation. Al Hayat Al Jadida's headlines read, **"During a demonstration organized by Hamas in Rafah, clashes broke out and a number of protestors were injured."** – subtitle.

**"Killing of an Egyptian policeman at the border with Gaza by a Palestinian bullet" – main headline**

**"The Presidency and government denounce: an irresponsible act targeting the Egyptian efforts to achieve reconciliation."**

خلال تظاهرة نظمها حماس في رفح تطورت الى اشتباكات اصاب فيها عدد من المتظاهرين

## مقتل شرطي مصري على الحدود مع غزة برصاص فلسطيني

الرئاسة والحكومة تدينان : عمل غير مسؤول يستهدف الجهد المصري لإرساء المصالحة

Upon a return to the text, we find that Al Hayat Al Jadida speaks about the killing of the Egyptian policeman by "a Palestinian bullet...in a demonstration organized by Hamas." That is, Hamas, in its capacity as the organizer of the demonstration is the one responsible for the killing of the Egyptian policeman – does this warrant an accusation of responsibility against Hamas, even though the party that caused his death has not yet been determined? There were also accusations coming from Hamas that the Egyptian soldier was killed by friendly fire while they were shooting at the Palestinian protesters on the other side of the border.

However, it is clear from the text that the newspaper based its accusation of Hamas for the killing of the Egyptian policeman on Egyptian security sources, saying that **"the policeman**



**Ahmad Shaaban was shot by a bullet coming from the Palestinian side of Rafah."** The newspaper did not investigate the validity of these accusations through its own reporter by getting an official statement from the other side, even if there is no recognition of their legitimacy. In another place in the article, Al Hayat Al Jadida gives another story taken from Reuters – quoting Palestinian eyewitnesses that, according to the newspaper, **"members of the Hamas police forces opened fire at the Egyptians."** Did this actually happen? Contrarily, Al Ayyam had mentioned that, **"Members of the Hamas national security and police force dispersed the protesters with nightsticks and prohibited them from reaching the border strip."**

وقالت مصادر امنية مصرية ان  
الشرطي احمد شعبان (٢١ سنة)  
اصيب بطلق ناري جاء من الشطر  
الفلسطيني لمدينة رفح الحدودية

Al Hayat Al Jadida based its coverage of this event on foreign press agencies – according to the story on its front page. As for the details printed on its inside pages, it depended on reporting from its Gaza correspondent, Nader Qaseer and on wire reports from Wafa, the official Palestinian news agency. It included blaring headlines that also insinuate that the responsibility for the death of the Egyptian soldier lies with what they called, **"armed Palestinian elements"** and was not killed by a random or stray bullet, but by **"sniper fire."** Furthermore, the newspaper used **"Egyptian sources"** suggesting to the reader that the Egyptian soldier was killed by premeditated Palestinian sniper fire and not during the clashes with angry protesters who were throwing rocks, from which the bullet could have been fired, or from the other side for that matter. The identity of the shooter or the party from whom the shots were fired was not known, even if it was Hamas who called for and organized the demonstration. Furthermore, Al Hayat Al Jadida described the dead Egyptian soldier as a "martyr" a term usually reserved in the local press for those who are killed by Israeli fire.

Moreover, the title of the report published on the inside page (Page 9) of Al Hayat Al Jadida included another title with certain political implications by highlighting Fateh's position without actually indicating to Hamas' position or that of the deposed government in Gaza, given that the latter is the party in control of conditions in the Strip. Hence, the complete title of the report reads as follows:

**A protest organized by Hamas in Rafah developed into clashes in which a number of protesters were injured.**

**Egypt accuses armed Palestinians of sniper shooting an Egyptian soldier at the border with Fateh condemns the provocations organized by Hamas against our brotherly neighbor Egypt.**

