

Media Monitoring Project:  
**Words Can Kill, Too**

**Disconnected:**

**The Israeli Media's Coverage of the Gaza  
Disengagement**

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## 1. Introduction

The evacuation of the Gaza Strip settlements was one of the most extensively covered events in Israeli history. This wide coverage was severely – and to a certain degree, justifiably – criticized by the Israeli political right. The media did indeed convey a distressing, unfounded message of the dangers of civil war between Israeli settlers and troops, while systematically avoiding a critical examination of the disengagement plan. On a deeper level, the media chose to represent the disengagement as an internal Israeli affair, a human tragedy affecting only Israelis, a story of collective trauma – the settlers' trauma, the soldiers' and policemen's trauma, the trauma of Israeli society at large. Suffering and tears took center stage, along with the nostalgic longing for the settlers' lost paradise. In its coverage of this trauma, the media unconditionally surrendered to a public relations campaign led by the settlers as well as by the security forces and sometimes actually coordinated between them. Voices that tried to suggest that the trauma may not be so severe, or that the disengagement could actually be a positive event, were marginalized.

Moreover, the media chose to disengage the disengagement from the tangle of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and to ignore its significance in terms of the peace process. The few items sent in by reporters about internal disagreement within the establishment; the security cooperation with the Palestinians (who were nevertheless considered “no partner”); the obstacles Israel was creating for the Palestinian Authority; the expansion of settlements in the West Bank; the ambiguous status of the Gaza Strip after the disengagement – all these never made headlines. Israeli media consumers now remember the sense of trauma involved in the disengagement, but they know even less about the conflict than they did before the disengagement.

This is the third in a series of comprehensive reports published by *Keshev* on the Israeli media and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The report analyzes the news coverage of the disengagement by Israel's three main newspapers, *Yediot Ahronot*, *Ma'ariv* and *Ha'aretz*, as well as by the newscasts of the three public channels, 1, 2 and 10, from August 1<sup>st</sup> until the evacuation of settlements in Gaza and North Samaria was completed on August 24, 2005. The bulk of coverage was tremendous. Our research team analyzed more than 2,000 items published during this period, as well as a few relevant items published later, through the beginning of September. Our goal, as in our previous reports, was to examine the extent to which newspaper and television editors made reasonable use of the news materials provided by their own reporters: Which elements of these materials did they choose to highlight in headlines? What was systematically relegated to back pages and supplements? As we shall show, the reporters and analysts did occasionally try to raise truly important questions about the disengagement, but the headlines kept reporting on an isolated event, affecting Israelis alone, and occurring only amongst them selves.

## 2. “WAR AWAITS US IN NORTH SAMARIA”

In the weeks prior to the disengagement as well as in the midst of it, the media expressed a sense of deep anxiety, repeatedly warning about the danger of armed conflict between the settlers and the security forces. These horror scenarios, which never materialized, captured the headlines. They told of armed struggle, of high alert in the security establishment and of the possibility of actual civil war, which would endanger the very existence of the Israeli democracy.<sup>1</sup>

During the relevant weeks, over 1,100 stories in the newspapers and newscasts dealt with the settlers' protests against the disengagement. Most of them, about 600, actually contained meaningful and important information indicating that the dire scenarios had no foundation in reality. But these reports systematically appeared on back pages, often under misleading headlines. The other 500 items, which repeatedly presented the worst possible scenarios, made main headlines. This campaign of intimidation began when the settlers' protest still consisted of demonstrations. It gained momentum with the coverage of “masses of infiltrators” trying to enter Gush Katif (the Jewish bloc of settlements in the Gaza Strip) which had been sealed off against additional settler support, and peaked during the days of the evacuation itself. Here is a very incomplete list of typical headlines:

IDF ESTIMATES: SEVERE CONFRONTATION AT SETTLERS' RALLY TOMORROW, HUNDREDS WILL ATTEMPT TO CUT THROUGH THE FENCE (*Ha'aretz*, August 1<sup>st</sup>, front page, main headline).

THE SECURITY ESTABLISHMENT IS ON HIGHEST ALERT FOR THE MARCH FROM SDEROT PLANNED BY THE RIGHT – THIS IS TODAY'S HEADLINE: THOUSANDS OF DISENGAGEMENT PROTESTERS ARE GATHERING IN SDEROT. CONFRONTING THEM WILL BE THOUSANDS OF SOLDIERS AND POLICEMEN, WHO WILL PREVENT THEIR ENTRY TO GUSH KATIF (Channel 1 News headlines, August 2<sup>nd</sup>).

FAILURE OF SECURITY FORCES' BLOCKADES. HUNDREDS OF PEOPLE MAKE THEIR WAY TO KFAR DAROM AND MORAG; MASSES OF INFILTRATORS MANAGED TO PENETRATE GUSH KATIF (*Ha'aretz*, August 11<sup>th</sup>, front page, main headline).

INFILTRATORS FLOOD GUSH KATIF (*Ma'ariv*, August 12<sup>th</sup>, p. 2).

THE CHIEF OF STAFF'S LAST BRIEFING FOR EVACUATION COMMANDERS: 5000 INFILTRATORS HAVE ENTERED THE STRIP, VIOLENCE MAY CONTINUE (Channel 2 News headlines, August 14<sup>th</sup>).

IT FEELS LIKE WAR (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 15<sup>th</sup>, large headline on p. 5).

DIGGING DITCHES AND PREPARING SPIKES (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 17<sup>th</sup>, p. 5).

PREPARED FOR FINAL BATTLE (*Ma'ariv*, August 17<sup>th</sup>, huge headline on, pp. 6-7).

ROOFTOP BATTLE (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 19<sup>th</sup>, front page, main headline).

THE LAST STRONGHOLD (*Ma'ariv*, August 21<sup>st</sup>, front page, main headline).

“WAR AWAITS US IN NORTH SAMARIA” (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 21<sup>st</sup>, headline on p. 2).

CONCERN THAT EVACUATION FORCES MAY BE SHOT AT (*Ma'ariv*, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, main headline on p. 5).

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<sup>1</sup> Only one frightening scenario never appeared in these headlines: the possibility that extremist settlers would stage terror attacks on Palestinians. In fact, it was this scenario that finally materialized (see box on page 41).

24 HOURS TO EVACUATION OF SA-NUR AND HOMESH: THE CONFRONTATION HAS BEGUN; ON THE VERGE OF EXPLOSION (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, front page, main headline).

DEFENSE MINISTER AND HEAD OF SHIN BET WARN: THE EVACUATION OF NORTH SAMARIA WILL BE MORE VIOLENT THAN KFAR DAROM; DANGER: FIREARMS (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, main headline on p. 2-3).

DOZENS OF GUNS HOARDED IN NORTH SAMARIA (Ha'aretz, August 22<sup>nd</sup>, front page, main headline).

SEVERE VIOLENCE FEARED TODAY IN EVACUATION OF SA-NUR AND HOMESH; CHIEF OF STAFF: WE WILL IMMEDIATELY NEUTRALIZE ANY SHOOTER (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, front page, main headline).

PREPARING FOR THE WORST (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, p. 2).

SAMARIA IS SEETHING (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, p. 2).

GROWING CONCERN IN THE IDF AND POLICE: KFAR DAROM WILL BE GUSH KATIF'S MASSADA. 600 EXTREMISTS HAVE INFILTRATED THE COMMUNITY AND ARE DICTATING ITS AGENDA, PREPARING FOR SIEGE (Channel 2, News headlines, August 12<sup>th</sup>).

THE POLICE DECLARES HIGHEST ALERT STARTING TOMORROW, ALMOST LIKE A STATE OF WAR (Channel 1, News headlines, August 14<sup>th</sup>).

COUNTDOWN HAS BEGUN FOR CONFRONTATION IN HOMESH AND SA-NUR IN NORTH SAMARIA (Channel 10, News headlines, August 22<sup>nd</sup>).



IT FEELS LIKE WAR,  
*Yediot Ahronot*, August 15, 2005, on p. 5.



▲ 24 HOURS TO EVACUATION OF SA-NUR AND HOMESH: THE CONFRONTATION HAS BEGUN; **ON THE VERGE OF EXPLOSION**, *Yediot Ahronot*, August 22, 2005, front page, main headline.



▲ KFAR DAROM – GUSH KATIF'S "MASSADA",  
*Channel 2, News headlines*, August 12, 2005.



▲ PREPARED FOR FINAL BATTLE,  
*Ma'ariv*, August 17, 2005, huge headline on pp. 6-7.

But the story brought in by many of the reporters, in the press and on television, was completely different: Many settlers were evacuating their houses voluntarily, before and during evacuation day, and the vast majority of those who chose to protest the evacuation did so by democratic means. Evaluations to this effect were voiced by sources in the defense establishment, as well as by the settlers' leaders. Moreover, many reporters sensed that the rules for the evacuation had been set in advance by both sides. The security forces and the settlers coordinated the events on the ground, while transmitting alarming messages of impending disaster to the media. These messages served both sides: those opposed to disengagement wished to engrave the evacuation in the collective Israeli consciousness as a traumatic event, impossible to replicate in the West Bank. The Prime Minister and the security forces wanted to frame the evacuation in Israeli and international consciousness as a painful and dangerous event which Israel ultimately handled very well. The reporters on the ground, in the settlements, sent in important information about the relatively calm atmosphere, about cooperation and likely coordination, but this material was generally relegated to the back pages of the papers. Thus coordinated settler protest on the ground became a threat to Israeli democracy in the headlines.

Consider, for example, the Channel 2 newscast on August 14<sup>th</sup>, which opened with the headline: FEAR OF CONFRONTATION, MAINLY IN NETZARIM, KFAR DAROM, NEVE DEKALIM, ATZMONA AND SHIRAT HAYAM. This newscast included ten stories from Gush Katif. One of them, broadcast from Netzarim, provided troubling information of the type reflected in the headline. But the other nine (!) stories actually sent a much calmer message, which was not highlighted in the headline. In a story from Kfar Darom, one of the rightist activists who penetrated the area says: "In the end, God willing, human sense will prevail [...] Who is the IDF? Myself, my children, and my husband. Who can fight one another here? I really hope those who are coming to evacuate us won't fight." Further into the newscast, the spokeswoman for Shirat-Hayam settlement says: "Our struggle will not be violent. Our struggle will harm no one, God forbid. We are against that. We have no weapons, we have no intention of harming anyone. There will be no violence here." In the report from Neve Dekalim, one of the community's leaders is seen saying to his people: "No violence. Neither physical nor verbal." The statement was received with warm applause.

The discrepancy between the relatively calm reality emerging from the reports and the state of affairs portrayed by the headlines, emerges in every aspect of the disengagement story. Many headlines dealt with the possibility that the settlers might use firearms against the security forces, yet quite a few stories told a different story, and were marginalized. For example, on August 2, 2005, *Ma'ariv* ran a small story on page 11 under the headline SETTLERS' WEAPONS COLLECTED IN THE STRIP. The story itself reveals that the settlers themselves decided to bring in their firearms:

A senior source in Gaza Beach Local Council yesterday explained why this process has begun: "We're on the threshold of a very sensitive period. Given the emotional turmoil we're all experiencing, and in order to prevent mishaps, we have started collecting the guns".

