

The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of **Global Dialogue and Democracy**·MIFTAH

المبادرة الفلسطينية لتعميق الحوار العالمي والديمقراطية



The Palestinian Media Coverage of Sharon's Illness And his Departure from Political Life

The Fifth Report

Media Monitoring Unit

June 2006



In Cooperation with the European Union

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Foreword

The Media Monitoring Unit at “Miftah” hereby issues its fifth report with the aim of providing both Palestinian and Israeli researchers with a document for comparison between the Israeli media coverage of the illness and demise of late President Yasser Arafat, which has been implemented by the Center for the Protection of Democracy in Israel “Keshev,” and the Palestinian media coverage of the illness of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and his loss of consciousness and consequently the end of his role in the political arena.

MIFTAH hopes that this report will contribute to raising the professional standards of the Palestinian media through manifesting the latter’s weaknesses and shortcomings, and at the same time be an incentive for better understanding between the Palestinian and Israeli sides in a manner geared towards ending Israeli occupation and reaching a just and lasting peace.

The News of Sharon’s Illness

On 4 January 2006, Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon was admitted to hospital due to an acute brain stroke and severe brain hemorrhage, one day prior to a scheduled catheterization to his heart, after a minor heart attack on 18 December 2005.

This news surprised everybody, and attracted broad interest at all levels. Meanwhile, the Palestinian media was preoccupied with two main topics:

First: the Palestinian Legislative Elections

Dates had been previously set for 25 January 2006, and consequently the campaigning had already started on 3 January 2006, and lasted until 23 January 2006. That was an extremely important period for the Palestinian media because of the severe competition between electoral blocs, the participation of Hamas after it had boycotted the 1996 elections, as well as commercial purposes due to the wide advertising spaces that came at the expense of local, regional and international news.

Second: Changes in the Political Map of Israel

The Palestinian media was interested in following up the new political map in Israel, since Sharon had announced his withdrawal from the Likud and the establishment of Kadema, which attracted prominent figures from different Israeli parties and security apparatus, in addition to academics, thus becoming the largest Israeli party according to Israeli opinion polls. The Palestinian people were specifically interested in the political project which this party had been established for implementing, and in which Israel would demarcate its final borders at the expense of the Palestinian Territories occupied since 1967, using the Separation Wall as its borders, after annexing major settlement blocs and Al-Aghwar (Jordan Valley) areas, on the pretext of the absence of a Palestinian negotiating partner.

Sharon's illness came amidst this political and media scene, thus shifting the focus from the media coverage of his illness to the future of Kadema and the political project it represents.

It can also be said that given the well established traditions of peaceful succession of government in Israel, Sharon's illness and his entering into a coma at a later stage, would not have triggered the same kind of questions that accompanied the demise of Palestinian President Yasser Arafat, especially if we take into consideration the differences between the Palestinian and Israeli institutions of governance, and the systematic and legal process of government succession in Israel.

Nevertheless, the Palestinian media has expressed a great deal of interest in Sharon's illness in its beginning and before he entered into a coma that he never awoke from. The nature of this coverage was in general factual, objective and in favor of conveying the reality of his health conditions, and avoid of the incitement that had been monitored in the Israeli media in the wake of the illness and demise of President Arafat. But the newspapers also pointed out Sharon's historical hostility towards the Palestinians in specific and the Arabs in general, and the Palestinian and Arab perception of him and the prevailing concept in the Palestinian and Arab minds that Sharon is a "murderer, bloodthirsty and war criminal".

Sharon's Illness and Coma

On 5 January 2006, the news of Sharon's sickness (in red) constituted the major headline of the three Palestinian newspapers. The news was communicated in the following manner:

"Al-Ayyam" Newspaper:

Olmert Takes Over: Sharon in Full Coma

"Al-Quds" Newspaper:

Authorities Delegated to Olmert: Sharon Struggles against Death.

"Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah" Newspaper:

Sharon in Coma following Severe Hemorrhage.

All newspapers also featured Sharon's photograph next to the news item, while some of them published Olmert's photo too. Ordinary photos of Sharon were published, with the exception of Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, which preferred to publish a photo of Sharon partially covering his head with his hands, as the newspaper may have linked between Sharon and his illness.