خلال احتجاج نظمته حماس في رفح تطور الى اشتباكات اصيب فيها عدد من المتظاهرين

## مصر تتهم عناصر فلسطينية مسلحة بقنص جندي مصري على الحدود مع غزة

فتح تدين الاستفزازات والتحرشات التي تنظمها حماس ضد الشقيقة مصر

The report chooses its terms carefully by describing the killing of the Egyptian soldier from "sniper fire", while at the same time playing down the scope of injuries on the Palestinian side by saying that, "a number of demonstrators", which were in the dozens. Hence, to achieve objectivity would have called for a more professional alternative headline from the one in the newspaper such as:

**During protests in Rafah in which a number of protesters were injured...  
Egyptian authorities accuse "Palestinian elements" of killing one of their soldiers.  
Fateh condemns the provocations against Egypt...the deposed government denies**

The same insinuations were found in the photos that accompanied the news coverage of the event on Page 9 of Al Hayat Al Jadida, which published two pictures of the clashes. It is apparent from the caption under the first picture that the newspaper holds Hamas responsible.



متظاهرون من حماس يرشقون برجاً للأمن المصري بالحجارة.

**Caption: Hamas demonstrators throw rocks at an Egyptian security tower**

The caption should have been something like this:

**Demonstrators throw rocks at an Egyptian security tower**

The newspaper also printed another picture with the following caption



..ومسلحون من حماس يضربون بالعصي المتظاهرين لانهاء المواجهات في رفح امس. (ا.ف.ب)

**"Armed men from Hamas strike protesters with nightsticks to quell clashes in Rafah yesterday"**

The newspaper could have chosen an alternative caption instead such as:

**Elements from the deposed government's interior ministry disperse protesters by force yesterday in Rafah.**

The pictures did not include any scenes of those injured on the Palestinian side of the border.

An analysis of the captions as they appeared in Al Hayat Al Jadida shows that the paper holds Hamas exclusively responsible for the incident. The first caption speaks of "**Hamas protesters**" while the second one mentions "**armed men from Hamas beating protesters**" – that is, Hamas is the party demonstrating and is also the party quelling its own elements, even though those who are beating the protesters are from the security forces of the deposed government's interior ministry. However, the newspaper avoids describing them as such, which is something

we notice in their coverage of news and in the description of the deposed government's apparatuses in Gaza.

What is noticeable in Al Hayat Al Jadida's coverage of this event is the absence a Hamas or deposed government narrative in the main headlines of its front page and inside page articles. It sufficed with posting Hamas' justification of what it called its "**protest sit-in**" in the words of Fawzi Barhoum, Hamas' spokesperson. However, it did not give Hamas' response or the response of the deposed government to the accusations against its people regarding the killing of the Egyptian soldier. Furthermore, it boldly highlighted on its front page in the lead headline that the President and government in Ramallah condemn the incident. It completely disregarded the position of the main and accused party in this incident, which is Hamas and the deposed government since they are administratively responsible for the area under their control and government. However, it seems the political split between the two parts of the homeland has affected the coverage of the three main newspapers of events linked to this division. Hence, we found that these papers have taken a certain slant in covering these events.









As for Al Quds newspaper, published in east Jerusalem, we find a different coverage than those in Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida, which are published in Ramallah.

The news story appeared at the bottom right of the front page and occupied only three columns. A picture appeared alongside it which depicted a group of angry protesters climbing the border wall between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. The newspaper chose another topic for its lead story about the new settlement neighborhood in Shufat, considering it the most significant. To the left of the lead story, there was another report given special attention with a picture of the celebrations for Christmas for the eastern denominations and the Palestinian prime minister's attendance of midnight mass. That is, it gave a religious occasion that recurs annually double the importance of the Rafah clashes. It would have been more appropriate if the newspaper put the story on the celebrations on the inside pages and given it less space than it did on its front page since this is a regular seasonal occasion, while what happened at the Egyptian-Palestinian border is more important and serious and should have taken up one of the two main sections of the front page. This coverage reflects the priorities of the newspaper and its interest in the event itself even if this same event was widely covered and given exclusive importance in the other newspapers and by public opinion.

