

The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of **Global Dialogue and Democracy**·MIFTAH
المبادرة الفلسطينية لتعميق الحوار العالمي والديمقراطية



Public Discourse and Perceptions: Palestinian Media Coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

MIFTAH's Media Monitoring Unit

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Introduction

The traditional role of the media as reporters of the truth can play an important role in conflicts. A key function of the media is to provide the public with the information necessary to make good decisions. It is important to realize that decisions are not only based on events but also very much on how events are presented. The media can seek to confirm or question official accounts, reveal official deceit, and correct errors of omission. Recent advances in the field of information technology have enabled the media to have a much greater impact on public opinion than ever before. The media provide the public with an indispensable service. It is one of the pillars of modern society.

Since the 1993 Oslo Accords which brought limited autonomy to Palestinian society, the tasks of the Palestinian media have changed radically. On the one hand, the media is expected to contribute to nation-building based on the prospective that the endgame of the Accords will be an independent, free, and democratic Palestinian state. On the other hand, it must deal with the reality that most of the Palestinian territory that will be the territory of the future Palestinian state is still occupied, and that it would indeed be early to shift the focus of the media away from the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. However, the two missions should not have to contradict each other since an honest, authentic, investigative, non-biased and informative media will serve both goals.

The spirit of the Oslo Accords made confidence-building between Palestinians and Israelis an indispensable condition to moving ahead in the peace process, and it gave the media in Palestine and Israel a decisive role in the difficult process of creating this crucial common ground. However, the failure of Camp David negotiations in July 2000 and the eruption of the second Intifada soon afterwards proved both sides' failure in achieving this mission.

Acknowledging the importance of the media in the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in particular, MIFTAH-The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy and KESHEV-Center for Protection of Democracy in Israel agreed to launch a joint project monitoring media coverage and professionalism on both the Palestinian and Israeli sides. The project will ultimately facilitate the development of an independent media and a culture of moderation, tolerance, and understanding between the two peoples, through monitoring, research, advocacy, and lobbying activities without jeopardizing the freedom of expression. What follows is a report on the first stage of this research project, scheduled to continue through 2005 and 2006.

The Palestinian Media Landscape

The media landscape in Palestine is complex and unique. Thus, it is essential to first outline it in order to understand the empirical reality with which MIFTAH is working and at the same time to explain the nature of the media outlets that MIFTAH is monitoring.

The Palestinian media comprises print and audio-visual outlets and an official news agency, Wafa. The press includes three daily newspapers: *Al-Quds* was established in 1951, *Al-Ayyam* and *Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah* were both founded in 1995. *Al-Quds* and *Al-Ayyam* are independent and private newspapers while *Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah* is partially subsidized by the Palestinian Authority (PA). All of these journals have websites, and provide electronic access to their archives for free.

The estimated combined circulation of these newspapers is 50,000 copies per day, according to the Palestinian Central Bureau for Statistics (PCBS) and other polling and research centers. However, the real circulation figure must be considered differently, namely from unofficially disclosed information from the newspaper owners. Polls and PCBS research also show that *Al-Quds* features the most distribution and *Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah* the least. *Al-Quds* is the newspaper that contains the most ads. Published in the annexed eastern part of Jerusalem, *Al-Quds* is subject to Israeli military censorship.

The number of pages in all newspapers varies, not according to differences in news coverage, but according to the number and size of advertisements. *Al-Ayyam* has many weekly and bi-weekly supplements such as the 'Voice of Women', 'Al-Tareeq' and others. These are considered independent publications benefiting from *Al-Ayyam's* printing and distributing system.

The percentage of the news and translated materials from international, Arabic- and Hebrew-language journals on average comprise 55% of the editorial copy, i.e. of the newspapers' content minus advertisements. To give an example, from Saturday 19 February 2005: out of the 16 pages of *Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah* on that day, there were 19.6% ads, 45.7% of the remaining space was original news from the journal and its sources, but out of that portion 29.1% was opinions rather than news.

