



***“The coverage of June 1967 War in the
three Palestinian newspapers and
Palestine TV on the 5th, 6th and 7th of
June 2007”***

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Media Monitoring Unit Team

Unit's Coordinator: Ruham Nimri

Media Analyst: Muhammad Abed Rabo

Information Coordinator: Ala'a Karajh

Administrative Assistant: Nahed Abu Sneineh

Monitoring Unit: Belal Ladadwi, Abeer Ismael, May Mustafa.

Steering Committee for this Report

Dr. Hanan Ashrawi

Dr. Lily Feidy

Khader Khader

Khalil Shahin

Mousa Qous,

Atta Al Qemari

Emad Al-Asfar

Bisan Abu Ruqti

Juman Qunis

NAhed Abu Tu'ami

Johara Baker

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“The Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy-
MIFTAH”



P. O. Box: 69647

Jerusalem 95908

Tel. No: Jerusalem 972 2 5851842 Ramallah 9722 2 989490

Fax: 972 2 5835184 Ramallah 972 2 2989492

E. Mail: info@miftah.org

Webpage: www.miftah.org

Introduction

Last June, the Palestinians commemorated the 40th anniversary of the June 1967 War through marches and several other activities. Factions competed over issuing statements, while the press and the television covered these activities over three consecutive days.

Arab satellite channels, such as Al-Jazeera and Al Arabiya, as well as Palestine Satellite Channel (PBC) were highly interested in this occasion.

In its reports and follow-up on the occasion, Al-Arabiya provided statistics and data on the 'June War' and its continuous repercussions and results that have persisted for forty years. Al-Jazeera, on the other hand, used the occasion to address and survey the opinions of Arab and Palestinian citizens. The poll revealed an ignorance of the June War and unveiled a state of indifference towards such a grave event.

What characterized the coverage of the event in the three daily newspapers and in the PBC was a follow up on the political and field events and a simple news reporting. The reports occupied large spaces in the three newspapers, which also published articles and photos from the archives of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency (UNRWA) and some news agencies such as Reuters and AFP. Special focus was given to humanitarian reports by local correspondents and foreign news agencies, that included moving stories about witnesses and victims of the June War.

June 1967 War in the three local newspapers:

The media coverage of this event linked war and defeat to the reality that the Palestinian were living on the eve of the 40th anniversary of the June War, in particular, the severe division, infighting and fragmented reality, as if it constitutes yet another aspect of the defeat. The aggravated political events and internal schism among factions necessitated such linkage.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah published a four-column AFP report at the bottom of its front-page entitled:

'Naksa anniversary...forty years of occupation, killing and imprisonment'

The report reviewed the desperate conditions of Palestinians forty years after the 'June 67 War' and the resulting military weakness, tight room for diplomacy and internal division. The newspaper merely published the AFP report, with no further analysis, as local newspapers usually do, relying on foreign news agencies in covering local news.

In Gaza, which witnessed a violent and harsh internal Palestinian conflict, the 'June War' appeared in a six-column news report published on page 9 of Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah and entitled:

'Forty Years after Massacres, Judaization and Settlement Activities (subheading)

Results of the June War combine with Repercussions of Infighting, Siege, and Disorder'

The report, written by their Gaza reporter Nufuth Al-Bakri, spoke about the June War as an event that changed the life of a whole people who had not yet awakened from their first Nakba, to lose the rest of the lands; then came the infighting, siege and disorder to eliminate whatever is left of their dreams.

The linkage between the occasion and the present reality was conventional and did not address the repercussions of the on-going events and their serious impact on polity.

Such a link was also evident in the local articles page in Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, where a number of articles written to commemorate 5 June linked the occasion to current events, including those of Nahr el-Bared Refugee Camp between the Lebanese Army and Fateh Al-Islam fundamentalist organization, whose victims were Palestinian refugees.

According to writers, the June War is renewed, and defeat prevails. In his article entitled "Beyond Talk' and published on 5 June 2007 in Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, Basem Abu Sumayya said:

“No matter how strongly we shed crocodile tears and commemorate through marches and rallies, no matter how much we dance over our wounds and show regret, this unforgettable war will not wipe out the shame of infighting and the resulting disorder and chaos whose outcome we continue to suffer from.”