صلاحياته نقلت الى اولمرت

شارون يصارع الموت



● اعلن في اسرائيل الليلة الماضية ان رئيس الوزراء اريئيل شارون يعاني من وضع صحي متدهور قد لا يتعافى منه، وان حالته سيئة جدا.

واقادت مصادر طبية في مستشفى هداسا بعد منتصف الليلة الماضية ان «شارون يصارع الموت». وكان مدير مستشفى هداسا بالقدس قد اعلن ان شارون نقل الى قسم الجراحة في المستشفى بعد ان شخّصت حالته على انها جلطة ونزيف شديداً في المخ. وقال سلومو مور يوسف «التشخيص انه نزيف في المخ، وفي ضوء ذلك نقل رئيس الوزراء الى قسم الجراحة». ونقلت وكالة اسوشيتدبرس للانباء عن يوسف قوله ان «شارون فقد الوعي ويبدو ان حياته في خطر». ونقلت الوكالة عن القناة الثانية في التلفزيون الاسرائيلي ان شارون نقل الى غرفة الجراحة لعلاج النزيف في المخ وأنه يعاني من شلل في نصفه السفلي، وأنه نقل الى المستشفى على نقالة. -البيبة ص 31-

“Al-Quds”- Thursday 5 January 2006

His Powers Transferred to Olmert: Sharon Fights Against Death

In the details, the three newspapers published what the Israeli doctors said about his illness and also noted the international reactions to Sharon’s illness. “Al-Ayyam” distinguished itself with a statement by Nabil Sha’ath, former Deputy Prime Minister, who said that “from a purely humane perspective, we feel sorry for Mr. Sharon, and from a political perspective this aggravates the uncertainty we face in resuming the peace process.”

The newspapers also published statements by U.S. President George Bush and Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, both expressing their grief, their prayers for Sharon’s recovery and their sympathy with his family. The newspapers also communicated the decision of the government of Israel (GoI) to appoint his Deputy Olmert as Prime Minister. “Al-Ayyam” specifically highlighted Olmert’s role in engineering the Gaza Disengagement Plan, in addition to Sharon’s history as Prime Minister, and how he slighted the descriptions with which his political opponents in Likud portrayed him following his dissent on 21 November 2005, such as “dictator.” “traitor” and “liar”, and Sharon’s response to these charges that “a strong leader must have no fear.”

“Al-Ayyam” published all statements issued by Israeli officials and doctors about his illness, be they optimistic or pessimistic. “Al-Ayyam”, however, copying Israeli sources suggested that since day one the possibility of Sharon not resuming work again, indicating that in the case of his death or absence, his party might suffer a political upheaval prior to elections.

“Al-Quds” communicated information about Sharon’s health condition from several news agencies including Reuters, Agence France Presse (AFP), Associated Press (AP) and Israeli Television- Channel 2, including quotes of an alleged senior Israeli political source stating that Sharon’s condition was very bad and that he might not recover. The newspaper was distinguished by publishing a historical glimpse of Sharon’s health record for the last four years, indicating that he had undergone an ablation of a cancerous tumor in his face in April 2003, and that the surgery had been kept a secret for several days, thus nurturing rumors surrounding his health condition, and another surgery ten months later to remove stones from his gall bladder. The newspaper conveyed rumors accompanying all that and Sharon’s reactions to them.

The newspaper indirectly insinuated that some members of GoI hoped that Sharon would not recover when it quoted Sharon during the Cabinet meeting that followed that surgery saying “I heard sayings that I am at hospital, do not rush”, or “I want to assure you, or disappoint you, I am in good health.” But the paper did not try to highlight any negative consequences that might result from Sharon’s sickness and his entering into deep coma.

“Al-Hayat al-Jadidah” reported similar details to those reported in other Palestinian newspapers, describing the expectations regarding Sharon’s health condition without any additions.

However, the uncertainty surrounding Sharon’s illness and the possibility of his survival cleared the next day, on 6 January 2006, as it was revealed that his condition was serious, and that he would remain in coma for several days. Consequently, newspapers started to focus on the political consequences of his absence, and on the Palestinian, Arab and International reactions to his illness.

“Al-Ayyam” headline on Front Page:

The Health Condition of the “Bulldozer” is critical and shall Remain under Anesthesia until Sunday.