There are also semi-monthly or irregularly appearing journals such as *Al-Awda* which is funded by the PA, or *Al-Risala*, which is affiliated with Hamas and appears mainly in Gaza. The press landscape also includes other smaller weeklies and monthlies. It is worth mentioning here that some Palestinian political factions use the mosques as their main media outlets.

The Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC) was established in 1994, when the Palestinian Radio (Voice of Palestine) started broadcasting from its studios in Jericho on the long wave length, at a frequency of 675 kHz. The transmitting station during that period was in Ramallah and Israeli technicians were in charge of transmitting, with a fiberoptic line connecting the Jericho studios with the transmitter in Ramallah. After the Israeli first redeployment in 1995, the Voice of Palestine moved to its main studios in Ramallah which were established with assistance from the EU. The Palestinian TV started diffusing in Gaza in 1994, but it took until 1998 to establish a complete network of towers and microwave links to cover all of Gaza and the West Bank. The need for creating more than 10 towers stems from the fact that Palestinian TV has to use several UHF channels with limited transmitting powers according to signed agreements with Israel on how to use the spectrum and at the same time avoid interference with existing

Israeli and Arab channels. Palestinian TV now has two main studios, one in Gaza and one in Ramallah. In 1998, Palestinian TV started using the Nile Sat satellite system for broadcasting. At this time, the satellite channel shared some of its broadcasting time with the terrestrial channel, but since 2002 the two channels had identical programming. One of the reasons for this is the destruction of the Palestinian broadcasting infrastructure by the Israeli army.

In January 2002, Israeli occupation forces destroyed the Palestinian Radio and TV studios in Ramallah and demolished the transmitting system of the Voice of Palestine including the 320 meter historic radio transmitting tower which was established during the British Mandate. Since then, the Voice of Palestine is disseminating on a high frequency FM channel (90.7), with low transmitting power. In February 2002, Israel blew up the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation building in Gaza. Despite the damage, Palestinian TV continued its broadcasting using the satellite channel.

There are also 45 private TV and 28 radio stations distributed throughout Palestinian cities and towns. All of them are local stations that serve their own communities due to their limited transmitting power. Except for a few, such as Al-Quds Educational TV, all of them depend on ads for survival. In Nablus alone there are 9 TV and 4 radio stations. In Gaza, however, there are 7 radio stations and no private TV stations.

According to the most recent survey carried out by the Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics in 2004, 93.4% of Palestinians own TV sets. Out of these, 29.3% view Palestinian TV every day, 21.6% of them are in the West Bank and 45.1% in Gaza.

In this context, MIFTAH sees its role as very important in promoting media diversity, honesty, and reliability as well as media that is free of incitement, dehumanization and de-legitimization of the other. Despite the fact that Palestinians are living under Israeli occupation and despite the numerous accusations directed at the Palestinian media of being an inciting tool, MIFTAH perceives its responsibility in presenting a proactive approach, which is not a reaction to those accusations, but points out the failure of the Palestinian media in meeting the international standards of professional media.

MIFTAH's initiative to establish a Media Monitoring Unit should be seen in the context of the Israeli occupation being the main source of provocation of incitement due to its actions in the Palestinian occupied territories. However, MIFTAH is working and will continue to work to highlight the deficits of and needs to develop the Palestinian media regardless of the occupation and difficult circumstances in which it is operating.

Methodology for Content Analysis of the Media Coverage

The monitoring unit observed media coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in order to assess the following:

- the Palestinian media landscape and its professionalism

- the types of bias in the Palestinian media outlets
- the policies and regulations pertaining to media coverage
- the interventions needed for the media to improve

The monitoring of the print media took place between 9 September and 25 December 2004. It sampled the three daily newspapers, *Al-Ayyam*, *Al-Quds*, and *Al-Hayat Al Jadidah*. The team monitored the following sections of the newspapers:

- First-page news stories and their completion on the inside pages
- The main news reports on violence
- Opinion columns and editorials
- Cartoons and photos

In addition, the monitoring unit covered the PBC's state channel, Palestine Television. This channel was monitored during a later stage between 8 December, 2004 (documentation started on 16 December 2004) and 23 December, 2004. At a future stage of the project, MIFTAH will monitor the PBC radio station, "Voice of Palestine," in addition to a number of selected web sites.