The absence of cartoons

The three newspapers were devoid of cartoons on the June War, except for one by Umayya Jeha, on the back page of Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah. There were no cartoons in Al-Quds or Al-Ayyam on this occasion which constitutes a daily event Palestinians continue to live.

Such an absence has no explanation, given the gravity of the occasion and its political significance, except the possible preoccupation of cartoonists with the hot events related to infighting, or because the June War has become a mere anniversary, just like many others, that appear in news headlines only. Perhaps, the reason is the general frustration that has prevailed recently due to internal political developments.



The three newspapers focused on the current political significance of the event, through reporting on the field and political activities. Hence, the three newspapers published the President's speech on the occasion on their front pages, to the extent that their headlines were similar. Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah had the following headline:

'President: We surpassed defeat with revolution; we are taking steps towards the state as a target, which is getting close'

Al-Ayyam had the following headline:

'The decision of calm and infighting will neither be in the hands of individuals nor in the hands of groups (subheading)

Abbas: The Palestinian state will erase the 1967 defeat; we are discussing potential for this goal that is getting close.' (headline)

Similarly, Al-Quds had the following headline over five columns:

'On the 40th anniversary of Naksa: demand for ending occupation (subheading)

President: We surpassed defeat with revolution; we accelerate steps towards statehood.'
(headline)

The three newspapers focused on the President's speech at the expense of the occasion and its implications. They lacked an analysis of the speech, but published it literally, as they usually do. It is worth noting that the speech had several political messages these newspapers did not highlight, but rather sufficed with big headlines. It was an optimistic speech despite the gravity of events on the ground, not only internally, but also at the level of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The Israeli army had recurrently invaded Palestinian territories and committed several killings and arrests.

At another level, the three newspapers published stories narrated by war witnesses, an unusual coverage by the local media that had an impact on the general Palestinian public. This form of coverage is used in several events that touch on citizens' lives and constitute an attempt to a new discourse other than that currently adopted.

The June War and defeat took the lead on page 5 of Al-Ayyam, with a four-column report entitled:

*"Al-Nakba survivors narrate details (subheading)
Occupation failed in its pre-emptive measures to end resistance following the June War."*

Newspaper correspondent Mohammad Al-Jamal reported live testimonies of those who lived through the June War, narrated by Abu Kamal, a 74-year-old citizen from Rafah, and Khalil Shakfeh, 54 years old.

On the same day, Al-Ayyam allocated page 6 in full to a number of humanitarian reports by correspondent Naila Sheikh that link people to the place and the bitter memories. These reports focused on the emotional relation between people and their land, despite the emotional overtones it carries.

The first 8-column report included the photo of Latroun Monastery that the Israelis did not demolish in 1967. It had the following heading:

"Latroun villages grant unforgettable memories to history, ever since Jesus Christ emerged there"

The second 3-column report on the same page had the following heading:

"Exiled twice from his village, he insisted on returning a third time: the whole world was too small for Issa Khadour and only big enough in Yalo, to which he returned as a martyr."

The report speaks about 'Hajeh' Naima, the wife of martyr Issa Khadour, martyred on his way back to Yalo few days after its occupation, and the birth of baby Issa, who ten days later carried his father's name, but was born in Qalandiya Refugee Camp.

The writer concluded with the following: *“The mother still asserts: our village was handed in to Jews in a conspiracy, and any compensation is rejected; no price can be set for my land, my martyred husband and years of loss and displacement.”*

The conspiracy theory dominates the popular memory that holds the Arab regimes responsible for the loss of the homeland. It is a common denominator among all humanitarian-type reports that generally consisted of accounts of what happened forty years ago, but did not link the past to the present, where the suffering and the tragedy persist.

The coverage of the War anniversary in the three newspapers constituted a large number of local and foreign reports, with varying space, that ultimately covered the event through news, photos and reports. Local, Arab and Israeli articles, however, occupied significant space of the war anniversary coverage, and included commentaries, analyses and used the event to link the past and the present.

On 5 June 2007, Al-Ayyam published on pp. 22, its Articles page, articles addressing the June defeat.

The first was entitled *'The June View from Two Windows'*, by Hasan Al-Batal, in his daily column 'Atraf Annahar'.

To the left, Al-Ayyam published an article by Hasan Asfour with the following question as heading:

'Where do we stand between two defeats (Naksa)?'