On that day *Yediot Ahronot* also carried a small story on this topic, on page 4, under the headline SECURITY PERSONNEL IN GUSH KATIF HAVE STARTED TO HAND IN THEIR WEAPONS. *Ha'aretz* carried a parallel story, similarly small, on page 3 of its August 4<sup>th</sup> issue. On page 2 of *Ha'aretz's* August 10<sup>th</sup> issue, we find the headline

**AGREEMENT WITH THE PA: THE WORLD BANK WILL FUND HOUSE DEMOLITIONS.**  
 The story itself has the following information:

Military sources said yesterday that in many Gaza Strip settlements residents have been voluntarily handing in army guns they hold, to the security coordinators [of the settlement], to be returned to the army. Yesterday a ceremony was organized for the handover of weapons in Netzarim (see item on page 6A)<sup>2</sup> The IDF has asked the settlers to hand in the weapons, but this act also has a symbolic meaning – to make clear that the evacuation will encounter no armed resistance.

A few other short items of this type, printed during this period, were systematically marginalized. The reports about settlers handing in their guns never once merited main, or even major, headlines.



◀ **SETTLERS' WEAPONS COLLECTED IN THE STRIP**  
*Ma'ariv, August 2, 2005. This report is played down in a small item on the bottom of page 11.*

**Moreover, only the text itself reveals that the settlers actually initiated this move:**

*A senior source in Gaza Beach Local Council yesterday explained why this process has begun: "We're on the threshold of a very sensitive period. Given the emotional turmoil we're all experiencing, and in order to prevent mishaps, we have started collecting the guns."*

By the same token, the headlines repeatedly highlighted estimates of the number of "infiltrators", which did not reflect information conveyed by reporters. On August 7<sup>th</sup>, a large headline on *Ha'aretz's* front page declared: EVALUATION: 4000 OPPOSITION MEMBERS HAVE MANAGED TO INFILTRATE GUSH KATIF. But within the story we discover that "Head of Southern Command, Dan Harel, has estimated the number of infiltrators at a mere 2,000. [...] The IDF and the police do not take these attempts seriously and believe that most infiltrators are being caught and removed." The following day, *Ha'aretz* ran a small item on page 5, under the headline IDF: ESTIMATES REGARDING INFILTRATORS ARE BASELESS. The report itself said: "*Ha'aretz* reported yesterday, that according to estimates in Gush Katif, at least 4,000 non-residents have entered the Gaza Strip. Sources in the Southern Command accuse the settlers of deliberate misinformation. They claim that this is a spin meant to convey the wrong impression, that the force of resistance will be greater than the IDF estimates." The misleading estimate was highlighted on the front page, while its refutation was marginalized to a small item on page 5.

<sup>2</sup> Page 6 of that issue carried a small item under the headline IN NETZARIM, HOUSES ARE BEING BUILT AS WEAPONS ARE BEING RETURNED TO THE IDF.

**8 DAYS BEFORE THE  
DISENGAGEMENT  
EVALUATION: 4000 OPPOSITION  
MEMBERS HAVE MANAGED TO  
INFILTRATE GUSH KATIF**

Ha'aretz, August 7, 2005, front page. A similar headline was repeated on page 6.

**These headlines contradict the information inside the story itself:**



The Head of Southern Command, Dan Harel, has estimated the number of infiltrators at a mere 2,000. He claims, most of them are people who have obtained permits, and do not intend to stay in Gush Katif until evacuation day. The IDF and the police do not take these attempts seriously and believe that most infiltrators are being caught and removed.

**Refutation of the exaggerated evaluation from the previous day, printed in a small page 5 item:**



◀ IDF: ESTIMATES REGARDING INFILTRATORS ARE BASELESS

**From the text:**

Ha'aretz reported yesterday, that according to estimates in Gush Katif, at least 4,000 non-residents have entered the Gaza Strip. Sources in the Southern Command accuse the settlers of deliberate misinformation. They claim that this is a spin meant to convey the wrong impression, that the force of resistance will be greater than the IDF estimates.

Was there a deliberate spin regarding the number of infiltrators? Definitely. But this fact, which should have created a completely different type of coverage, was marginalized. For instance, *Yediot Ahronot's* main headline on August 3<sup>rd</sup> declared: **SETTLERS' COUNCIL'S SECRET ORDER TO 2,000 SETTLERS: "REACH GUSH KATIF TODAY BY ANY MEANS"**. The double-spread headline on pages 2-3 was **2,000 PEOPLE ON THEIR WAY TO THE STRIP**. But the sub-headline itself suggests a different state of affairs: **THEY [the leaders of the settlers' council] TRIED TO DISGUISE THEIR INTENTIONS IN THEIR PUBLIC STATEMENTS: "THE CHANCES OF OVERPOWERING THE SECURITY FORCES ARE SLIM, THE MAIN THING IS AROUSING PUBLIC OPINION."** The story itself says:

Pinchas Wallerstein did not hide the settlers' council true intent when he declared that the purpose of rallying thousands of people to Sderot and Ofakim was mainly arousing public opinion, rather than marching to Gush

Katif. “We will stay in Ofakim all day, and then start marching together to Gush Katif”, said Wallerstein. “I don’t care if the army and the police stop us. We will not triumph over the IDF. This is a war over public opinion within Israeli society. I can’t carry out a military revolt, but I can bring the government down and lead us to elections”, he added.

The headlines, then, present an actual attempt, “a secret order”, to overcome the IDF and penetrate the Gaza Strip. The report tells of an attempt at arousing public opinion in Israel.

The coverage rarely mentioned the fact that not only the settlers, but the security forces as well, had a stake in magnifying the danger. The double-spread upper headline on pages 4-5 of *Ma’ariv’s* August 10<sup>th</sup> issue is; COMPROMISE EMERGING BETWEEN IDF AND SETTLERS: VOLUNTARY EVACUATION TILL NEXT WEDNESDAY, WITH SYMBOLIC PROTEST ONLY. On August 16<sup>th</sup> *Ma’ariv* ran an additional item at the bottom of page 7, under the headline IDF AND SETTLERS AGREE: WE’LL STAGE A VIOLENT EVACUATION. On August 19<sup>th</sup>, *Ha’aretz’s* page 4 headline stated: RULES OF PROTOCOL: EVERYONE CRIES TOGETHER – THEN DRAGS OR GETS DRAGGED. On the Channel 2 News on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 66 (!) minutes into the program, we find the following exchange between anchor Gadi Sukenik and commentator Amnon Abramovitch:

Sukenik: “Just a minute, there’s a problem here – most of those still out there are actually the ‘illegal’ ones, those who joined in later?”

Abramovitch: “Well, let me assure you, that there is a lot of IDF and police PR going on here. According to the latest data there are less than 3,000...”

Sukenik: “That’s all?!”

Abramovitch: “Infiltrators. That’s all. How did they get to 5,000 and 7,000? First of all, the Permit Center: There are all the people who have applied for permits, but who have already left the Strip without reporting it. Secondly, there was an internal count in all the communities, and the number of infiltrators, or what we called two months ago ‘illegals’ is now estimated at less than 3,000. The point is, that about 400 of them are problematic. These are 200 people known to the Shin Bet, and another 200 of the wilder ‘hill-boys’. The concern is not that they would shoot soldiers and policemen, but that they may try to stage a provocation and shoot at the outskirts of Dir El-Balah, Khan-Yunes, Rafah, and at the Arab villages in Sa-Nur and Homesh here in the West Bank. But a solution has been prepared for this too, in cooperation with the Palestinians.”

On the Channel 10 News on August 12<sup>th</sup>, we find the following conversation:

Gilad Adin: “Danny, to what extent has the media become a pawn? It is clear, after all, that the picture which will emerge is possibly crucial for Israel?”

Dan Margalit: “Look, Israel also wants the world to see that there’s a struggle going on... Today, the president of an important country told a very high-ranking minister, who was promoted this week, that he saw the rally yesterday and he understands what an impressive move the Israeli government is making.”

A story by reporter Israel Rosner, aired at the 28<sup>th</sup> minute of Channel 10's August 19<sup>th</sup> newscast, provided his viewers with a very rare glimpse into what he called a "chronicle of an evacuation foretold":

From this point on, it's a chronicle of evacuation foretold. All sides have memorized their roles, everyone has had a year to prepare for this moment, for the curtain rising over Gush Katif.

First act: The farewell ceremony. The soldiers slowly surround the residents, silently listening to the songs and the invective addressed to them by the community rabbi. [...] After that, the blessing for the dead. [...] The ceremony is over, the participants go home, waiting till the evacuators arrive.

Now for the second act: Dialogue. Both sides have gone through many drills in order to arrive at this moment with the right text. [...] The door is closed, but the scene is not over yet. Meanwhile, across the road, the laundry is taken off the line [...] Down the street, the bus is already waiting for the evacuees.

[...] Third act: Forceful evacuation. The leading actors are carried in arms. Lots of crying, lots of staged pictures to turn over any Jew's heart. [...] After exhausting every possible image, the evacuees on the bus leave, never to return.

And suddenly, silence again. Epilogue, and we're on the water-tank again. The last person evacuated here is led handcuffed. The play is over, the protagonists have left the stage. Ten hours ago a farewell ceremony took place here, now it's a military base. And yes, the canteen has also arrived here, for post-catharsis sweets.

Occasionally, then, we do find claims that the evacuation had been coordinated between the settlers and the establishment, that both sides had a stake in creating a sense of imminent disaster. But these few items were submerged in the flood of foreboding headlines. And so, when the evacuation finally began and the frightening scenarios turned out to be false, there was often a sense of surprise. Consider Channel 1's Benny Lis, concluding his August 17<sup>th</sup> story:

Generally speaking, it can be said that all the evacuation scenarios involving extreme responses by the residents were proven false in the great majority of communities. In the great majority of communities the residents waited till the soldiers came, and then evacuated their homes. Some of them had their things packed and shipped, others packed but left the crates for the moving company to deal with [...] By evening, Kerem Atzmona was completely evacuated. A small contingent of officers remained, to guard the property left in the houses. All in all, the commanders told me, none of our fears came true.

Here is Moshe Nussbaum, reporting from Neve Dekalim on August 16<sup>th</sup>, 82 minutes into the Channel 2 newscast:

One last word, Yonit. I must tell you, that up to now the soldiers and policemen have entered a few more houses here in Neve Dekalim, and till now there has been no resistance whatsoever. All the families in these houses which the soldiers enter are understanding and willing, and intend

to leave by tonight. Even the other Neve Dekalim residents, those who resisted at noon, are accompanying them, trying to persuade them, there is no violent resistance. There is no violent resistance. There is no force.

This sense of surprise reached almost absurd levels when the time came for the evacuation of the North Samaria settlements. The Gush Katif evacuation had already been peacefully completed, and the reporters' information from Sa-Nur and Homesh led to the conclusion that there would be no violence there either. Nevertheless, the media continued producing headlines such as COUNTDOWN TO THE INEVITABLE CONFRONTATION. Here, for example, is *Yediot Ahronot's* front page on August 22<sup>nd</sup>: 24 HOURS TO EVACUATION OF SA-NUR AND HOMESH: CONFRONTATION HAS BEGUN; ON THE VERGE OF ERUPTION. The headlines on pages 2-3 read: DEFENSE MINISTER AND HEAD OF SHIN BET WARN: THE EVACUATION OF NORTH SAMARIA WILL BE MORE VIOLENT THAN K FAR DAROM; DANGER: FIREARMS; TENSIONS PEAK BEFORE THE EVACUATION OF NORTH SAMARIA [...] INTELLIGENCE REPORTS: SA-NUR RESIDENTS ARE TAKING COVER ARMED WITH GRENADES.