Definitions Determined Prior to the Monitoring

For the purpose of this report, MIFTAH developed the following definitions and applied them to its monitoring. However, we acknowledge that other classifications or definitions would be possible.

Incitement:

When a report/speech/opinion/song/cartoon/drawing directly or indirectly advocates killing innocent people, and/or promotes hatred or racism against an entire people.

De-legitimization:

When directly or indirectly denying a nation, race, or group the right to exist; when negating legal rights such as denying the legitimacy of UN and other multilateral conventions, treaties, declarations, resolutions.

De-humanization:

When presenting the other party (ethnic, religious, or political group) in the conflict as inhuman, or denying its members their human rights or reducing them to objects or numbers.

Other Kinds of Bias:

When the narrative of the other party in the conflict is either distorted or not presented at all, or when only a segment of a statement is taken out of context to support the narration of one side in the conflict while the main actor (who was providing the statement) was balanced in his/her statement, or when the news is not informative, but expressive or imperative in character.

Tables Showing Monitored Materials and Programs

Table A: Subjects Monitored in the Press

Monitored Subject	Monitoring Period	Number of Monitored Items
Segregation Wall + Gaza “Disengagement” Plan	9/9/2004 - 2/10/2004	170
Gaza Invasion	4/10/2004- 11/10/2004	132
Gaza Invasion + “Disengagement” Plan	12/10/2004 – 30/11/2004	173
PA President Arafat’s Illness and Death	8/11/2004 – 18/11/2004	78
Israeli Military Activities in the Occupied Palestinian Territories	1/12/2004 – 25/12/2004	223
Total	106 Days	776

News stories, articles and cartoons that appeared in Al-Quds, Al-Ayyam, and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah newspapers which dealt with the Palestinian-Israeli conflict and were not limited to internal Palestinian politics

Table B: Subjects Monitored on Palestinian TV

Topics (specific programs and series)	Period in minutes	Notes
News in Arabic	290	
News in Hebrew	45	
Programs about Jerusalem	160	
Programs on Arafat	1263	
Programs on Settlements and the Wall	40	
Programs about arts and crafts	120	
Religious programs	105	Including the Friday sermon
Programs on elections	75	
Program on refugees	30	
Entertainment programs	360	Cartoons, drama, songs

16 December-23 December, 2004. Total monitored hours: 41.47, which is 21.16% of the entire broadcasting time during the eight days of monitoring.

Findings on media orientations

1. The Palestinian media tend to work within the conceptual framework that the Israeli occupation is the reason behind the current confrontation. They consider the Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories illegal and immoral. They focus coverage on the Israeli occupation army practices in the occupied territories and the Palestinian people's suffering. Furthermore, the Palestinian media advocate the two-state solution based on the UN Security Council Resolutions 242 and 338 and the principle of land for peace. However, the Palestinian media do not present the Israeli narrative nor the human suffering of the other.
2. The main deficits in the Palestinian media are not in what "is there," but rather in what "isn't there."
 - a) The Palestinian media widely ignored its role as a public watchdog as well as elementary journalistic ethics by not criticizing Palestinian militant attacks inside Israel. Criticism of these operations mainly came in the form of paid ads. The Palestinian media largely ignored the armed state of anarchy in Palestine and its outcomes on Palestinian society and on the entire peace process. This subject has only recently become a debatable issue in the media, specifically after Mahmoud Abbas won the PA presidential elections. Humanizing the conflict was not one of the concerns of the Palestinian media, and therefore we found few articles in the press and no programs at all on Palestinian TV advocating an end to Palestinian militant attacks inside Israel.
 - b) The Palestinian media lacked investigative reports on bad management, lawlessness, and corruption in the public and private sectors of Palestinian society although some independent analysts wrote about these issues in their independent articles.
 - c) Palestinian TV commonly dealt with Palestinian victims as numbers without faces, names, or stories on their interests, wishes, or lives. When it came to Israeli victims, the Palestinian media often did not mention them at all, almost as if all of them, including children and civilians, would belong to the Israeli occupation forces.
 - d) The participation of children in Palestinian militant activities drew public criticism. Despite this, few Palestinian writers criticized these activities and the general treatment of this important issue was not a topic in the press headlines, while the Palestinian TV totally ignored it.
 - e) The Palestinian media do not enhance critical thinking in the public sphere; rather, they reflect the dominant culture.