Furthermore, the headline was weak and dry and reflected the inability of the editor to appreciate the pivotal significance of the event. The following headline was chosen:

**The arrival of the Life Line Convoy 3 to the Gaza Strip  
After two days of bloody clashes in Al Areesh and Rafah**

**وصول قافلة «شريان الحياة ٣» الى قطاع غزة  
بعد يومين من الصدمات الدامية في العريش ورفح**

There was no mention of the Egyptian soldier being killed or the injuries on the Palestinian side. It sufficed to point to what it called "bloody clashes." It would have been more appropriate if the editor had used another headline for this event suitable to its scope, gravity and importance and which would highlight the developments, namely the killing of the Egyptian soldier. It could look something like this:

**The Life Line Convoy arrives in the Gaza Strip  
Killing of an Egyptian soldier in unfortunate clashes at the Egyptian-Palestinian border  
Egypt accuses Hamas...the deposed government's interior ministry opens an investigation  
into the circumstances surrounding the incident.**









The weakness in the title was also found in the text of the article, which was dealt with even more weakly by the editor. The article did not embrace to the significance of the event. The reportage about the incident started with the arrival of the Life Line Convoy to the Gaza Strip, the welcome it received and the welcoming speeches. Mention of the killing of the Egyptian soldier was only mentioned in the continued pages of the newspaper on page 34, where it was mentioned that an Egyptian soldier **“was killed by gunfire”** – the party that opened fire was not identified. **–Yesterday, at the border between Egypt and the Gaza Strip, and nine others injured along with dozens of Palestinians in confrontations that erupted during a resistance demonstration - Which resistance? – protesting the Egyptian authority’s refusal to allow the entire convoy to cross into Gaza through the Rafah Crossing”**

However, the newspaper seemed more balanced in that it took its information from a number of media and official sources from both the Egyptian and Palestinian sides in addition to information from the wire agencies. It called things by their proper name in regards to Hamas and the deposed government. Even the demonstrators were described as **“dozens of Palestinians”**. It did not say **“dozens of Hamas supporters,”** for example.

The same appeared in the captions under the pictures for the news story on the front page of the newspaper, contrary to the captions for the pictures in Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida in regards to the identity of the demonstrators, which the latter two described as Hamas activists. In the captions for the pictures in Al Quds, the description was more accurate.



«اب»

رفح - مجموعة من الشباب تقوم بالحجارة باتجاه الجنود المصريين.

### **Rafah – A group of youths throw rocks at Egyptian soldiers**

Nevertheless, Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida were more professional in dealing with the news in terms of priority of the events taking place and also in the location of the news item. Both newspapers began their reportages first with the killing of the Egyptian soldier and the injuries



of the demonstrators along with reactions to what had happened. They then moved on to talk about the arrival of the Life Line Convoy and how it was received and welcomed.

What is noticeable in the three newspapers' coverage of this incident is their reliance on more than one source in covering the events. In addition to foreign press sources, they used their correspondents in Gaza. As for the location of the news piece, it was given a significant location in Al Ayyam and Al Hayat, the former giving it the lead headline and the latter giving it an important space to the left of the lead story. Al Quds' rank of importance for the article was weak, putting it at the bottom of its front page.

### **Conclusions:**

- There was a discrepancy in the coverage of the Viva Palestina Life Line Convoy's arrival to the Gaza Strip and the clashes at the Palestinian-Egyptian border between the three newspapers.
- This discrepancy was clear in terms of the location of the news story, the choice of headline and the content and accuracy of the media material.
- The discrepancy was clear between Al Ayyam on the one hand and Al Hayat Al Jadida and Al Quds from the other.
- In their coverage, the three newspapers depended on more than one source; in addition to foreign press agencies they depended on information from their Gaza correspondents, but with the exception of important sources related to the event, such as the deposed government's interior ministry and its police and security forces.
- The event was given important status in Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida; the former made it the lead headline while the latter placed it in a key spot to the left of the lead story. Al Quds, on the other hand, was weaker in terms of interest in the story, placing it at the bottom of its front page.
- It was apparent that the political division between the two parts of the homeland left its impact on the coverage of this event on the three newspapers. Hence, we found these newspapers to have taken a certain slant in covering the events that transpired that day.