Israel Gets Prepared for the “Post- Sharon Era”.

Olmert is Informed of Military and Nuclear Secrets.

The newspaper also highlighted on its front page Abu Mazen’s statements, in which he said that postponing the elections was only linked to banning Jerusalemites from participating, and that Sharon’s illness had no impact on that. It also conveyed his contacts with the GoI to check on Sharon’s health, and Sha’ath’s statement that Sharon did not even get close to the minimum demands of the Palestinians, and that the outcome of the Israeli Elections was among the major concerns of the Palestinian Authority.

In its inside pages, “Al-Ayyam” allocated page eleven fully to reactions to Sharon’s illness, specifically highlighting photos of children in the Refugee Camps in Lebanon rejoicing and raising the victory sign, as Palestinians link Sharon’s name to the 1982 Sabra and Shatilla massacres that had followed the Israeli Invasion of Lebanon. In the details of the news item headlined “*Lebanon: Feelings of Joy Prevail in Palestinian Camps after Sharon is admitted to Hospital,*” “Al-Ayyam” published interviews with Palestinians from Al-Rashidiyya Camp, in which feelings of joy were expressed over his illness, because “he imprisoned President Yasser Arafat in the Muqata’a for years” while some said that they saw him personally supervising the pulling down of their homes during the invasion of Al-Rashidiyya Camp, after some young cadets (Ashbal) had confronted his soldiers and had succeeded in killing two of them. The news item was an AFP report.



مقاتل فلسطيني من مخيم عين الحلوة يعبر عن فرحته وهو يتابع عبر التلفزيون أنباء تدهور صحة شارون. (أفج)

A Palestinian militant at Ein Al-Helweh joyfully watches a TV report on Sharon’s deteriorating health condition (AFP).

Furthermore, Nayef Hawatmeh, the Secretary- General of the Democratic Front for the Liberation of Palestine (DFLP) was quoted saying: “There is no Palestinian who feels sorry for the departure of the war criminal Sharon”; Maher Al-Taher, The Popular Front for the Liberation of Palestine (PFLP) Political Bureau member, was quoted saying that he “could not see any horizons for a political settlement with or without Sharon, so long as the Israeli policy continued to rely on U.S. support.”

The newspaper also published a Reuters report entitled “Arabs shed little tears over Sharon but are worried over peace.” The report conveyed the opinions of Palestinian citizens living abroad as well as Arab citizens, in which all expressed their concern that the Israeli substitute may be similar to Sharon in his wish to get rid of Palestinians and maintain occupation of the Palestinian Territories; some of them said that they would “celebrate when Sharon dies.”

As for the political consequences of Sharon’s departure from the political arena, “Al-Ayyam” published an AFP report entitled: “Analysts indicate a state of uncertainty in the Middle East in case of Sharon’s departure,” which included interviews with Dennis Ross, Former U.S. Coordinator of the Middle-East peace Process, and with Aluf Benn, Israeli Haaretz writer, both expressing their concern over the future of “Kadema” due to its link to the person of Sharon, its lack of clear organizational structure and the absence of a real successor within the Party.

“Al-Ayyam” published an investigative report on page 6 about Sharon’s health condition and the possibility of postponing Palestinian elections, in which it interviewed a number of PLC candidates who linked Sharon’s illness to a possible desire on behalf of his successor to maintain an extremely stringent position in order to preserve Sharon’s legacy and policy that had attracted large scores of Israelis, and consequently expressed the concern that this would lead to banning elections in Jerusalem and postponing the Palestinian elections.

“Al-Quds” newspaper wondered about the fate of Kadema, in its editorial on 6 January entitled: “His era has ended, and the fate of his party Kadema is unknown,” and a headline in red that read:” Sharon in an artificial coma.”

“Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah” provided a headline of the main news item on 6 January 2006 that spoke of the doctors’ decision to keep Sharon anesthetized for several days and the unlikelihood of his resuming work.

“Doctors Keep Sharon Anesthetized until next Sunday, and Consider the Possibility of His Resuming Work in Case of Survival Unlikely.”