Findings on Bias

War inside Israel!

The coverage of the Israeli unilateral 'disengagement' plan reflects hopes, wishes, and desires in the Palestinian newspaper editorials rather than real facts and news about the debate inside the Israeli polity. As the following examples show, the headlines in the newspapers predicted a civil war between Israelis if their government were to proceed with its Gaza 'disengagement' plan.

The Headlines

Shas Will Vote against It [the 'disengagement' plan] and the Settlers Will Demonstrate Too: Lapid Warns of Civil War after the Rabbis' Declarations (Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah 22-10-2004.)

Tempers Flare in Israel, Orders to Reinforce Security Measures to Protect Sharon and the Knesset (Al-Quds 21-10-2004.)

The Leaders of the Settlers Are Outraged and Warn of Civil War: Sharon Refuses to Submit his Plan for a National Referendum (Al-Quds 18/10/2004.)

Calls for Referendum Snowballing: Sharon and Settlers on Confrontation Course (Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah 18/10/2004.)

The 'disengagement' plan was ratified in the end by the Israeli Knesset without any referendum. All the headlines thus either reflected editorial wishful thinking (at least in the short run), on an internal confrontation between the Israeli government and the settlers, or constituted distortion of information, aimed at the Palestinian public.

Israel Is Condemned by the International Community; We Are Not!

In the coverage of the Israeli invasion of northern Gaza, the press used the statements of the international community representatives that condemn the Israeli invasion in its main titles while the criticism against Qassam missile attacks by Palestinian militant groups appears only in the details.

Headlines

Al-Quds. Monday, 4 October, 2004. Position: Left-Middle Front Page.

Headline: *Annan [The UN Secretary General] Calls for End to Israeli Incursion in Gaza.*

Details: In the details, Annan also demands that the PA prevent the Palestinian militant groups from firing Qassam missiles at Israeli targets. He reminds the two parties that civilians on both sides have the right to protection.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah. Friday, 1 October, 2004. Position: Right-Down, Front Page.

Headline: *Straw [Jack Straw, the British Foreign Minister] Calls upon Israel to Stop Assassination Operations and to Stop the Construction of Settlements and the Wall.*

Details: Straw also addresses the PA to work seriously to stop the "activities of the terrorist groups which continue to be committed against Israeli innocent families".

The Palestinian media tend not to link the occupation forces activities in the occupied territories with the activities of the Palestinian militant groups. We consider this to be selective and distorting information.

They Didn't Fulfill Their Obligations According to the Road Map!

Phase One in the Road Map requires that the two sides take parallel steps that would eventually lead to negotiations. It expects the Palestinian Authority to stop all kinds of "violence and terror" including certain measures to dismantle the militant Palestinian groups. At the same time, it demands that the Israeli government stop targeted killings and incursions into the Palestinian Territories and stop settlement activities and remove settlement outposts that have been established since March 2001.

The Palestinian media coverage of the Road Map focused only on the actions that the Israelis should take but it ignored what was required of the Palestinian side. Indeed it attempted to deny those requirements or at least it avoided mentioning them, leaving the impression that the Palestinians fulfilled their obligations according to the Road Map while the Israelis did not. We find this misleading and irresponsible media behavior.

