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The "Bulldozer Operation" in Jerusalem: A Balanced Media Coverage

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The Bulldozer Operation in Jerusalem: A Balanced Media Coverage

The Bulldozer Operation a young Palestinian from Sour Baher/south Jerusalem implemented on 2 July 2008 in West Jerusalem received special coverage in the three Palestinian newspapers Al-Quds, Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, as well as in Palestine Television (PBC).

The operation killed three Israelis in addition to the implementer, Husam Tayseer Dwayyat, injured tens, and triggered wide Israeli reactions because of its nature and means.

First: The three newspapers

News of the operation occupied the headlines of the three newspapers, unanimously describing it as an "attack" and describing the victims as "killed," including the implementer, without mentioning his motives that remained unknown even to Israeli security services, unlike other attacks for which a certain party usually assumes responsibility.

The three headlines were balanced, neutral and not instigating, as they were based on international news agencies. The three headlines were close, as Al-Ayyam had the following headline on its front page:

The bulldozer attack in Jaffa Street:

Three Israelis and the implementer killed and 45 injured

The 8-column report included a main photo of Israeli Police and Border Guards inspecting the attack bulldozer, and to the side appeared the picture of the implementer.

Al-Ayyam report was based on Israeli Police reports, as well as statements reported by news agencies of Israeli citizens who were present at the location, and who described details of the attack, the identity of the implementer and his motives.

The report included two subheadings: the first, which monitored the reactions of Hamas and Islamic Jihad towards the operation, came as follows:

Hamas and Jihad: Jerusalem attack is a natural outcome of Israeli aggression

The news item included statements by Hamas Spokesperson Sami Abu Zuhri reported by AFP, in which he said "*If it turned out to be an operation, then it is also a result of rejecting Israeli occupation and ending its aggression,*" and a statement by Islamic Jihad that said: "*The attack is a clear message to the criminal enemy...The enemy must expect more so long as occupation and aggression against our people continue, and so long as abuses of Al-Aqsa and Jerusalem continue.*"

The second subheading under the headline shed light on the identity of one of the victims:

An Austrian woman among victims of Jerusalem attack

The news item included detailed information about the identity of the victim based on statements of the Austrian Ministry of Foreign Affairs to AFP.

Al-Ayyam also allocated a large part of page 23 for publishing photos of the operation that showed wrecked vehicles and a public bus in addition to paramedics and police at the scene.

Al-Quds selected a different headline at its front page:

In an operation that is the first of its kind:

Three Israelis killed and 44 wounded in the heart of West Jerusalem

The following indication of the implementer of the attack appeared in the following heading over grey background:

A citizen from Sour Baher destroys passenger busses and cars with a huge bulldozer before being shot

The newspaper neither mentioned the fate of the implementer nor his motives in its heading. It, however, included elaborate details of the incident itself, based on news agencies reports from the scene of the operation.

A photo of the huge bulldozer, Israeli Security members next to it, and the wrecked vehicles the bulldozer destroyed appeared on the front page over 4 columns.

The photo of the implementer or the Israeli Security members attacking him, circulated by local and international news agencies, did not appear on the front page. The newspaper only reported the killing of the implementer in its report as narrated by

witnesses and security members and published his photo on page 2 in the following news item:

Bush sends his condolences to Olmert, and Paris, London and Ban Ki-Mon condemn

The photo had the following caption: "Martyr Tayseer Husam Dwayyat," a description that had not appeared in the newspaper's report, which spoke of the implementer as being killed not martyred.

While the newspaper showed interest in the event itself, it particularly included within its main report two subheadings about Israeli reactions to the attack, including the demand to impose restrictions on the freedom of movement of Jerusalemites, through the use of smart cards, and confiscating the IDs of Jerusalemites who participate in operations against Israelis:

Israeli measures against the Dwayyat family and citizens of Jerusalem

And Depriving Dwayyat family from widows' allowance'

The Knesset approves the confiscation of the IDs of Jerusalem citizens who participated in operations

Unlike Al-Ayyam, which highlighted the reactions of Hamas and Islamic Jihad to the operation on its front page but did not report international reactions to the operation, Al-Quds reported in its coverage of the attack American, French and Spanish condemnation, and allocated a large part of page 32 for pictures of the bulldozer operation, showing totally wrecked vehicles, a bus rolled over by the attack and Israeli security and paramedics everywhere.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah chose other headlines for its front page, through which it showed the party that adopted the attack, though it did not verify this information. It also mentioned the way the implementer was killed, published his name and place of residence in a subheading under the 8-column main headline. It published a photo of the operation scene over 4 columns, and to the left had the photo of the implementer.