In the details, the newspaper indicated that “Sharon’s brain hemorrhage would probably end his hegemony over Israeli politics” and would “create vacuum in the Middle East Peace Process,” It also communicated the doctors’ decision to keep him anesthetized for several days and to wake him gradually. The newspaper allocated pages 16 and 17 to covering different reactions to Sharon’s illness and its repercussions on the peace process, with the following headlines:

The Settlement Engineer who became a Traitor in the Eyes of Extremists.

In the details, the newspaper published the biography of Sharon as a political leader and his statement in mid November 2005 regarding his desire to reach peace with the Palestinians and not waste the year 2006 without concluding a peace agreement, reported from AFP.

Israel in the Era of Sharon's Four Governments

The newspaper could have possibly meant Israel the four years of Sharon's Government, since Sharon formed two governments under his rule, the first in 2001 and the second in 2003. In this AFP report, the newspaper highlighted the main political turning points under Sharon's rule since his election in June 2001 starting with the siege of President Arafat in January 2002, Operation Defensive Shield launched at the end of March 2002, beginning the construction of the Wall in June 2002, the overwhelming victory of his party in the January 2003 elections, his close relations with the U.S., the assassination of Hamas leaders, and executing the Gaza Disengagement Plan and dismantling its settlements.

The newspaper also published a Reuters report entitled: "Potential Successors of Sharon in Kadema," including brief biographies of Ehud Olmert, Tsebi Levny and Shaul Mofaz, all of whom are Kadema leaders. Another AFP report entitled: "The Arab World Concerned: Who is the Alternative?" shed light on the Arab media coverage of and preoccupation with Sharon's illness. The newspaper also published reports from other newspapers about the state of uncertainty that prevailed in Israel, considering Sharon's illness an Israeli political earthquake. As for the Palestinian reactions, the newspapers reflected a lack of harmony between the popular and official positions. While it communicated Abbas' wishes for Sharon in recovery and statements by the then Prime Minister Ahmad Qurei' that "Israel will lose Sharon the leader and decision-maker," it also published the reactions of Islamic organizations, including a statement by Islamic Jihad leader Khaled Al-Batsh, who said: "God is fed up with Sharon the murderer of Sabra, Shatilla and Jenin, so He relieved all people from him, and we are not sorry for him." The newspaper also mentioned that scores of young boys rejoiced for his illness and distributed candy to passersby and cars in Rafah, south Gaza.

The most controversial and unrealistic headline that was discordant with the content of the reports in the newspaper itself was entitled: "Palestinians have mixed feelings and reactions. Sharon's brain hemorrhage puts Israel under intensive care."

In the details, we find the newspaper asserting the smooth transfer of authority in Israel with the presence of well-established institutions; it might have wanted to attract the attention to the partial impact of Sharon's illness on the Israeli economy, as the value of the shekel for the dollar dropped, and the fact that Kadema was taken by surprise due to Sharon's illness, and consequently its chances in an overwhelming victory as opinion polls had predicted were dwindling. However, this does not relieve the newspaper from

its responsibility for exaggeration, and in adopting a tabloid style, using suspense to attract new readers without having any realistic foundations, especially that it was the only report coming from the newspaper's own press sources, namely its correspondent in Bethlehem.

The newspaper also published the caricature below, by Steven Berry, which shows Sharon attempting and wanting to kill the dove of peace even while in coma.



Palestinian newspapers continued coverage of Sharon's illness on 7 January, with its consequences dominating the front page headlines:

“Al-Ayyam” published the news of Sharon undergoing another surgery following the deterioration of his condition, and photos of five Israeli leaders, three of whom are Kadema members namely Ehud Olmert, Shimon Peres and Tsebi Levny, in addition to Benyamin Netanyahu and Amir Peretz, publishing summaries of their biographies surrounded by a news item about an Israeli opinion poll, and another about potential Sharon successors. The newspaper also highlighted the decision by Condoleezza Rice to

cancel her visit to Indonesia and Australia because of Sharon's condition, and the refusal of the White house to talk about a post-Sharon era.

"Al-Hayat Al-Jadida" published an article by Fuad Abu Hijleh on the last page entitled: "Blood in Sharon's brain" in which he said that the "doctors succeeded in draining the blood out of Sharon's brain," wondering whether doctors, no matter how genius they might be, could remove blood from Sharon's brain? And whether Sharon could in the first place, live without blood in memory? Adding that "coma does not cancel blood memories and that the operations room at Hadassah Hospital cannot be wide enough for all the blood of the victims of Sabra, Shatilla, Golan, Karamah and Rafah."