On August 23<sup>rd</sup> the issue's main headline was: SEVERE VIOLENCE FEARED TODAY DURING EVACUATION OF SA-NUR AND HOMESH; CHIEF OF STAFF: WE WILL IMMEDIATELY NEUTRALIZE ANY SHOOTER. But the sub-headline already says: RELIEVING MESSAGES FROM SETTLERS LAST NIGHT: WE WILL NOT SHOOT THE EVACUATING FORCES. But the story on page 4 has a very different story to tell:

In spite of the community's belligerent mood, clear rules have been set for the struggle: "Anything is allowed, except physically harming the security forces." But the leadership is also concerned about unforeseen incidents during the evacuation [...] "There are no weapons here. If the army or the police know anything about weapons, they should tell us, and we will take care of it", said community leaders yesterday. [...] Rabbi Eliezer Waldman from Kiryat-Arba [...]:"We will not strike any soldier, or any policeman, or any Jew, but we will struggle, it will not be easy to pull us out of here."

The upper headline of *Ha'aretz's* August 23<sup>rd</sup> issue reads: TODAY THOUSANDS OF SOLDIERS AND POLICEMEN WILL START EVACUATING 2,100 SETTLERS EMBATTLED IN SA-NUR AND HOMESH. The banner on the front page adds: PREPARING FOR BATTLE; HAMMERS RESOUNDED IN THE STREETS OF HOMESH YESTERDAY, FURTHER "SUPPORTERS" EXPECTED IN SA-NUR. The main headline on page 3 reads – PREPARING FOR SIEGE WITH ALL THEIR MIGHT. But the item at the bottom of page 3, under the headline THE MASSES OF "SUPPORTERS" NEVER CAME tells a different story:

Spokesmen [at Sa-Nur] repeatedly explained yesterday, that there would be no violence, that they gathered in the private guns last week. [...] In Sa-Nur "supporters" were still expected yesterday, but these hopes didn't materialize. The thousands expected never arrived.

***Yediot Ahronot, August 22-23, 2005:***



◀ DANGER: FIREARMS  
August 22, 2005, huge headline on pp. 2-3.



◀ CHIEF OF STAFF: WE WILL IMMEDIATELY NEUTRALIZE ANY SHOOTER  
 August 23, 2005, front page, main headline.

**Compare these headlines with the text of the story on p. 4, giving completely different information:**

In spite of the community's belligerent mood, clear rules have been set for the struggle: "Anything is allowed, except physically harming the security forces."

Later, during an improvised press conference, the community's spokesman Yossi Dagan declared: "We are under a defamation attack orchestrated by Sharon's media personnel. They want to turn us into grenade hurlers and weapon hoarders – this is absolute nonsense."

In Sa-Nur people also repeatedly explained yesterday, that they would not exceed boundaries nor resort to violence. "There are no weapons here. If the army or the police know anything about weapons, they should tell us, and we will take care of it", said community leaders yesterday. Rabbi Eliezer Waldman from Kiryat-Arba, one of Sa-Nur's spiritual leaders, told *Yediot Achronot*: "We will not strike any soldier, or any policeman, or any Jew, but we will struggle, it will not be easy to pull us out of here."

The television newscasts presented the very same message: Gush Katif's evacuation did indeed go smoothly, but things would be different in Samaria. Here, for instance, is a conversation between anchor Haim Yavin and military correspondent Yoav Limor, opening Channel 1's newscast on August 22<sup>nd</sup>:

Yavin: "Yoav, tomorrow is a completely different story, we all feel the rising level of anxiety. The battle has moved on to Homesh and Sa-Nur, and there we hear of a completely different type of struggle. My question to you is, how much violence is expected there, what kind of level of resistance by the 'roof-top youth' is the IDF preparing for?"

Limor: "Look, Haim, I hope that tomorrow the Head of Central Command, Yair Nave, will come here and say the same things said tonight by the Head of Southern Command, Dan Harel. I hope he will talk of tolerant residents, of restrained soldiers, but I think that in the balance between empathy and determination, we will see tomorrow more determination and less empathy. We will see much more police involvement. Special forces. The action on the rooftop of the British police station in Sa-Nur, for example, has been assigned to the police's special squads, and this may actually be the point, we have completely different people in this area, a completely different topographic layout, a completely different population. [...] There is definitely talk here about a possibly high level of

violence, there are already weapons circulating there on the ground, and there is indeed concern that they might be used [...] I hope none of this will happen, I hope it will all end in dialogue and good will, but according to what we've heard over the past hours, we can definitely expect a great drama at Sa-Nur and Homesh tomorrow, and I'll say tonight what I said yesterday in the same context: Let's hope we're wrong. [...]"

Yavin: "Thank you, Yoav. So as you said, the security forces understand that violence not encountered in the Gush Katif evacuation may erupt at Sa-Nur."

Then, as if he wished to remove any lingering doubts, Limor concluded the conversation with the following message:

We should only add, of course, that we will be broadcasting all day, from 6:45 AM, from Homesh as well as Sa-Nur, [...] Things will heat up, things will be interesting. Be with us on Channel 1, it will be worth it.

The headline of the Channel 2 News that day announced: VIOLENT STRUGGLE FEARED TOMORROW DURING EVACUATION OF NORTHERN SAMARIA SETTLEMENTS. A GLIMPSE OF THE EMBATTLED ROOFTOP IN SA-NUR. But further on, deep into program, Ilan Lazerovitch brought in the story from Sa-Nur, and his message was completely different:

In spite of these warnings by the Chief Inspector, there seems to be no special commotion today, here at Sa-Nur. The "hill-boys" are indeed roaming the streets, they have tied ropes on the water tank and barbed wire has been stretched tonight across many rooftops – nevertheless, the general atmosphere rather reminds one of a summer-camp than a community preparing for its last battle.

This pattern was replicated exactly on Channel 10. The headline of the newscast was: COUNTDOWN STARTED FOR THE CONFRONTATION IN SA-NUR AND HOMESH IN SAMARIA. But Ariel Margalit concluded his report from Sa-Nur with the following words:

Less than 24 hours before the evacuation that is supposed to take place here at Sa-Nur, this is the picture behind us: not only does the community convey a sense of business as usual – at the bottom of the fortress, which is supposed to be the stronghold of resistance, children are jumping on trampolines.

When it finally emerged that the evacuation had been completed without any violent clashes between Jews, the anxiety was immediately replaced with a proud sense of unity, as if Israel had indeed proved to itself, as *Ma'ariv's* editor Amnon Dankner wrote, "we went through this together." Instead of examining how they got caught up in the horror scenarios, the media chose to give everyone, and especially the security forces, a pat on the back. On August 24<sup>th</sup>, the day after the evacuation was completed, *Ma'ariv* celebrated the victory officially, and with the pathos usually reserved for Independence Day speeches, Amnon Dankner and Dan Margalit published this front-page article, under the headline: EIGHT DAYS, A DIFFERENT STATE:<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The pathos in Dankner's articles is reminiscent of the distant past. In his August 17<sup>th</sup> piece on *Ma'ariv's* front page, for example, under the headline THE ENTIRE NATION IS WATCHING YOU, he writes: "Evacuator and evacuated, soldier, policeman, settler and demonstrator: know that even in your most difficult, painful and infuriating moments, enveloped in the heavy heat that exhausts inflamed nerves, the entire nation is watching you, hurt, sorrowful, and concerned, with conflicted hearts, tight lips and clenched fists."

Let's not underestimate what happened. This was an operation unlike any in the history of Zionism, and it was carried out without anesthetics, with all the pain of the rawest nerves of the Israeli psyche. Other societies have collapsed, collided violently and have been submerged in blood over much less than this. But we, truly, went through this together. On pages 2-3 of the same issue, under the headline COULD IT BE OVER? Ben Caspit continues in the same vein:

The State of Israel has shown uncompromising power. It was a decisive, resounding historic victory of national Israeli sovereignty. Problematic as it may be, controversial as it may be, the disengagement plan was fully implemented, almost without any casualties, with almost no violence, smoothly, quickly and elegantly (if we elegantly ignore the two Jewish terrorists who murdered eight Arabs over the past weeks). [...] The IDF, as we know it: meticulous preparation, perfect execution. Danny Halutz on the ground, all is safe and sound. The good news is that the IDF is the people's army, and the people are one.

Thus, in retrospect, the security forces became the great heroes of the disengagement. Consider Yoav Limor, reporting live on the Channel 1 News on August 18<sup>th</sup>:

If we must choose the heroes of the events we have experienced over the past days, these totally difficult days, we have two: the residents who left their houses, whose voices we just heard, and on the other side, the soldier and the policeman, who were really confronted here with painful images and curses, and really had a hard time, considering also the severe heat and discomfort here, but they made all of us, the state of Israel, very-very-very proud, Haim.

Or take Alon Ben-David on Channel 10 News, August 19<sup>th</sup>:

As always, I think, the greatest obstacle faced by the army was its lack of faith in its own strength. I have seen this before many military operations. The army often sets itself this obstacle, and simply doesn't believe it can do things [...] This week, in Gush Katif, truly, I saw thousands of heroes. And we know the familiar faces: Uri Bar-Lev, and Dan Harel, but really, thousands of people who were simply heroes. Soldiers, policemen, in impossible situations, who were really heroic. The people who planned this operation should also be credited. The way they prepared the troops is truly astonishing, Beyond all expectations, I think. And the way they handled themselves with us, the media – also, truly impressive.

Uri Cohen-Aharonov was the only one who tried to consider whether the media should take itself to task over its coverage of the events. Here is his conversation with anchor Ya'akov Achimeir on Channel 1, August 23<sup>rd</sup>:

Achimeir: "Our police correspondent, Uri Cohen-Aharonov, is with us, on the same topic. Uri, do you think the IDF and the police used the media as part of their psychological warfare against the settlers, Uri?"

Aharonov: "It's hard to avoid that, and I'll tell you why. Look, in Shfar'am and Shilo, two serious terror attacks, no one knew in advance, no one sounded the alert. On the other hand, regarding Gush Katif, and even more so, Sa-Nur, the security sources, the IDF and the police gave out frightening scenarios. Take a few examples: 'fear of shooting and suicides in gush katif', 'stashes of tear gas, smoke and shock grenades,

molotov bottles and shooting expected in sa-nur', to such an extent that we – not only the police correspondents, but we, too – accepted these things from our sources.”

Achimeir: “In other words you feel that your sources have misled you and your colleagues?”

Aharonov: “Yes. This does not excuse the media, there is also the question of self-criticism...”

Achimeir: “Yes, we'll get to that immediately.”

Aharonov: “But I think it can definitely be said that at the very least we're talking about wild exaggeration and intimidation, and moreover, a kind of psychological warfare that was conducted, I can't put my finger on it precisely, perhaps vis-à-vis the public, perhaps against the settlers, or against other elements, and the media, the media is due for some soul-searching – we didn't check, we didn't warn, we were sucked in, addicted to the action, the operation. With all due respect for the impressive operation, these headlines had absolutely nothing to back them up... And if indeed there was information, or at least an evaluation, that in Sa-Nur for instance the more extreme settlers were expected to take action, why didn't they raid the place two weeks ago? Why didn't they check if there really were Molotov bottles, shock and gas grenades and firearms, in order to act? Why did it emerge only today, in the course of today, that after all this was not such a difficult day?”

Achimeir: “But why were the reporters who covered the evacuation and brought in these assessments so absolutely exploited? The material was run indiscriminately, without checking, as you say?”

Aharonov: “I say, one can't claim that the media is exploited...”

Achimeir: “Part of it...”