In his article, Asfour addressed the military defeat of the Arab armies and regimes in June War, and linked it to the current 'Naksa' the nation suffers, which, according to him is 'more comprehensive,' as it afflicts the consciousness and behavior, in addition to regimes.

It is noted that local article writers either held the Arab armies responsible for the defeat, or linked it to the current situation, and wailed over the ruins. Some, though, proposed ideas to exit the persistent reality of the June War.

In addition to local articles, the coverage of activities commemorating the event was not void of criticism of their nature and form, deemed disproportionate to the scale of the event itself. Husam Izzeddin, *Al-Ayyam* correspondent pointed out in his article on page 8, inconsistency in the activities commemorating the War. The article had the following heading:

'Ramallah on the Naksa Day (subheading)

Inconsistent Activities Reveal Dire Need for Centralized National Decision –Making'

The writer said, '*...it is strange that throughout this whole landscape that reflects an absence of a common and unified vision towards this, as well as other occasions, everybody talked of unity and the need to reinforce it.*'

Apparently, national unity was another issue recalled on the occasion. The June War reminded Palestinians of their bitter, divided and fragmented reality, hence the attempts to motivate parties to the conflict and urge them to unite. Nevertheless, why is the common and united vision of the Naksa Day absent? Moreover, how is it possible to call for unity, while factions do not meet, but rather fight and separate? The report addressed these questions. The conflict between Fateh and Hamas and between the Presidency and the Government has imposed itself on the internal agenda, and reflected on the popular and factional activities that were confused and unresolved.

On 5 June 2007, Al-Quds published to the left of its local articles page an article by Dr. Sa'eb Erekat, Head of the Negotiations Department at the PLO, with the following heading: '*In order not to continue with the disasters of 1948 and 1967.*' It described the June defeat as a disaster, similar to the 1948 Nakba. He said, '*if the 1967 War was a defeat (Naksa) for all Arabs, what is happening to us as Palestinians today is a full-fledged Nakba.*'

This quote highlighted the current crisis of the Palestinians, which the media had not addressed properly, and even contributed to exacerbating it, merely by not being cautious enough to address it in a manner that does not contribute to its aggravation.

Hence, Dr. Erekat elaborated in criticizing the internal situation, including the multiplicity of authorities and other aspects, and linking the political disasters that afflicted the Palestinian people, starting with Nakba, the mother disaster, the Arab defeat of June, and the current disaster, Nakba of infighting.

Palestine Satellite Channel (PBC)

The coverage of the June War anniversary by Palestine Satellite Channel (PBC) differed from that in the three daily newspapers, in terms of focusing on talk shows, live transmission, presenting archived photos of the exodus of refugees, conducting interviews and broadcasting excerpts of conversations with persons who witnessed the War, some of whom are displaced or refugees.

On the first day of the 40th anniversary, PBC broadcast at 6:00 a special program entitled, '*Forty Years, Remember.*' It hosted Munir Hasan Sarsour, one of the founders of the PLO, Yousef Al-Farra, a writer and intellectual, Brigadier General Ahmad Murjan, of the Palestinian Liberation Army who witnessed 1967 War, and Raji Sourani, of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights in Gaza. Sourani described forty years of Israeli occupation as:

'The worst and bloodiest; full of darkness, repression and siege.'

In another quote, Sourani described Israel as, *'the first and foremost human rights criminal in the world.'*

The “Open Program” wave hosted Yaser Abed Rabbo, PLO Executive Committee member, in a talk about the June War in which he described the conditions before and after the war. When he talked the 40th anniversary, he described the situation as: *'extremely difficult because of the internal Palestinian conditions, attributing them to the wrongful policies of some factions, especially Hamas, which affected the achievements and victories the PNA and PLO had achieved.'* He concluded by saying, *'There are those who want to have and monopolize authority and exclude any other party,'*

We notice here an investment of a different kind in the War anniversary. At the time, infighting was at its peak and hence overshadowed the anniversary that was used for political bickering. The programs with big headings diverted from main subjects to secondary topics, such as infighting and political conflict, transforming the media into arenas for such conflict. A similar situation arose in ‘Al-Mawqif Assiyasi’ (The Political Stand) program, broadcast at 8:12, which hosted PLO Executive committee member Saleh Ra'afat, and writer and political analyst Hani Al-Masri. While the main topic was the June War, the current political reality and the internal Palestinian division occupied some space of the program. While Hani al-Masri talked about infighting as a threat to the entire Palestinian national project, Saleh Ra'afat described it as a gap, criticizing some slogans that portray the conflict between Palestinians and Israelis as a religious conflict.