"Al-Quds" main headline read: "The opportunity for survival of Sharon dwindled; a third surgery to remove a bulge and renewed brain hemorrhage." In this main item, the newspaper focused on what doctors said and their expectations regarding the life or death of Sharon. On page two, the newspaper had a news item on Sharon's willingness to negotiate with Hamas provided that the latter change its charter, which he had expressed in an interview before his illness and hospitalization. Page four also was allocated for potential successors of Sharon within Kadema as well as to the world press coverage of Sharon's biography. On page twenty four, the newspaper published a report taken from the London-based Al-Sharq Al-Awsat newspaper entitled: "Sharon's history in Palestinian memory is killing, destruction and displacement." The report starts by describing how Raba'a, a woman from Gaza, defied curfew in July 1970 in order to prevent an Israeli soldier from dropping the bodies of three Palestinian militants in a garbage container upon the instructions of the Southern Area Commander, Ariel Sharon. The report presented the role of Sharon as a Haganah member, his role at the Paratroopers Unit (101) which executed a retaliatory operation against penetration operations conducted by Palestinians, his role in Qibya massacre in 1954, his role in killing tens in Khan Younis in 1956, the Lebanon War in 1982 and his sanctification of the use of force ever since he assumed his position as Prime Minister in March 2001.

Palestine Television Coverage of Sharon's Illness

On 5 February 2006, "Palestine Television" placed a news flash at 6:00 p.m. that said: "Israel Speaks of a severe hemorrhage in Sharon's brain and reports of his death." Few minutes later, the Television broadcast a news item that said: "Our correspondent for Israeli affairs indicates that Sharon's condition is extremely serious," then a news flash that said: "Sharon enters into coma."

At the 9:00 p.m. news bulletin of the same day and in a telephone call with Mohammad Al-Sayyed, Palestine Television correspondent for Israeli affairs, Al-Sayyed said that Israeli officials asserted that the Israeli elections will remain as scheduled, and statements by Ahmad Qurei, Palestinian Prime Minister who said that "the Authority aspires that the new leader in Israel shall have the desire for peace and shall resume negotiations with the Palestinian side," The Television also broadcast statements by Saeb Erekat, in which he said that "Sharon's health condition shall change the situation in Israel" and expressed his

concern over exploiting it to ban the Palestinians of Jerusalem from participating in the elections.

The Television contacted its correspondent Mohammad Al-Sayyed by phone who reported on the health condition of Sharon and what the Israeli doctors had said in that regard. The Television broadcast a report on the life of Sharon, his birth in Palestine during the British Mandate in 1928, his joining the Haganah, the Israeli Army and his role in Israeli wars. The report paused at his dismantling of settlements in Sinai, his role in the 1982 War in Lebanon, the Sabra and Shatilla Massacres and the Kahane Report in this regard, stating the senior official positions assumed by Sharon during his life and his role in triggering Al-Aqsa Intifada, when he entered Al-Aqsa Mosque at the end of September 2000.

On the subsequent days, the Television continued its coverage of the news through the daily reports of its correspondent, who had been present in front of Hadassah Hospital to highlight the developments on Sharon's health condition as reported by Israeli doctors, and who focused on the future of Kadema and the political map of Israeli parties in the case of the absence of Sharon.

Less Coverage

The media coverage of the illness of Sharon continued in the Palestinian press and Television, but the size of such coverage started to diminish in terms of space and location in the newspaper or in terms of sequence in main Television news bulletins. The news was no longer the main headline of the newspaper, after it had become clear that the return of Sharon to the government was impossible, and that his coma might last long, in addition to the preoccupation of the Palestinian media with the Legislative Elections as mentioned earlier. Following are some newspaper quotes:

“Al-Ayyam” 8/1/2006 Front Page

Prime Minister Sharon's Health Condition still Serious

One of his Doctors: Sharon will Survive Death and will be in a Relatively Good Condition

Straw: Israel Will Face an Unknown Future in the Short Run because of Sharon's Illness

Olmert: We Will Continue to Run the Government as Usual

Page 10:

Former Gaza Settlers Refuse to Weep over Sharon

Israeli newspaper: Americans have Started to Realize the Sharon Era has Come to an End

“Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah” 8/1/2006 Front Page

Head of Hadassah Hospital Asserted that a Decision will be Made Monday Morning as to whether to Awake Him or to Keep Him in Coma: A Doctor: Sharon will survive and this is the Day of Truth Regarding his Condition.