Aharonov: “But there's one thing we can say, within the framework of the great operation, which should be commended – and not by me – but within the framework of the big operation we shut our eyes for the headlines, the training, the briefings, and one of the things we need to think of in the future, is this type of scenarios, for example, which turned out to be false. Black and white! No nuances!”

## “A Broadcasting Evening All About Delay”

Within this general framework of anxious, threatening coverage, a more realistic perspective found itself a place, from time to time, in the columns of the newspapers' television critics. These acerbic texts created an almost surreal situation: the newspapers were printing threatening and unfounded headlines, while at the same time running columns criticizing the television channels for broadcasting the very same type of headlines. Consider, for instance, this excerpt from Ra'anana Shaked's column, published on August 4<sup>th</sup> on *Yediot Ahronot's* page 25, under the headline WHAT'S THE SCORE?

Uh? Wake up? Is it morning yet? Say, did they finally get to Gush Katif? Did the confrontation begin? Was violence as unavoidable as they said? Was the food any good? [...]

Ilan Lazerovitch, our correspondent in Ofakim, promised Nissim Mishal for the eightieth time, that “Thousands will soon start the march, and it seems the collision is unavoidable this time”; but the protesters just took their time, and refused to go out of their minds as promised. “Come on”, Mishal seemed to want to tell them, “We're not getting any younger here! You promised a dove with a vulture's stick, come on.” In these dire straits, [MK] Tommy Lapid was ushered to the studio, as an attempt to resuscitate the dying public panic following the endless delay of the yearned-for violence. “Blood may be shed!” He promised the electorate about to zap the remote. “This is an attempted coup!”

And what a coup it was. While demonstrators gradually and peacefully leave the square behind Lazerovitch, Mishal is still hoping: “Here, the march is starting now! This march the police was so concerned about!” ... Such concern... The policemen behind Nussbaum almost seem to be dozing off. “A moment of rest for the troops,” our correspondent apologizes. What can we say – the period before the Six Day War was less tense. It was, no doubt, a broadcasting evening all about delay.

### 3. "A SEA OF TEARS"

As shown above, the media painted the disengagement in stark colors, highlighting the fear of violent confrontation between security forces and settlers. But this anxiety was accompanied by another, equally emotional element. The disengagement was portrayed by all the media as a traumatic event on a national scale: the settlers were being traumatized, the security forces involved were traumatized, and Israelis at large were experiencing the trauma along with them. From the beginning of August until the end of the evacuation, over 1,200 items repeatedly told a distressing story of pain and emotional hardship experienced by all parties involved.

The newscasts and news-pages were filled with huge, heart-breaking pictures of tearful female soldiers hugging female settlers, policemen and evacuees praying and crying together, fathers avoiding their children's eyes. These tearful images appeared everywhere, including *Ha'aretz*, which is not known as an especially emotional newspaper. The newspaper printed such pictures on August 10<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup>, and later as well. In *Yediot Ahronot's* August 16<sup>th</sup> issue, the main headline read FINAL EMBRACE, and was printed above a giant photo of a tearful female settler hugged by an IDF officer visibly restraining his anguish. On August 18<sup>th</sup>, under the main headline FAREWELL GAZA, the newspaper printed a huge photo of a sobbing settler about to faint. In her arms she holds her dazed infant daughter, on her right she is supported by a tearful female officer, and on her left a compassionate female soldier is patting the baby. *Ma'ariv's* main headline on August 14<sup>th</sup> proclaimed: TEARFULLY. Next to the headline was a photo of the farewell ceremony at Elei Sinai, and at its center, the community Rabbi hugging and consoling one of the residents. On August 18<sup>th</sup>, under the dramatic headline GUSH KATIF HAS FALLEN, we find a huge close-up of a young settler, sitting on the evacuating bus and sobbing.



FINAL EMBRACE  
*Yediot Ahronot*, August 16, 2005, front page.



TEARFULLY  
*Ma'ariv*, August 14, 2005, front page.

The newscasts presented the same picture. On August 21<sup>st</sup>, for instance, 37 minutes out of the 48-minute news broadcast on Channel 1 dealt extensively with all sides' pain and sorrow. On August 19<sup>th</sup>, Channel 10 focused on this topic for 36 minutes of its hour-long newscast. During these long minutes, the stories were often accompanied by editing devices not usually present in news items: many stories were set to melancholy, subdued guitar or piano music and Israeli folk songs (*Like a Wild Plant*, *Sadness Never Ends*, and so forth), frequently accompanied by images of sunsets and waves. The coverage was all about unbounded, uncritical emotional identification. Any evidence that the disengagement might actually be less traumatic in all aspects, that there may actually be reason for rejoicing, was marginalized.

So what did we cry over? First of all, over the settlers' bitter fate. More than 740 items during this period dealt with the physical and emotional agony experienced by those forced to leave their homes, especially by the children. Here is another incomplete list of headlines:

CHILDREN STAND BY THEIR PARENTS, ASKING FOR AN EXPLANATION. AND THERE IS NONE (*Ha'aretz*, August 5<sup>th</sup>, page B 7).

HURTING TOGETHER (*Ha'aretz*, August 12<sup>th</sup>, page B 1).

DAYS OF RUIN (*Ha'aretz*, August 19<sup>th</sup>, page B 4).

THE BLOOD WILL REMAIN HERE FOREVER (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 15<sup>th</sup>, pp. 10-11).

DADDY, HOW DO YOU PACK THE SEA? (*Ma'ariv*, August 5<sup>th</sup>, weekend supplement, p. 9).

THEY NO LONGER DRAW HOUSES (*Ma'ariv*, August 12<sup>th</sup>, weekend supplement, p. 14).

YOU CUT OUT MY HEART (*Ma'ariv*, August 16<sup>th</sup>, p. 10).

I SAT "SHIVA" THREE TIMES, AND I FEEL THAT THIS IS THE FOURTH (*Ma'ariv*, August 23<sup>rd</sup>, p. 9).

This obsessive preoccupation with the settlers' feelings spilled over beyond the newspapers. The major newspapers dedicated special supplements to the topic. Here is *Ma'ariv's* description of its SEPARATION PANGS supplement published on August 14<sup>th</sup>: A MOMENT BEFORE THE CURTAIN FALLS ON THE GAZA SETTLEMENT PROJECT, A MOMENT BEFORE THE GATES ARE LOCKED, A MOMENT BEFORE THE EVACUATION. DISENGAGEMENT 2005: SPECIAL ISSUE. The next day, in its daily "24 Hours" supplement, *Yediot Ahronot* ran an article under the headline LAST WORDS AND FAREWELL. The sub-headline on page 10 read: GUSH KATIF'S WALLS WILL KEEP ON SPEAKING AFTER THE EVACUATION, TELLING OF THE SENSE OF BETRAYAL, THE DISAPPOINTMENT, THE BEGINNING OF LONGING. SETTLERS' GRAFFITI – A PHOTOGRAPHIC JOURNEY.

This flood of emotions also took hold of the newscasts, compounded by the anchors' and reporters' pathos and subdued music. On August 14<sup>th</sup> on Channel 2 reporter Nir Dvori spoke about the Elei Sinai, Dugit and Nissanit settlers: "The residents of the small settlement parted yesterday with their houses, with the little paradise they built with their own hands." On August 14<sup>th</sup>, Channel 10's reporter Effi Trigger described Elei Sinai's residents: "Adults and children, men and women, religious and secular – they all cried yesterday for the community they will soon be leaving behind." On August 19<sup>th</sup>, standing in front of an image of a girl leaving her home with the Israeli flag in arms, Channel 1 reporter Rotem Avrutzki commented: "And across the street, another blood-chilling sight. The heartbreak at the moment of leaving home".



SEPARATION PANGS

A MOMENT BEFORE THE CURTAIN FALLS ON THE GAZA SETTLEMENT PROJECT, A MOMENT BEFORE THE GATES ARE LOCKED, A MOMENT BEFORE THE EVACUATION. **DISENGAGEMENT 2005: SPECIAL ISSUE**

Ma'ariv, August 14, 2005, special supplement, front page.



THIS WAS MY HOME

A SOLDIER LEADING A CHILD FROM HIS HOME \* AN OLD MAN STEPPING ASIDE FOR A LAST PRAYER IN HIS FAMILIAR SURROUNDINGS \* A POLICEWOMAN CRYING ON HER COLLEAGUE'S SHOULDER \* LEAVING GUSH KATIF - THE PICTURES THAT WILL REMAIN AFTER THE EVACUATION \* SPECIAL SUPPLEMENT

Yediot Ahronot, August 18, 2005, special supplement, front page.

We wept, then, for the settlers' emotional plight. Day by day, the media repeatedly made it clear that the material, existential hardship facing the evacuees had only begun: they would lose their community life and be forced to move into cities; the houses they were being offered were too small, and they would not be able to fit in all their belongings; the new neighborhoods built for them were too dense; the lawns had not yet been set; the air-conditioning systems were not functioning; there were no parking spaces. A headline on page 6 of *Ha'aretz's* August 24<sup>th</sup> issue read: MISSING THE PORCH IN ELEI SINAI, AND DREAMING OF A PLACE BY THE SEA. The headline on page 14 of *Yediot Ahronot's* August 18<sup>th</sup> issue read: IT'S LIKE THE CAMPS BUILT FOR IMMIGRANTS IN THE FIFTIES. The sub-headline clarifies: STUNNED EVACUEES FIND IT HARD TO ADJUST

TO THEIR PROVISIONAL HOMES (“THE WALLS ARE THIN”) AND HOTELS (“MY THAI WORKERS HAD BETTER HOUSING”). On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, a headline on *Yediot Ahronot*’s page 7 read: IT’S NO PROVISIONAL HOME – JUST PROVISIONAL SHIT *Ma’ariv*’s August 1<sup>st</sup> issue dedicated its double-spread on pages 2-3 to the same subject, under the headline THE NEW PIONEERS. The sub-headline read: THE FIRST EVACUEES ARRIVING AT NITZAN RECEIVED THEIR KEYS WITH A SMILE – AND TEARS IN THEIR EYES. MANY WERE DISAPPOINTED WITH THE SMALL HOUSES; SOME COMPLAINED ABOUT THE CROWDED NEIGHBORHOOD; AND ALL OF THEM MISSED THE HOME LEFT IN NISSANIT. The story itself read:

    Maria and her husband Amos, who left Nissanit after 12 years, could not imagine how they would manage three children in a 60-square-meter house. Maria couldn’t stop crying. Amos tried to comfort her, but was upset himself. “We looked for a different alternative and found none, so the only option left was to take the trailer-villa”, he said. “Now that we see what it actually is, we are simply shocked. The trailers are so close to each other, it’s a disaster. I only hope there will be no conflicts among neighbors here. How can I dress in my room with the neighbors’ window so close by? ”

Tears were also shed for the settlements themselves, those earthly paradises the settlers had built for themselves and were now forced to leave. The media repeatedly printed and broadcast picturesque, nostalgic, pathos-ridden descriptions of the glorious settlement enterprise, presenting it as an idyllic setup only occasionally disrupted by Palestinian terror. *Yediot Ahronot*, for instance, dedicated a special issue of its August 12<sup>th</sup> weekend supplement to this topic. Six stories in the supplement were printed under the general headline THIS WAS MY HOME. In one of them, under the headline IN THE NAME OF THE FATHER, settler Simcha says: “Look at the palm tree outside. Twenty years ago a date pit fell in our yard, and soon afterwards the palm sprouted.” In another article in this series, titled A PLACE IN THE COUNTRY, a settler says: “We had a good life here, I wish every citizen in the country had such a life. We fulfilled all our dreams here.” And under the headline IT’S ONLY THE SPIRIT (title of a popular song), we find the following:

    “‘It was love at first sight”, says the couple with sparkling eyes. “We found peace and a special kind of spirit here. A community of believers, with values, who consider life here a calling.”