Although PBC allocated the larger portion of the War day coverage for open programs and talks, as well as covering political and field activities, such interest declined beyond expectations during the next two days. News bulletins and reports focused on the Fateh Central Committee meetings, and on possible meetings between President Abu Mazen and Israeli officials. With the exception of ‘Khat Ahmar’ (Red Line) at 7:40, anchored by Hasan Al-Kashef, the coverage of the War anniversary was not sufficient.

It is noted that part of the program that hosted PLC member Qays Abdul Kareem discussed the June War, the surrounding circumstances and subsequent fait accompli. The internal conditions occupied a larger portion, and the link between the War Anniversary and the deteriorating internal Palestinian conditions was clear. These were even linked to the achievements that Palestinians presumably accomplished following the launching of their revolution in 1965, the breakout of the first and second Intifadas, and the signing of the Oslo Agreement.

PBC otherwise sufficed in broadcasting national songs and archived photos of the War, the refugees and the displaced. On the third day, PBC only covered a rally held in Khan Younis with the slogan: *'Tribute to Palestine on the Occasion of Forty Years of Occupation,'* and broadcast excerpts of speeches of factions and civil society leaders. Infighting overwhelmed the coverage, and the news bulletin was void of any mention of the War anniversary.

Findings

- The three newspapers, as well as PBC, were largely interested in the June War anniversary, particularly during the first two days. Interest declined on the third day, while details of the infighting were highlighted. PBC intensified its talk shows and allocated some time for the occasion.
- The three newspapers adopted a blend of news sources for the coverage, including local correspondents, official local news agencies, namely WAFA, foreign news agencies, such as Reuters and AFP, in addition to the June War photo archives available at UNRWA, Reuters and AFP.
- There was an evident interest among article writers in the War 40th anniversary, although some newspapers, such as Al-Quds, neither mentioned the nationality of Arab writers nor cited their newspapers.
- Coverage included field and political events, statements of factions and stories narrated by witnesses to the war. It linked the June war to the 1948 Nakba, as the second was an extension of the first, and in both, Arab armies and regimes, rather than the people who did not fight, were defeated. Some linked the 1967 Naksa to the Naksa of Palestinian infighting, while others described infighting as a Nakba.
- PBC continued its traditional form of coverage, providing nothing new to the audience. A major part of the information and data it broadcast came from Arab satellite channels, such as Al-Arabiya and Al-Jazeera that opted for presenting the perception of the ordinary Arab citizen of the War.
- There was an absence of cartoons in the coverage of the War, which we could not explain, given the gravity of the event. As mentioned above, the only cartoonist who addressed the occasion was Umayya Jeha of Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah.
- Coverage of the three newspapers consisted mostly of news rather than analyses and reviews of the event, its repercussions and impact. The coverage, however, included a new aspect, namely a large number of humanitarian reports written by both newspaper correspondents and foreign news agencies.

Recommendations

- It is of utmost importance to surpass the narrative style in covering events of such scale, particularly concerning its repercussions and impact. Unlike lifeless written or visual material that is monotonous and boring, humanizing reports attracts the attention of the audience.
- It is necessary to identify non-local writers and their nationalities. This is important for readers and audience who are interested in knowing the identity of guest speakers who may not be familiar.
- There is a need to follow up and monitor cartoons in covering daily events. In this, both the newspapers and cartoonists share the responsibility. In fact, the responsibility mostly lies with the cartoonists, since they are capable of capturing the event and expressing it in a creative and artistic manner.
- There is a need to link the historical event of the June War to the current Palestinian reality, rather than absent political analysis from the newspaper coverage of the anniversary, and suffice with news coverage of activities that commemorated the occasion. Local sources should be given priority in covering local news, political or otherwise, over foreign new agencies.
- Support and develop the capacity of the field correspondents of the three newspapers, and allocate larger space for covering local national events, focusing on news stories, rather than mere traditional news reporting.