“Al-Quds” 9/1/2006 Front Page
Sharon will be Awakened Today from his Artificial Coma
Doctors: He will not Resume his Responsibilities as Prime Minister

Page16:

Hamdi Farraj wrote an article entitled: “Sharon is Treated in his Country,” in which he compared between the refusal of Arab leaders to receive treatment in their own countries and their distrust in their own hospitals and medical teams, and Sharon who is being treated in Hadassah Hospital in Israel.

“Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah” 9/1/2006 Front Page
Sharon Remains in Coma an Additional Day and Doctors do not Expect his Return to Work

Page 17:

Head of Hadassah Hospital: Awakening Sharon from Coma Will Start Today
One of the Surgeons: Prime Minister is Conscious to What is Happening around Him but Cannot Resume his Responsibilities.

“Al-Ayyam” 10/1/2006 Front Page
Sharon Breathes and Moves his Limbs but his Health Condition Remains Critical

“Al-Quds” 10/1/2006 Front Page
He Moved his Arms and Right Foot
Cautious Optimism Following the Start of Sharon’s Awakening from Coma

“Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah” 14/1/2006 Front Page
Radio Israel: Sharon’s Health Condition is “Extremely Distressful”

“Al-Ayyam” 14/1/2006 Front Page
Sharon is in a “Very Distressful” Condition as he does not Awake from Coma.

“Al-Quds” 14/1/2006 Front Page
Hadassah Hospital: Sharon’s Condition is Serious but Stable

**شارون في وضع مقلق جداً
لعدم استيقاظه من الغيبوبة**

القدس - الجمعة بعد مرور تسعة أيام على وضع لرئوس شارون في غيبوبة قال مستطلي هداسا، اسمه إن حاله وليس الوزراء الإسرائيلي الصحية مستقرة لكنها مستقرة فيما تنقلت الأمانة العامة من وضع مقلق جداً.

فقد قال ناطق باسم مستطلي هداسا في القدس إنه لم يطرأ أي تغيير على وضع رئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي لرئوس شارون الصحية وهو لا يزال مضطراً ومستقر، مؤكداً أن البيان الحقيقي يصدر مساء اليوم السبت. (القدس ص ٢٩)

السبت ١٤/١/٢٠٠٦ الموافق ١٤ ذو الحجة ١٤٢٦ هـ - العدد ٣٨٦، السنة الحادية عشرة

Sharon is in a very Distressful Condition as he does not Awake from Coma Saturday, 14 January 2006,

**الاذاعة الاسرائيلية : وضع
شارون الصحي 'مقلق جداً'**

القدس المحتلة - ا.ف.ب - نقلت الاذاعة الاسرائيلية العامة عن مصادر طبية قولها أمس ان الوضع الصحي لرئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي ارئيل شارون الذي لا يزال في غيبوبة منذ تسعة ايام «مقلق جداً». وقالت الاذاعة ان «الوضع مقلق جداً لا بل مخيف» مشيرة الى ان «ساعة الحقيقة تقترب مع وقف اعطائه ادوية التخدير». وتابعت المصادر «إذا لم يكن هناك أي مؤشر تحسن حتى الآن فالامر يتطلب معجزة ليفيق شارون من غيبوبته العميقة ويعود الى وضع شبه طبيعي». وقالت الاذاعة «حسب التحليلات التي اجراها الاطباء فإنه كلما مر الوقت وبقي في غيبوبة من دون أي مؤشر استفاقة ومن دون ان يفتح عينيه وان يتعرف على أي شيء فإن فرص رجل في سن شارون بالاستفاقة والتصرف بشكل طبيعي ضعيفة جداً».