On August 17<sup>th</sup>, on page 7, *Ha’aretz* published a story in the same vein under the headline THE COMMUNITY WILL BE EVACUATED TODAY; TOVI WENT TO SEE THE “SOOTHING WAVES” FOR THE LAST TIME. Here is an excerpt:

    “I don’t understand why the newspaper reviews of different beaches never mentioned our beach. As if we were lepers. Aren’t we a part of Israel? This is the best beach.”

    It is truly amazing. Plenty of golden, clean, soft sand. The water is pure, no wastes and oils. The waves have almost disappeared from many beaches in the country, because of the marinas and surf-breakers. But on Dekalim beach they rise high, and the swimmers with them. “It soothes me”, Tovi explains.

Life in the settlements was beautiful, but dangerous as well. The grief over the evacuation was accompanied by an almost nostalgic review of their existential struggle. In Channel 1’s DISENGAGEMENT CHRONICLE on August 1<sup>st</sup>, Menahem Adar reported from Morag:

“During the Intifada, every time people made their way in or out, was life-threatening.” Resident Itzhak Gueta described his daily routine in detail:

“You drive 30 kilometers back and forth for each liter of milk. Milk, bread, anything. I went to do some shopping. On the way back a terrorist was lying in ambush here on the ramp. He unloaded a cartridge at me, I kept on driving, I didn’t stop, the car just rolled down by itself, I saw I had blood on my head, blood on my shoulder – my entire body was covered with blood. Thank God I made it, it was a great miracle. A miracle. There were security problems here all the time – since the day we came.”

On August 15<sup>th</sup> *Yediot Ahronot* ran a double-spread under the title THE BLOOD WILL REMAIN HERE FOREVER. The story dealt with families whose beloved ones were killed in terror attacks, and who now had to leave their homes. The subtitle read: PAINFUL ENCOUNTER WITH THREE FAMILIES WHO ARE LEAVING BEHIND MUCH MORE THAN A HOME, LIVELIHOOD AND MEMORIES; RESIDENTS WHO PAID IN BLOOD FOR LIFE IN GUSH KATIF – A MOMENT BEFORE THE KNOCK ON THE DOOR. *Ma’ariv’s* SEPARATION PANGS supplement carried a double-spread under the headline WE SHALL REMEMBER THEM ALL. The sub-title read: 75 CITIZENS WERE MURDERED IN TERROR ATTACKS IN THE GAZA STRIP; 193 SOLDIERS WERE KILLED DEFENDING THE STRIP SINCE THE END OF THE SIX DAY WAR; THESE ARE THEIR NAMES, WHICH WILL BE COMMEMORATED ON THE CENTRAL MEMORIAL TO BE BUILT IN THE NITZAN COMMUNITY.

We also cried for the unfortunate soldiers and policemen participating in the evacuation. More than 350 stories appearing during the month of August dealt with the inner conflict experienced by people forced to evacuate their brethren from their homes. The headlines’ overall message was: The mission is impossible, but necessary; therefore, it is absolutely alright to cry. Here are a few examples:

SOUTHERN COMMAND CHIEF: “THE IDF HAS BEEN CHOSEN AS THE TOOL FOR THIS TRAGEDY” (*Ha’aretz*, August 15<sup>th</sup>, front page).

THE EVACUATING FORCES WILL END UP WOUNDED IN HEART AND SOUL (*Ha’aretz*, August 15<sup>th</sup>, p. 4).

EVACUATING AND CRYING; IDF: “IT’S BETTER IF THE SOLDIERS CRY” (*Ma’ariv*, August 18<sup>th</sup>, p. 8).

TOGETHER IN EVACUATION: FATHER AND SON (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 3<sup>rd</sup>, p. 5).

BROTHERS IN EVACUATION (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 2<sup>nd</sup>, p. 5).

On August 16<sup>th</sup>, on page 13, *Yediot Ahronot* carried a large story under the headline SYNAGOGUE’S FUNERAL. The sub-headline read: THE CADETS WERE NOT READY FOR THE TASK AT HAND: THE FIRST EVACUATION OF A GUSH KATIF SYNAGOGUE; THEY PRAYED WITH THE RESIDENTS, CRIED WITH THEM AND SOMETIMES EVEN BROKE DOWN – BUT FINALLY FULFILLED THEIR TASK. The story explained:

The soldiers, future IDF officers, found it hard to hide their feelings. They hugged the residents and wept with them over their mission. Some of the soldiers actually found it hard to carry out their task and simply sat on the ground in a large circle, praying with the residents. Throughout, Lieutenant

Colonel Yohananoff kept talking to the soldiers and hugging them, and went ahead with the task of evacuating the synagogue.

On Channel 10's newscast on August 15<sup>th</sup>, Emanuel Rosen interviewed Major-General Dan Harel in Neve Dekalim. Here is an excerpt:

Emanuel Rosen: "We've seen soldiers crying here, might we end up seeing a General crying as well?"

Major-General Harel: "I don't think you'll see a crying General, but many people are crying on the inside."

What is missing, then, in the tragedy reflected by the news-pages and newscasts during the month of August? First, all those settlers, soldiers and policemen who did not rush to unburden their hearts to reporters. Many settlers who accepted their situation, who did not feel that their world had come toppling down, who actually appreciated the compensation they would get – all these appeared only occasionally, deep inside the stories, and very rarely in headlines. Thus, for instance, Nissanit resident Shalhevet Kahlon appeared briefly on the Channel 1 news on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, saying: "We will have a great place, just like the one I had in Nissanit – only safer." On August 3<sup>rd</sup>, on page 5, *Yediot Ahronot* printed a story under the headline: THE PLAN: EVERY FAMILY WILL BE ALLOWED TO BUILD A BACK-YARD SWIMMING POOL. The text elaborated:

Special report: A future view of Nitzanim, the exclusive community of Gush Katif's evacuees: villas with sloping, red rooftops on half-dunam lots, two parking spaces per house, a storehouse on the first floor, a basement, an attic, and to top it all, a permit to build a swimming pool in each yard. [...]

Thus, unprecedentedly, each lot in the new community will be given a permit to build a swimming-pool. The community's utilities, all underground, will include drainage for the pools. They will also be allowed to build a pergola jutting up to two meters from the building line.

Once, on Channel 10, some of this actually made newscast headlines. An August 23<sup>rd</sup> headline said HUNDREDS OF APARTMENTS FOR EVACUEES REMAIN EMPTY. Reporter Haim Har-Zahav elaborated: "People who say no to a 4-bedroom apartment with a view of the sea should not complain', says the determined staff at the relocation board". This aspect of the situation also made it, once, to *Yediot Ahronot's* front page, in Nahum Barnea's commentary printed on August 16<sup>th</sup>: "The home-owner, an elderly settler, approached [the soldier] and comforted him. 'There is no reason for tears', said the settler, 'I had a beautiful house in Jerusalem, I had a beautiful house here. And I already have a beautiful new house in Ashkelon. What's a house? Mere stones.'"

During the entire month, the comparison begging to be made between the settlers' plight and the hardships experienced by other sectors of Israeli society appeared very rarely., For instance, on August 8<sup>th</sup>, on the bottom of page 17, *Ma'ariv* printed a story under the title 2000 FAMILIES THROWN OUT TO THE STREETS OVER THE PAST YEAR. The sub-headline elaborated: THERE WAS NO PROTEST AGAINST THIS EVACUATION; NOR WERE THERE TRAILER-VILLAS; THOUSANDS OF ISRAELIS WERE EVACUATED FROM THEIR HOME LAST YEAR, AFTER FALLING UPON HARD TIMES. On August 2<sup>nd</sup>, on page 10, *Ha'aretz* carried a story under the headline TERMITE PLAGUE THREATENS IMMIGRANT HOMES IN OFAKIM. Towards the end of this story we find the following lines:

[They] recently conducted a small comparative study, and checked the trailer-villas offered to the Gush Katif evacuees. They came back even angrier: "The trailer-villas are much more reliable structures than our houses."

*Yediot Ahronot* financial analyst Sever Plotzker, had the following to say on August 15<sup>th</sup>, in a commentary run under the headline AN EXERCISE IN MENTAL ACCOUNTS:

Thirty thousand's the number of families who joined the growing circle of the Israeli poor over the past year. [...] 1,500 is the number of settler families in the Gaza Strip. The state is evacuating them from a war zone and releasing them from the threat of terror. And the state is offering them reasonable housing and relocation options just one kilometer away from their previous place of residence. The average evacuated family will receive about 2 million shekels' compensation. [...] They will find employment, adapt to a new environment and finally return to a normal life. But the media allocates unprecedented resources to the coverage of the evacuation. The emotional and national identification with the evacuees' lot suffuses every column and every broadcast. Israel's poor, whose number is 200 times larger, that is 2,000 percent in comparison with the number of settlers in Gaza, cannot even dream of such a display of sympathy.

Nor was the fact that many soldiers died over the years while protecting the settlements, really addressed by the media. We find only few stories like Amir Ben-David's, printed on *Yediot Ahronot's* page 7 on August 23<sup>rd</sup>, under the headline GOODBYE FOREVER. The sub-headline reads: WE WERE FIVE FRIENDS POSTED TOGETHER ON RESERVE DUTY IN NETZARIM; FOUR WERE KILLED WITHIN ONE WEEK; 11 YEARS LATER, I CAME TO NETZARIM TO SAY A LAST GOODBYE TO DROR, HEZI, YOTAM AND GIL. In the story Ben-David writes:

Netzarim remained where it was. People continued celebrating the Sabbath. Soldiers kept protecting it, many more soldiers. The company became two companies, two companies turned into a battalion. Armored forces, observation forces and engineering forces were added. The road no longer winded between orange groves. Meter after meter was 'cleared' by the army, and anyone traveling to Netzarim till yesterday, was surrounded mostly by desert.

Over the years additional combat soldiers, male and female, died while protecting this settlement. [...] Ten years after that terrible week we decided to hold a memorial service for our friends. The service was suddenly disrupted by shouting. The community's security coordinator was furious. He was indignant because the battalion's soldiers, standing at the service commemorating their friends, did not show up on time to accompany the bus on its way out.

[...] This image, which to me expressed utter contempt for the memory of people who had protected his home, is engraved in my memory, and will not let go.

The obsessive preoccupation with the settlers' plight seems problematic even within the internal Israeli context. But in order to fully understand its meaning, it must be analyzed against the media's almost complete disregard for the prolonged suffering the settlements have caused Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. Caught between the nostalgic longing for the settlements' golden sands, and the constant crying over their bitter fate,

the media found no occasion for a slightly more realistic examination of the settlements' history and their role in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Such discussions appeared very rarely. Consider Amnon Abramovitch on the Channel 2 news, on August 19<sup>th</sup>:

1,600 families were living amidst 1,250,000 Palestinians. They occupied a third of the territory, and used a quarter of the water. This was a colonial situation unparalleled throughout the world. A greedy, oppressive, pointless and hopeless situation. [...] The IDF found itself protecting the settlers – the proportion was almost one soldier per settler. Had we stayed there another five or ten years, we would have needed two soldiers per settler. In nearby Yeruham, Dimona, Ofakim and Netivot, there are people who never received a thing from the state. The state unloaded them from the trucks and disappeared without a trace. The state became a rumor. Look them in the eye – they received no grants, no Palestinian and Thai laborers for 60 shekels a day, no protection and armored convoys day and night, no huge compensation upon leaving. Now that we're leaving Gaza, with a fatal delay of dozens of years, the media is drenching us in milk and honey. There is not a boy, not a girl, not a tear, not a whine that we haven't heard and seen. Had we had such media in '48, the state would never have been created.