Adopted by Galilee Liberators Brigades:

3 Israelis killed and tens wounded in a bulldozer attack in Jerusalem

It had the following heading on a black background in an indication of its importance:

Two policemen shot rounds of bullets into the body of implementer Husam Dwayyat from Sour Baher

In fact, the three newspapers relied in their coverage on international news agencies and Israeli media sources in their reports and had photos of the operation scene.

Second: Palestine Television (PBC)

News of the operation was given priority in the PBC local and main news bulletins on 2 July, the day of the operation that was described as an attack.

The 6 pm local news bulletin broadcast the news of the operation and indicated that four Israelis were killed and 36 injured as a result of "an attack by a bulldozer in the center of a street in Jerusalem." This was the only relevant news item in the local news bulletin.

As for the implementer, the news item said the following:

"..Sources of the Occupation Police said that the attack targeted a passenger bus and several cars in the Center of Jaffa Street, killing the implementer of the attack and three others."

The report did not describe the implementer of the attack as a "martyr," the description PBC usually uses for implementers of attacks against Israelis whether civilians or soldiers, sufficed to describe the operation as an "attack," based on the report of the Israeli Police and did not add any official or factional Palestinian reactions.

PBC broadcast pictures of the scene of the operation that showed the bus that had been the target of the attack, ambulances, policemen and the bulldozer used in the attack.

In its 9 pm main news bulletin, PBC broadcast the same news item in further details, including new information and details on how the implementer attacked the bus, in the following manner:

"...Armed Israelis followed the bulldozer and shot at the driver using rifles and automatic guns from a zero distance, 'leading to his death' and the stopping of the bulldozer. A picture showed a guard emptying his gun in the body of the bulldozer driver."

PBC broadcast almost complete segments of the operation while the implementer was attacking cars with the bulldozer, his scuffle with a security member, until another armed person shot him at a zero distance. Then a third security member came and emptied his gun in the implementer's body, while passersby gathered at the site and said "bravo".

PBC thoroughly followed up the Israeli reaction towards the operation, and the threats of the Israeli Prime Minister to demolish the house of the implementer and deprive his family from the social security allowances. PBC broadcast pictures of the surroundings of

the implementer's house in Sour Baher encircled by the Israeli Police before PBC Jerusalem correspondent presented details of developments that followed the operation, particularly the arrest of some family members for interrogation. It also followed up the approval of the Israeli Knesset in the first reading of a bill that authorizes the Minister of Interior to confiscate the IDs and Residency permits of Jerusalemites who participate in attacks against Israelis and their families.

PBC also monitored other Israeli reactions through its Jerusalem correspondent, such as the gathering of Israeli right-wing members near the house of the implementer. The correspondent described them as "the extreme right," a description the Palestinian media usually uses to describe the Israeli far right.

Findings

First: The news of the operation ranked first in the three newspapers and in the PBC local and main news bulletins. PBC gave significant time of the main news bulletin to follow up field developments and official Israeli reactions through its Jerusalem correspondent. Similarly, the newspapers allocated significant space of their front pages for the coverage of the operation, and allocated some space in these pages for photos from the operation scene.

Second: The newspapers and PBC were balanced and neutral, and avoided the use of typical depictions and jargon that prevail in the discourse of the local media with respect to armed operations that target civilians, and the different terms used to describe the implementers, with the exception of Al-Quds newspaper, which described the implementer as "the martyr" in the photo caption.

Third: The newspapers relied on reports of international news agencies and Israeli reports, and there was an absence of a Palestinian media story of the operation. The local media did not conduct the necessary analysis or monitor local reactions, with the exception of Al-Ayyam, which highlighted the reactions of Hamas and Islamic Jihad, while Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah shed the light on the identity of the implementer without verifying the accuracy of the relevant information.

Recommendations

First: To encourage the current trend of adopting balanced stories in the media coverage of internal and regional events, seeking accuracy of information and avoiding incitement and agitation.

Second: To provide correspondents with material and technical support, build their capacity in order to improve their professional performance, enable them to have quick access to the necessary information, and produce a local independent and credible story.

Third: To use objective jargon and accurate descriptions of individuals and groups and adopt professional editing policies.