تفاصيل ص ١٧

Radio Israel: Sharon's Health Condition is "Extremely Distressful"



Hadassah Hospital: Sharon's Condition is Serious but Stable

“Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah” 15/1/2006 Front Page

Radio Israel: Sharon Condition on the Verge of Collapse and his Awakening from Coma will be a Miracle

Page 17:

An article by Osama Issa entitled: “Sharon... a war Criminal Haunted by Hatred to Arabs(Arabo-phobia),” in which the author paused at the main points in Sharon’s relationship with Arabs, associating some massacres perpetrated against Palestinians with Sharon’s name, such as the Qibya massacre in 1953 when 67 Palestinians were killed, including whole families, his assault against Arab Al-Azazmeh in 1955, Samou’ in 1966, his threat of conducting a coup d’etat if Levi Eshkol, who was the Israeli Prime Minister in 1967, did not declare war against Egypt, Syria and Jordan, in addition to his role in eliminating armed resistance during the early seventies. The writer continued to present details of Sharon’s military activities up to the second Intifada and his unilateral disengagement from Gaza.

“Al-Ayyam” 15/1/2006 Front Page

Sharon on the Verge of Collapse

This is a very small news item reported from AFP, with the title quoted from Radio Israel in its description of Sharon’s condition.

“Al-Quds” 16/1/2006 Front Page; the item appears at the bottom of the page.

Operating on Sharon to Change a Tube in his Throat that Helps him Breathe

Page 18:

An article by Dr. Ahmad Tibi who spoke of Sharon as a central personality in Israeli political life was published, and in which he reminded that “The history of a leader or a people cannot be reduced to one step (Withdrawal from Gaza settlements), erasing five

decades of conflict and bloodshed.” He indicated that Sharon’s policies had always been unilateral and had never aimed at reaching peace with the Palestinians. Tibi also noted that he had refused to meet Sharon more than once, comparing between the death of President Arafat as a result of severe brain hemorrhage following a long coma, and the same hemorrhage and same coma which Sharon suffered from.

“Al-Ayyam” 17/1/2006 Front Page

Sharon may Enter into Permanent Inactivity and Reports of Opening his Eyes Denied
The item appeared on the page head.

“Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah” 17/1/2006 page 17

Kadema Selected Olmert as a Chairman by Proxy. Sharon Opens his Eyes for Seconds and his Condition is Stable but Serious

No news of Sharon appears on front page.

On 18/1/2006, the three Palestinian newspapers did not mention any news about the health conditions of Sharon and started focusing on his successor, Ehud Olmert:

“Al-Quds” 18/1/2006 Front Page

Olmert Hopes to Start Final Status Negotiations with President Abbas following the Palestinian and Israeli Elections

“Al-Ayyam” 18/1/2006 Front Page

On Condition the Road Map Commitments are fulfilled, Olmert Hopes to Negotiate over the Final Status with Abu Mazen following the Israeli Elections

“Al-Ayyam” 19/1/2006

His Condition is Stable but Serious. a New Surgery Performed on Sharon to Change a Breathing Tube

“Al-Quds” did not mention any news about Sharon, while on 21/1/2006 it published a news item on its front page that reads:

Senior Assistant to Israeli Prime Minister: Artificial Resuscitation may be Lifted off Sharon Beginning of Next Week

The same news appeared in “Al-Ayyam” but not in “Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah.”

On 22/1/2006, the three newspapers did not publish any news about Sharon’s illness. News started to appear only every time there were new developments in his health condition. Focus started to shift to the Israeli elections, to opinion polls and to Kadema policies in the absence of Sharon.

In the nine o'clock news bulletin on "Palestine Television," the news item about Sharon's illness came third on 10/1/2006, fifth on the next day and eighth on 13/1/2006.

On 15/2/2006, the Television broadcast news that the Legal Consultant of the GoI was inclined to declare that Sharon had reached a condition that would not enable him to resume his work for a very long time, which meant that Olmert would remain on top of the government until elections were held.

On 18 and 19/2/2006, news bulletins did not mention Sharon's illness. Then, the news appeared as the ninth item on 20/2/2006, conveying what the Hadassah Ein Karem Hospital Spokesman announced, that there had been no improvement on the health condition of Sharon.

Interest in the news of Sharon's health condition gradually decreased, after it had become evident to all that his health would not allow him to resume his responsibilities.