This perspective occasionally surfaces in the op-ed pages, but it did not affect the news coverage even once, nor was it highlighted in headlines. This blind spot sometimes reached absurd dimensions. For instance, in its special disengagement supplement of August 14<sup>th</sup>, *Ma'ariv* carried a double-spread under the headline THE MEMORY THAT REMAINS. The pages show nostalgic photographs from the moment Gaza was occupied till the present day. The sub-headline was: SINCE THE OCCUPATION OF GAZA IN THE SIX DAY WAR, THOUSANDS OF PICTURES DOCUMENTING LIFE THERE HAVE ACCUMULATED IN THE ARCHIVES; THEY TELL OF THE MOMENTS OF HOPE AND FEAR, COMMEMORATE JOYOUS SMILES AND PAINFUL TEARS; THE BUSY PEACE RESTAURANT ON GAZA'S BEACH AND SOLDIERS CREEPING IN THE CURSED SANDS OF RAFAH; THESE ARE THE PICTURES WE'LL REMEMBER LONG AFTER THE GATE IS LOCKED. Except for one Palestinian woman selling her merchandise in the market, not a single Palestinian appeared on this double-spread. The constant nostalgia for the wonderful beaches completely disregarded the fact that the Palestinians were never able to visit the beach just by their home, which was reserved for the settlers. Only once, after the disengagement, on September 13<sup>th</sup>, *Ma'ariv* ran a page 3 item under the headline: SENIOR OFFICER: "HISTORIC JUSTICE HAS BEEN DONE". Here is an excerpt from the text:

Seeing the hundreds of Palestinians who made their way to the Kissufim road at the crack of dawn, a senior officer said: "It's hard to believe that for such a long time people were unable to go down to the road passing just by their houses". Another officer said: "I'm glad for the tens of thousands of Khan-Yunis residents, who could not visit the beach just two kilometers from their home, because Gush Katif lay between them and the beach."

Occasionally, vague, casual references were found to the obvious comparison between the settlers' plight and Palestinian suffering. *Ha'aretz*, for instance ran the following story on August 22<sup>nd</sup>, under the headline PROUD DUGIT FISHERMEN: "WE WERE EVACUATED BY BRAIN, NOT BRAWN". Deep inside the story we find the following lines:

The IDF spokesman's unit was able to attract a considerable amount of media to cover the demolition. "We want you to see it all", said Captain-Major Sharon Wollek. "Why don't you call us when you destroy Palestinian houses?" one of the reporters asked. "Because you write what you want anyway", the officer joked.

But in most cases, the media chose to ignore this comparison completely, even when settlers' made their complete indifference to Palestinian suffering absolutely clear. Here is a settler quoted on page 9 of *Ma'ariv's* weekend supplement on August 5<sup>th</sup>, under the headline DADDY, HOW DO YOU PACK THE SEA?

I imagine the bulldozer pulling down my house, and shudder while I think of myself strolling over the rubble that was once our life. I remember Itamar telling me, that maybe we should give our house to the Palestinian worker who built it, because he has a small house; that maybe we should wrap the flowers in the garden, so they shouldn't be cold in the winter, when we leave forever.

The obvious comparison to the systematic demolition of Gaza and Rafah houses is not even mentioned.

Direct references to the implication of settlements as a whole were also rare, and appeared mostly on the op-ed pages and at the margins of news broadcasts. Take, for instance, Saliman A-Shafi in a story from Gaza, broadcast 83 minutes into the Channel 2 News on August 18<sup>th</sup>: "Yihya has been waiting for this moment for many years. Ever since the creation of Kfar Darom, he has not been able to cultivate his fields, which lie next to the settlers' houses." On August 22<sup>nd</sup>, half an hour into the newscast, Channel 10 showed Shlomi Eldar's story. Eldar explained that the IDF had blocked Palestinians' access to all roads in the Netzarim area in order to protect the isolated settlement. Anchor Miki Haimovitch presented the story: "And now to the Palestinians – Netzarim has always been a symbol of the Jewish occupation in the Gaza Strip. On the day this symbol was evacuated, our reporter Shlomi Eldar returns to the images of the outbreak of the second Intifada: The destruction of Khan Yunis's twin towers and the boy Muhamad A-Dura." At the end of its August 11<sup>th</sup> newscast, Channel 1 presented a DIARY OF THE DISENGAGEMENT FROM NETZARIM. The story showed some historic footage from the settlement's first days. In this segment Labor's Nissim Zvili says: "In the heart of the Gaza Strip, with a population of 250 thousand Arabs, 180 thousand to the north and 45 thousand to the south, between Gaza and Nussirat and El-Boreij, they have placed an isolated Jewish community."

*Yediot Ahronot* and *Ma'ariv* had no such stories on their news pages. In *Ha'aretz*, the topic was mentioned only three times throughout this period. On August 23<sup>rd</sup>, for instance, a commentary by Aluf Ben was highlighted with a front page banner, under the headline DEMOGRAPHY WINS:

It is very symbolic that the Israeli settlement project in the Gaza Strip came to an end yesterday in Netzarim, the place which symbolized the hold on all settlements, even the tiniest and most isolated one. This is the point: its presence in the middle of the surrounding Palestinian sea symbolized Israeli intransigence during the Intifada. [...] In retrospect, the Gaza settlement enterprise seems like a hopeless delusion of a programmer whose computer got unplugged half-way through the job.

And the story printed on page 4 summed up the history of the Gaza settlements, making perfectly clear that the disengagement is not, and cannot be, an internal Israeli affair. The

headline read simply: 230 ISRAELIS AND SOME 2,600 PALESTINIANS KILLED IN THE STRIP SINCE ITS OCCUPATION.

## 4. “LOOTING AND BURNING”

The story of the disengagement, then, was told by the Israeli media as an internal Israeli tragedy. The Palestinians were absent in all the ways we have seen, but also in the more immediate coverage of events on the ground throughout the disengagement. The following map, published on *Ma'ariv's* front page on August 17<sup>th</sup>, aptly illustrates this situation:<sup>4</sup>



*Ma'ariv*, August 17, 2005, on pages 2-3.  
this map was also printed on the same issue's front page.

On this map, the Gaza Strip appears as island floating in mid-air. The objects on the map represent both sides of the story: the small houses are the settlements, the red arrows stand for the evacuating forces. The signs on the map and on the rooftops divide the territory into confrontation zones: the blue roofs mark those settlements whose residents have left voluntarily, the orange ones are for settlements soon to be evacuated, and the red ones stand for settlements expected to resist. Somewhere between all of these we also find the names “Gaza” “Beit Hanoun” and “Rafah”, but beyond that, the map gives absolutely no indication that some 1.3 million Palestinians live on this detached island called the Gaza Strip. This is in complete accord with the way the media covered the disengagement: without Palestinians.

The most important news item which the media consistently ignored was the Palestinian Authority's security involvement during the disengagement and in its aftermath, which to a great extent was coordinated with the IDF. Throughout the period, many senior security sources said Palestinian action in this regard was impressive, and played a central role in the rapid evacuation. Many of them spoke openly of Palestinian “restraint” when Palestinian militias barely challenged the ceasefire, after the murder of Palestinians and Israeli Arabs by Asher Weisgan and Eden Natan-zada. Some even called the Palestinian deployment a true “strategic achievement”.

<sup>4</sup> Additional similar maps were published in the printed media during the period analyzed.

Normally, evaluations by senior security sources almost automatically make headlines. In this case, however, they were systematically marginalized. During the month of August, the newspapers carried 61 reports on Palestinian security arrangements to prevent shooting and looting during and after evacuation, and on security coordination between Israel and the Authority. Only five times, three in *Ha'aretz*, did these reports make headlines. The remaining 56 items were buried inside other stories, often in the weekend supplements. The following reports, for example, only appeared as part of other stories, under headlines which dealt with completely different issues:

“The head of the Shin Bet, Yuval Diskin [...] and the director of military Intelligence, Major-General Aharon Ze’evi Farkash, examined the situation on the Palestinian side and said that Chairman of the Authority Abu-Mazen (Mahmud Abbas) gave orders not to disturb the disengagement” (*Ha'aretz*, August 15<sup>th</sup>, p.4, under the headline SHARON WILL ADDRESS THE NATION TODAY; DETERMINED TO CARRY OUT EVACUATION).

“Israeli and Palestinian officers agreed yesterday on the detailed deployment of forces on both sides, in order to secure the evacuation process. The issue was discussed in a meeting held yesterday at the Erez crossing. The Palestinians will deploy 7,500 policemen in areas next to the settlements. The deployment started last evening, and will continue today” (*Ha'aretz*, August 15<sup>th</sup>, p.2, under the headline IDF OFFICERS WILL PRESENT EVICTION ORDERS THIS MORNING).

“Coordination with the Palestinians is gaining momentum. IDF sources speak of a strategic achievement, of coordinated deployment of troops, a sharp decline in terror attacks, and agreement on a peaceful, coordinated, calm evacuation” (*Ma'ariv*, August 12<sup>th</sup>, p. 2, under the headline INFILTRATORS FLOOD GUSH KATIF).

“The operational coordination between Israel and the Authority regarding the disengagement has now entered its final leg. Yesterday two joint operation rooms were created, in order to assure a smooth withdrawal...” (*Ma'ariv*, August 12<sup>th</sup>, p. 6, under the headline HAMMAS PREPARING FOR VICTORY CELEBRATIONS).

“[Dan Halutz:] The leadership, and some of the factions, have their own reasons for wanting the process to be completed without confrontation. And if Hamas and the Authority find it necessary to maintain peace, all the rest are marginal...” (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 5<sup>th</sup>, p. 4, under the headline MANY WILL NEED TO SEARCH THEIR SOULS).

“Yesterday, the Palestinian policemen completed their deployment between the Israeli communities and the Palestinian territory, in order to avoid friction between the Palestinian mob and the IDF” (*Yediot Ahronot*, August 16<sup>th</sup>, p. 8, under the headline LAST CHANCE).

Television commentators and reporters mentioned the Palestinian efforts 40 times, but the topic made newscast headlines only once, on August 16<sup>th</sup>, on Channel 1. The headline was PALESTINIAN POLICEMEN PUSH BACK INFLAMED HAMMAS DEMONSTRATORS NEAR NEVE DEKALIM. Other references to this topic were played down, For instance, viewers had to wait till the 53<sup>rd</sup> minute of the Channel 1 News on August 15<sup>th</sup>, in order to hear the following conversation between anchor Yavin and commentator Granot:

Yavin: "Oded Granot, would you say that the Palestinians have shown admirable restraint till now?"

Granot: "Yes, they are definitely making a serious effort [...] They are really trying to stabilize the situation in Gaza for as long as the disengagement continues. First of all, the deployment of policemen. It's a constant preoccupation. They have deployed almost 2,000 already, and it is estimated that by tomorrow all 7,000 policemen will be deployed around the settlements. [...] They are pushing back people who want to approach the settlements. All this is to say, 'There is still time, we will not enter the settlements, we will maintain civilized behavior'. This is also Abu-Mazen's message tonight. After the Executive Committee's session he told the Palestinians, 'Let's behave in a civilized way, because the entire world is watching us'. And in order to make sure that peace is indeed maintained, Haim, this is what Abu-Mazen does today: he plays the card, the ultimate card that makes for calm, he announces that parliamentary elections will be held on January 21<sup>st</sup>, which is in fact telling the Hamas, if you want to make an impact, if you want to participate in government, well then, please follow the democratic course, don't try to disrupt the disengagement."