The Israeli Army Killed Them!

The Palestinian TV usually covers the news of the Palestinian victims as numbers and as things, not as human beings. It mainly presents the morgues and the dead bodies, briefly providing the names, but not the identities or narratives of the victims. Very little is mentioned about the circumstances of their deaths and nothing about their families. No one sees their real faces before they were killed.

Showing the Palestinian victims in their blood only is a kind of self-dehumanization and is used to show how brutal the occupation is. But what about the victims' dignity which the media should respect (according to numerous ethics codes)? By presenting the victims in this image, the media contribute to the degradation of human life.

We do not advocate restrictions on media freedom, but permission from victims' families should, in our view, ideally be obtained before showing pictures or footage bodies of victims. Notification of deaths to the families should also precede publication of victims' names. Some media professionals consider it their duty to provide the public with evidence of all the horrors of war. This could indeed help prevent wars in the future, but the information should at least try to be more respectful of victims' privacy and dignity.

Although the press is more careful about this issue, it sometimes has the same tendency. On 24 November 2004 Al-Ayyam newspaper published the following picture of Iman Al-

Hams, a 13-year old girl killed by Israeli soldiers in Gaza while on her way to school.
Position: Middle-Left Front Page.

قال له أعطها، فأرداها قتيلة: . .

التلفزيون الاسرائيلي : قوة من الجيش قتلت فلسطينيين بدم بارد في غزة



رفح— صورة للشهيدة ايمان الهمص وهي ملطخة بالدماء بعد نقلها الى المستشفى
في اعقاب استشهادها يوم ٥ تشرين اول الماضي. (أغب)

القدس— كشفت القناة العاشرة
في التلفزيون الاسرائيلي، مساء
امس، عن قيام قوة من جيش
الاحتلال الاسرائيلي في غزة، قبل
اسبوع، بالاستيلاء على منزل
فلسطيني قرب مستوطنة «نتساريم»،
وقتل مواطنين فلسطينيين بشكل
متعمد وبدم بارد.

وقال احد ابناء العائلة للتلفزيون
الاسرائيلي ان قوة من الجيش
استولت على المنزل واقامت فيه نقطة
مراقبة عسكرية. واثناء ذلك قال احد
الجنود للقائد: «توجد في ذلك البيت
فتاة تنظر. فقال له القائد: اعطها
فاعطاها (اي اطلق النار عليها)، بعد

[التتمة ص ٢١]

Suicide Attackers or Martyrs: What Did the UN Official Really Say?

In gathering news, the newspapers rely on international agencies and sometimes it is difficult to decide whether the translation is accurate or not. For example, international news agencies use the term "suicide bombings." In translation, we might see "martyrdom operations," as in the following example:

Al-Quds Sunday, 26 September 2004. Position: Top Right Page 14

Title: Senior UN Official: The Purpose of the Wall Is to Grab the Land of the Palestinians and to Expel Them.

Details: John Dugard, a senior personality in human rights and international law, says there is no evidence that if the wall was built on the borders of 1967 or even in the Israeli territories it would be less effective in preventing the entrance of the "Palestinian potential martyrs" to Israel. Referring to Reuters where the original statement of John Dugard first appeared, we found him using the expression 'Palestinian suicide bombers,' not 'martyrs.' The newspapers should, in our view, be accurate in translation to avoid misinforming their readers.

Sharon as Child-Killer

One week after the Israeli incursion into northern Gaza on September 29, 2004, Israel killed 75 Palestinians, 31 one of whom were civilians, and among these 19 minors. (according to a B'tselem report). In this context we observed this extreme depiction of the Israeli prime minister, Ariel Sharon, as a child-killer:



Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah. Thursday, 7 October 2004.