The Official Political End of Sharon

With the approach of closing hundred days for Sharon in deep coma, the media resumed its interest in this issue, but from the perspective of political developments, i.e. the definite departure of Sharon from the political life of Israel and Olmert's heading of the government, regardless of the fact that Kadema had won the largest number of seats in the Knesset during the 28/3/2006 elections, when Kadema leader Olmert was assigned to form a new government.

Following are some samples of what was monitored in the Palestinian media on the end of Sharon's era:

"Al-Ayyam", 12/4/2006 Front Page

Officially: Olmert Succeeds Sharon as Prime Minister

Details: The Israeli Government yesterday officially appointed Ehud Olmert as a successor of Ariel Sharon, who had entered into deep coma since the fifth of January, declaring him incapable of performing his duties as Prime Minister. The decision officially entered into force on Friday-Saturday midnight, upon the completion of the hundred-day period of Sharon's hospitalization. Sharon was the first Prime Minister in the history of Israel to be declared incapable of performing his duties.

"Al-Quds" 12/4/2006 Front Page

A Symbolic End to Sharon's Era in Israel

Details of the item reported from Reuters: The era of Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has symbolically ended yesterday during a cabinet meeting, where Ehud Olmert was officially selected to replace Sharon, who is in deep coma following a brain stroke.

"Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah" 12/4/2006 Page 16

The Israeli Government Officially Declares Sharon Incapable of Performing his Duties as Prime Minister

The newspaper published an AFP report that read: *In its meeting yesterday, the Government unanimously appointed Olmert as Prime Minister of a caretaker government, pending the formation of the forthcoming government.*

Yael Bossam-Levi, the spokesman of the Hadassah Hospital in Jerusalem, announced that the health condition of Sharon was still serious and stable.

Consequently, and after hundred days had passed on Sharon's inability to perform his duties, the political life of Sharon came to an end, and so did the news, reports and articles on Sharon's illness and absence.

Results and Recommendations

- 1- The media coverage of the Palestinian newspapers and Palestine Television was mostly factual, objective and gave Sharon's illness the importance it deserved as news and as developments during the first stage, reporting from Israeli newspapers and foreign news agencies, analysis and news reports that addressed the political dimension of his illness, as well as International and Arab reactions.
- 2- The Palestinian media failed to present its own initiative and questions which should have expressed its own point of view and evaluation of the new reality in Israel in light of the absence of Sharon from the decision-making center. It neither suggested to the Palestinian readers and audience its own ideas about the possible scenarios for the development of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in his absence, nor succeeded in triggering a discussion among the Palestinian public of the impact of Sharon's absence – with all it represented in the Palestinian mind- on the possibility of reaching a better understanding between the Palestinian and Israeli peoples.
- 3- The Palestinian media failed to clarify and explain the details and mechanisms of the transfer of authority in Israel. For example, the Palestinian public was not informed during the first days of Sharon's illness of the hundred-day period of disability that must pass before the Prime Minister is officially dismissed from office and another person is appointed. The media did not explain or clarify the legal and actual differences between the role of Proxy and Acting Prime Minister and that of an actual Prime Minister.
- 4- Despite the general objectivity of the media coverage, "Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah" specifically demonstrated clear un-professionalism in some of its articles and caricatures, through some exaggerations that reached in some cases to the extent of placing headlines to some articles that were totally irrelevant to their subjects, and that contained meaningless glee over the misfortune of a dying man.

Based on the above, MIFTAH recommends the following:

- 1- To call upon the media institutions to shoulder their professional responsibilities towards the Palestinian public in a more serious manner, to endeavor to provide the necessary and sufficient information from its own sources, and not to settle for reporting from Israeli sources and news agencies, especially that local sources do not lack information about the subject of Sharon, in addition to the fact that Palestinian reality and memory is replete with information and objective opinions and points of view.
- 2- To seek to focus in a better manner on the event and its dimensions and avoid resorting to suspense and provocation of sentiments as was the case with some press releases, articles or caricatures, that were not consistent with the reality of the event and its political significance, and that might also be understood as incitement or vengeful messages that are totally irrelevant to politics and to media, and that are indirectly, but essentially detrimental.
- 3- To seek to investigate and cover the opinions of the other side and different points of view and to present them to the Palestinian recipients in order that they get a clearer vision and understanding that will allow for promoting realistic thinking.