On the Channel 10's "Central Studio" broadcast on August 12<sup>th</sup>, military commentator Alon Ben-David discussed a few security issues, including settler violence. At the very end of his commentary he added, quite casually:

The big surprise for me this week, were the Palestinians. This is the quietest week I've seen in Gaza. The Palestinians have shown restraint and forbearance for a long time. Let's hope this continues.

On the Channel 2 News on August 1<sup>st</sup>, Roni Daniel expresses utter disbelief while reporting a meeting between Israeli and Palestinian officers:

Gadi Sukenik: "Roni Daniel, it has been said Gaza would be evacuated unilaterally. But you will now bring the latest, and I think most solid evidence, showing that the disengagement may actually be coordinated."

Roni Daniel: "Yes, quite so, at least, this is the impression of officers who met their Palestinian counterparts tonight. The characterization I hear is a real working session. Purposeful, focused, in other words, something which may indicate that we might start believing that a coordinated disengagement may be possible. The Palestinians came to this meeting with the IDF brigade commanders with maps in hand. They explained where they would deploy their forces, how they would prevent gunshots, mortars and rockets. This discussion lasted a few hours, the atmosphere was very cooperative. They, the Palestinians, talk of about 10-20 thousand troops who will make sure that there is no shooting during the disengagement. So on the one hand, the IDF is holding these meetings with the intention of achieving some coordination. But on the other hand, and this is happening right now, at this very moment, Gadi, the IDF is greatly reinforcing its forces in the Gush Katif area. This means that convoys of tanks and armored personnel carriers are now making their way there, during the night. So these forces are sent there just in case the Palestinians don't do the job, and then they will have to do it, before or during the disengagement."

Needless to say, Daniel's awkward language – “something which may indicate that we might start believing that a coordinated disengagement may be possible” – is not typical. In normal times, his sentences are crystal clear.

So when did the Palestinians finally make it to the headlines? Only under problematic circumstances. As we have seen, positive evaluations about their deployment were tucked deep inside the reports; but when a negative evaluation was given, on August 4<sup>th</sup>, it made the top headline on *Ma'ariv's* front page:

#### SECURITY SOURCES: TERROR MAY SLOW DOWN EVACUATION

But in this very issue, on page 4, we find the following: “During the last few days there has actually been a significant improvement in the level of coordination between the IDF and Palestinian security forces regarding the approaching disengagement.”

Channel 1's newscast on August 19<sup>th</sup> dealt with the issue of possible terror attacks after the disengagement. At the very beginning of the program, military correspondent and analyst Yoav Limor presented this ominous forecast:

Meanwhile, there is satisfaction with the way the Palestinian Authority is controlling the situation, and hope that something good may happen. But senior sources are concerned that after the exit of the last settlers from the strip, there may be a sharp rise in the number of terror attacks on IDF soldiers, in order that the terror organizations may at least be perceived as those who drove Israel out of the Strip.

The following text appeared at the bottom of the screen: “IDF evaluation: Terror will increase until the Strip is handed over to the Palestinians”. Twenty-five minutes later, deep into the newscast, Arab affairs commentator Oded Granot had the following to say:

...One of the questions is whether [Islamic] Jihad and Hamas will disrupt the ceasefire and open fire on the IDF after the last resident leaves, for a show of victory. We must listen to what they're saying. They're saying: the ceasefire will end by the end of 2005. In other words, we may assume – there's no certainty, no insurance policy – that if Israel makes no move that they perceive as a provocation, there will be no fire directed at the IDF for the duration of its presence in Gush Katif.

Only after the withdrawal, when thousands of Palestinians entered the evacuated settlements, burning synagogues and taking equipment left by the settlers, they suddenly appeared on the front pages of all the newspapers and in the newscast headlines of all television channels. Newscast headlines on September 12<sup>th</sup> and the newspaper headlines the following day reported rioting, burning and looting:

THE PALESTINIANS DID NOT WAIT TILL DAWN – THE IDF WAS STILL ON ITS WAY OUT WHEN THOUSANDS OF PEOPLE, POLICEMEN, ARMED MEN AND CIVILIANS, ENTERED THE SETTLEMENTS TO BURN, LOOT AND BE MERRY. (Channel 1, News headlines, September 12<sup>th</sup>).

THE PALESTINIANS CELEBRATED ON THE SETTLEMENTS' RUINS, TOOK ANYTHING THEY COULD FIND, AND WRECKED THE SYNAGOGUES (Channel 2, News headlines, September 12<sup>th</sup>).

THE PALESTINIANS ARE TAKING OVER GAZA AND BURNING SYNAGOGUES (Channel 10, News headlines, September 12<sup>th</sup>).

LOOTING AND BURNING (*Yediot Ahrnot*, September 13<sup>th</sup>, main headline on front page).

DANCING ON THE ROOFTOP (*Ma'ariv*, September 13<sup>th</sup>, main headline on front page).

MASSES OF PALESTINIANS WRECKED SYNAGOGUES IN THE GAZA STRIP AND ILLEGALLY CROSSED THE BORDER TO EGYPT (*Ha'aretz*, September 13<sup>th</sup>, main headline on front page).



◀ MASSES OF PALESTINIANS WRECKED SYNAGOGUES IN THE GAZA STRIP AND ILLEGALLY CROSSED THE BORDER TO EGYPT  
*Ha'aretz*, September 13, 2005, front page.



▲ DANCING ON THE ROOFTOP  
*Ma'ariv*, September 13, 2005, front page.



▲ LOOTING AND BURNING  
*Yediot Ahrnot*, September 13, 2005, front page.

Here, again, information presented by reporters presents a more complex story. First of all, there was no looting, as there was simply nothing left to loot. The Palestinians collected garbage, leftover objects, rubble and plants, anything the settlers did not bother to take, since it was simply worthless. The fact that the Palestinians gathered anything they could find attests to their desperate economic situation, not to a looting rampage.

Secondly, quite a few reporters mentioned the fact that the Authority's policemen often tried, albeit unsuccessfully, to protect the settlement's facilities. Consider, for instance, Arnon Regular's report on *Ha'aretz's* page 2 on September 13<sup>th</sup>: "[In Neve Dekalim] the

policemen tried to protect public facilities and prepare the ground [...]. Until noon, overall, the policemen did manage to prevent civilians from entering public buildings and synagogues, as they did in the other ex-settlements [...] But the civilians did not comply. [...] Throughout Gush Katif soldiers were seen protecting greenhouses in order to ensure their continued functioning.” Amit Cohen sent in a similar report, run the same day on *Ma’ariv’s* page 2: “They hardly touched the greenhouses. Palestinian sources pointed out that the other important buildings in the Gush Katif settlements, such as schools and nurseries, are also being protected.” Arab Affairs analyst Ehud Yaari had the following comment on the Channel 2 News on September 12<sup>th</sup>:

Nevertheless, it should be said, that looting and attacks on the industrial zone in Erez were prevented. [...] This is important. And the border crossings, that’s important. And public facilities as well as agricultural facilities in the Gush Katif area – these things did not happen.

But again, none of this made headlines.

## 5. “THE STATE OF GAZA”

On August 24<sup>th</sup>, the newspapers celebrated the end of the disengagement. *Ma'ariv's* main headline read: PEACEFULLY CONCLUDED. MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: THE EVACUATION OF ALL GAZA AND NORTH SAMARIA RESIDENTS HAS BEEN COMPLETED. NO SHOOTING, NO SEVERE VIOLENCE, NO CASUALTIES. *Yediot Ahronot's* main headline read: THE EVACUATION OF THE GUSH KATIF AND NORTH SAMARIA COMMUNITIES HAS BEEN COMPLETED; 6 DAYS, 25 COMMUNITIES, 15,000 EVACUEES, 0 CASUALTIES. Note that eight Palestinians murdered by Eden Natan-zada and Asher Weisgan are not mentioned in this count. *Ha'aretz's* main headline simply stated: THE 25 COMMUNITIES IN GAZA AND THE WEST BANK WERE EVACUATED WITHIN A WEEK. Under this headline the newspaper printed a commentary by Amos Harel, which starts as follows:

“What started out as a tragedy ended as a farce [...] It's hard to tell where things looked more absurd: under the fortress (where tired policemen stretched for hours, a stone's throw away from the fanatics on the rooftop), or at the foreign networks [...] Towards evening, Head of Central Command Chief Yair Nave could note with satisfaction that the psychological warfare he conducted did the job. For a few days, the IDF fed the press exaggerated reports about the resistance's preparations at Sa-Nur and Homesh. The media were not the only ones who bought into these reports, so did the settlers.”

As we have seen, Major-General Nave's psychological warfare did indeed do the job. But at the end of his commentary, Harel poses the most significant question, never once mentioned in newspapers and newscasts throughout the period:

And perhaps at this point, said yesterday an officer who has devoted most of last year to preparing the evacuation, someone will take the trouble and explain the logic behind the entire plan, the logic which has not yet been convincingly presented to any of those who implemented it.

As we shall see, on that day *Yediot Ahronot* and *Ha'aretz* tried to answer some elements of the questions about what would happen “the day after”. *Ma'ariv* also addressed this issue, two days later. But until the disengagement was completed, the newspapers and television channels presented it as a necessary move, calling for no explanation or criticism. The media frankly supported the plan, a fact which provoked severe criticism by the political right. But at the same time, the media also tacitly embraced the basic assumption of the disengagement's planners, namely, that there was “no partner” on the other side. They told the disengagement story as a unilateral one, an event which Israelis experienced amongst themselves. A whole series of questions was thus excluded from the story: What would Gaza's status be after the withdrawal? Would it remain de facto under Israeli rule? How were the Palestinians in Gaza supposed to deal with poverty, overpopulation and unemployment, if the gates between Israel and the Strip remained closed? Was the disengagement plan an attempt to disconnect the Gaza Strip from the West Bank, both physically and legally? Would people and commodities be able move between both Palestinian areas? How? Who would control the border crossings? Would a seaport and airport be built in the Strip? When? Was Israel coordinating all of this with the Palestinian non-partner?

Some of these questions appeared throughout the period in newspapers' opinion columns (63 times). They appeared much less frequently, no more than 25 times, on news-pages

and newscasts, usually with no headlines. Important items related to these issues, sent in by reporters, were systematically marginalized.<sup>5</sup>

This happened for instance, on the few occasions in which a reporter mentioned disagreement within the Israeli establishment regarding “the day after”. On August 2<sup>nd</sup> Akiva Eldar wrote the following in *Ha’aretz*’s B section:

Shimon Peres is absolutely certain, that if Ariel Sharon’s disengagement plan stifles the Gaza Strip by disconnecting it from its West Bank oxygen supply, he and his colleagues in the Labor party will once again serve as a backdrop for the horror movie “Intifada 3”. [...] Minister Haim Ramon [...] does not hide his criticism of the approach taken by the Prime Minister and Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu, regarding Abu-Mazen’s concern that the disengagement might disconnect Gaza from the West Bank. He and many others, including senior officials in the defense establishment, think that this concern, far from conflicting with Israel’s interests, actually serves our stake in keeping the Gaza Strip quiet.