Last Page

Jerusalem Belongs to Us Alone

We monitored two TV programs that included de-humanization and de-legitimization. The first program, "Jerusalem Is Calling You," was 30 minutes long. It was aired on Tuesday 21 December, 2004 at 9:30 AM. The program used history and religion as leverage to deny other civilizations' rights in Jerusalem. The program referred to Jews implicitly, using dehumanizing language by calling them "parasites" and "worms." The program proceeded by saying "We are a nation that reserves the right to revenge." This

inciting sentence was introduced in the program out of context to the subject of Jerusalem.

The other program, “This Is Jerusalem,” aired on Sunday, December 19, 2004, and included almost the same language as the previous one.

East Jerusalem is part of occupied Palestinian territory since 1967 and digging into unproven history to outlaw the occupation of Jerusalem will add nothing to this issue. We are extremely worried that these programs are spreading hatred and de-legitimizing people and a culture, rather than a way to de-legitimize the occupation.

Conclusions

The Palestinian press in general advocates a two-state solution and a peaceful solution to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It is important to point out a further positive initiative adopted by the Palestinian press: to dedicate two pages to Israeli writers that reflect the Israeli different perspectives and viewpoints of the conflict. Sometimes, however, this is based on selectivity and does not give the real picture of what is published in the Israeli journals.

Nevertheless, the Palestinian media should be more balanced when it covers the Road Map, and it should expose the PA’s obligations to the public. Moreover, the Palestinian media should not ignore the Palestinian militant groups’ activities; especially those that contradict with UN laws and charters. It can easily improve by not simply focusing only on the occupation forces’ military operations and behavior in the Palestinian occupied territories. The Palestinian media, moreover, should work towards humanizing the conflict by more often treating the victims on both sides as human beings and not only as abstract numbers.

According to the results of our monitoring, calls for violence in the media are very rare occurrences and do not qualify labeling the Palestinian media as ‘incitement to violence.’ However, our main object is to reach a balanced, honest and informative media, and we are willing to assist the development of an alternative, critical, and more credible media discourse.

Palestinian television should have policies in place to control this potentially important media outlet. The television performance is poor regarding the messages it conveys and the quality of the broadcasts, which also make it a minor source of information for the Palestinian public at present. Although the potentially inciting programs in the Palestinian TV represent less than 2.5% of the sample we monitored, these programs should be stopped and discontinued.

Finally, we would like to modify and reiterate some of the observations and recommendations on media issues that MIFTAH’s Media Monitoring Unit recently published in a report on the media coverage of the 2005 Palestinian presidential elections.

- The Press Law lacks clarity, direction and adequate provisions to guarantee that the media provide independent and plural coverage. A new law with adequate provisions for the press and the audiovisual media in general should be drafted and should replace the existing framework for both broadcast media and the press to provide solid foundations for the development of the media. This law should cover both commercial and public media and should be underpinned by the establishment of an independent regulatory body that operates at arm's length from the state and commercial interests.
- Palestinian investors should be encouraged to invest in the local media and in this respect local media should be encouraged to invest in local programming that serves local needs and interests.
- The position of *Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah* should be clarified as to whether it is legally obliged by the same terms as other public media.
- Palestine Television and Radio have demonstrated confusion as to the policies pertaining to their broadcasts and responsibilities. The broadcasters' role and independence should be established in law and as a publicly financed broadcaster, it should be obliged to provide a public service that remains impartial and objective.
- Critical and balanced media content is not a negative characteristic of the press, but all media outlets should be encouraged to engage more extensively with issues of concern to the Palestinian society in an impartial and balanced manner in order to inform the public.
- There is already wide support for the development and support of an industry organisation that represents the rights of journalists and is truly independent of external forces. Such a body is a crucial part of a media system that protects and promotes journalistic standards and develops a satisfactory code of conduct for journalists, and it should be established as soon as feasible. A self-regulatory organisation could act to raise standards in the industry and assist in preparing a range of programmes to strengthen the role of journalists in serving the public interest.