37 minutes into Channel 2’s newscast on August 3<sup>rd</sup>, Udi Segal reports:

Peres and Ramon are coming to this meeting from the Prime Minister’s office, where a discussion was held about the type of movement between Gaza and Egypt following disengagement. They recommend free transit of persons in Rafah, under European Union surveillance. Shin Bet head Diskin is adamantly opposed: “A situation of free transit, with no Israeli supervision, would make it possible for even Ben Laden to visit Gaza. Hamas headquarters in Damascus would be able to move into the Strip”. Ramon [responding]: “That’s actually good, that way we can eliminate all of them at once.”

These short excerpts could have given the public an actual glimpse of the backstage workings of the Israeli collective trauma, and shed some light on Prime Minister Sharon’s diplomatic intentions. But the media chose not to highlight this issue, and it was only mentioned off the news-pages. Consider, for instance, Aluf Ben in *Ha’aretz*’s weekend supplement, on August 12<sup>th</sup>:

Sharon’s distaste for any negotiation with the Arabs is his weak point. A senior minister, who recently talked with him about Abbas, was told: “Why on earth should I reach an agreement with him? You can’t believe them”. [...] And what will Sharon do on “the day after”? His advisors promise that he will pursue the Roadmap with all his might. [...] For Sharon, this is “long term parking” for the peace process, waiting till Abbas crushes the Hamas, or fails and disappears [...] But this is just vague talk for upcoming election days. In any case, no one believes Sharon’s avowals that “there will be no second disengagement” [...]

And in this same supplement, Amir Oren writes:

[...] After the elections, he will insist that the Palestinians fulfill their share of the Roadmap, and prove, at least in one or two cities that have been

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<sup>5</sup> The media highlighted the political right’s criticism of the disengagement only once, following the resignation of Finance Minister Binyamin Netanyahu. But even on this occasion, the media did not seize the opportunity to create public discussion regarding the entire complex of diplomatic issues.

handed over to them, that they are conducting an all-out war on terrorism. If they measure up, he will strive for a permanent status agreement whereby the Palestinian state will get all the territories of the West Bank outside the settlement blocs. [...] The Jordan Valley is no longer as necessary as it was, and may be given up.

Instead of continuous building towards Ma'ale Edomim, which will force the Palestinians to circumvent it on their way between both parts of the West Bank, Sharon will be willing to consider a tunnel road, like the one between Jerusalem and Gush Etzion. Concessions are also to be expected in the eastern parts of Jerusalem, an allusion to the National Security Council's plan of giving up Kfar 'Aqeb and Shoefat. The chances for the realization of this outline of Sharon's seem slim now. His plans have run askew, and he faces two difficult fronts: on the internal front, Netanyahu and the opposition to the evacuation, and on the external front, an American-Palestinian alliance. If he somehow manages to get out of the former, he will find it difficult to deal with the latter.

Behind the polite smiles, diplomatic and security relations with Washington are worse than they've been in years. Sharon's unilateral withdrawal from Gaza has turned into a mutual hug between Abbas and Condoleezza Rice. In return for the Palestinians' obliging willingness to accept Gaza, the Americans will shower them with abundant diplomatic and economic support. Sharon wants the Roadmap as a substitute for Oslo. Abbas wants to return to Oslo. The Bush Administration tends to support Abbas: back to Oslo, even through the back door. Without definite goals for future Israeli withdrawals, without a binding timetable and with no international guarantees, Abbas will refuse to fight terror. Bush and Rice will not accept Sharon's attempts to explain that even if the end is pretty much agreed upon, it must be reached by a lengthy process. And all this, provided there is some quiet, for a while, in post-evacuation Gaza.

The few comments by reporters and analysts about the obstacles Israel was creating for the Palestinian Authority never made it to the headlines. Here, for instance, is an excerpt of Ben Caspit's interview with PA Chief of Security Mohammad Dahlan, printed by *Ma'ariv* on August 17<sup>th</sup>, pages 10-11, under the headline WE WILL NOT BECOME A SECOND KABUL.

[...] "We coordinate everything you are willing to coordinate with us. All the rest is a mystery. We ask where the construction rubble will be buried – they say, we'll see later. We ask about the crossings – they say, we'll talk about it later. We ask about the Rafah border crossing, they tell us to wait until they conclude everything with the Egyptians. We ask about an airport – they say that this should not be mentioned, it annoys Sharon. We ask about the safe passage – they say that is part of Oslo, so it really annoys Sharon [...]"

Here is Ofer Shelah, in a commentary run in *Yediot Ahronot's* section B on August 4<sup>th</sup>:

The Palestinians have been warning for a long time, that their police and security services [...] lack weapons and ammunition. [...] We are forced to buy weapons on the black market, they said [...]. They also blamed the lack of weapons for the Authority's impotence in dealing with Hamas.

To Israelis ears, this sounds like nonsense [...]. You don't have enough weapons, says Israeli common sense to its usual interlocutor, i.e., itself, then get it from Hamas.

So what was actually happening? Was Sharon indeed planning "long term parking" for the diplomatic process, until Abu Mazen "crushes Hamas or fails and disappears"? Or would he perhaps "strive for a permanent status agreement"? Was the relationship with Washington indeed "worse than it has been in years"? Was Israel actually telling the Palestinian Authority to buy weapons from Hamas? It is hard to imagine weightier issues. These questions should have been on top of the media's agenda. They should have made main headlines, creating a real public discussion of the disengagement as a diplomatic move, a debate which would also consider other alternatives. But no such discussion took place.

It should be noted that the Palestinian perspective was consistently presented in David Witztum and Oren Nehari's "World Coverage" on Channel 1, a program dealing with the disengagement in the world media, broadcast every Monday at 8 PM during August. But the Palestinian perspective was disconnected from the coverage in the newscast itself, where Palestinian criticism was rarely voiced and never highlighted in headlines. In the August 13<sup>th</sup> newscast, for instance, one of the headlines was THE PALESTINIANS CONTINUE PREPARATIONS FOR THE CELEBRATION OF ISRAEL'S EXPECTED WITHDRAWAL FROM GUSH KATIF. HAMMAS DECLARES: WE WILL CONTINUE THE ARMED STRUGGLE. But comments by Palestinian minister Nabil Sha'at, reported briefly later on, did not make it to the headlines. Sha'at noted that the Gaza Strip "[...] has not been fully released. The Israelis still control the sky, that is the airspace and the electromagnetic frequencies. This in fact entitles the area to protection by the Fourth Geneva convention, as an Occupied Territory."

Upon completion of the disengagement, then, the three newspapers did try to address some of these questions, albeit carefully. On its front page on August 24<sup>th</sup>, *Ha'aretz* carried a story under the headline: [government's legal advisor] MAZOSZ APPROVED CONSTRUCTION OF FENCE AROUND MA'ALE EDOMIM. The upper headline read: PALESTINIANS: THE FENCE WILL COMPLICATE TRANSIT BETWEEN THE SOUTHERN AND NORTHERN AREAS OF THE WEST BANK. The front page banner referring readers to page 11 adds: SHARON WANTS A CONTINUOUS BLOC BETWEEN MA'ALE EDOMIM AND JERUSALEM. On page 11 there is a detailed map of the Ma'ale Edomim area, and small pictures of the settlements there.<sup>6</sup> *Ma'ariv*'s main headline on August 26 was 13,000 NEW SETTLERS IN THE TERRITORIES. The upper headline read SPECIAL REPORT: SHARP RISE IN NUMBER OF JUDEA AND SAMARIA RESIDENTS SINCE THE BEGINNING OF THE YEAR. The headline on page 2 adds: EVACUATION IN THE STRIP, SETTLEMENT IN THE BANK. This is noteworthy.

But the most comprehensive attempt to address these questions, published by *Yediot Ahronot*, only proves the need for such a discussion before and during the disengagement. On August 24<sup>th</sup>, the newspaper dedicated a double-spread on pages 4-5 to this topic. The front page carried a banner referring to the double-spread, under the headline THE STATE OF GAZA. The sub-headline asked: WHAT RELATIONS WILL EXIST BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE NEW PALESTINIAN ENTITY IN EVACUATED GAZA. But turning from the front page to pages 4-5, it seems that the Palestinians have already lost half of their new state. The double-spread's headline reads: HALF A STATE. The upper headline says: THE DAY AFTER: A NEW PALESTINIAN ENTITY WILL

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<sup>6</sup> *Ha'aretz* continued addressing the issue of the arrangements for "the day after" later on. For instance, the main headline of the September 6<sup>th</sup> issue was PRESSURE TO ENABLE FREE PASSAGE OF PALESTINIANS FROM EGYPT TO GAZA.

EMERGE ALONGSIDE ISRAEL IN THE GAZA STRIP. THESE ARE ISRAEL'S PREPARATIONS. The sub-headline elaborates: NO AERIAL SPACE OR SEAPORT. BUT UPON COMPLETION OF THE DISENGAGEMENT ISRAEL WILL ANNOUNCE: MILITARY RULE IN GAZA IS ABOLISHED. THE IDF EXPECTS A FREE HAND IN CASES OF QASSAM ROCKETS, THE MINISTRY OF THE INTERIOR IS PREPARING TO ASSUME RESPONSIBILITY FOR THE BORDER CROSSINGS, AND THE MINISTRY OF AGRICULTURE EXPECTS A DECLINE IN SMUGGLING. LESS OPTIMISM ON THE OTHER SIDE OF THE BORDER: "IF ISRAEL DOES NOT GRANT US FREE TRANSIT, GAZA WILL BECOME ONE BIG JAIL". Under the logo THE END OF THE DISENGAGEMENT: A NEW NEIGHBOR, there are two small items under the headlines: NEW INITIATIVE: SHARON-ABU-MAZEN SUMMIT IN THE UN, and BUSH: "IMMEDIATE RETURN TO ROADMAP IS IMPERATIVE".



◀ **THE STATE OF GAZA**  
 WHAT RELATIONS WILL EXIST BETWEEN ISRAEL AND THE NEW PALESTINIAN ENTITY IN EVACUATED GAZA?  
*Yediot Ahronot, August 24, 2005, front page banner.*

HALF A STATE  
*Double-spread on pp. 4-5. ▼*



The internal contradictions between these headlines attest to deep conceptual confusion. Is the Gaza Strip a "state", "half a state", a "new neighbor", "a new Palestinian entity", or "one big jail"? This same confusion is reflected in the stories printed on this double-spread. One paragraph reads:

On the day after disengagement, Israel will announce that military rule in the Gaza Strip has ended, after 37 years. This declaration will be accompanied by the announcement [...] that Israel takes no responsibility for whatever happens in the area. [...] authority over the territory is

transferred to the Palestinian Authority, and Israel no longer assumes any responsibility for the Gaza Strip.

In another paragraph, however, we find the following:

Legally, it is not possible to declare that the occupation has ended, since Israel is keeping several areas of responsibility which are usually handled by sovereign states, i.e., control over aerial and maritime space, and full or partial control of border crossings. Nevertheless, Israel intends to maximize its withdrawal from Gaza on the diplomatic level, in several ways: First, Israel intends to declare the abolishment of military rule in Gaza during the coming months.

And the item concludes:

On the other side, the Palestinian Authority is on alert. "If Israel does not give us freedom of transit, Gaza will become one big jail", says Mohammad Dahlan, who like many others Gaza knows that disengagement has turned Gaza into half a state that depends on Israel's good grace for anything that has to do with border crossings and security.

The border crossings agreement was finally signed on November 15<sup>th</sup>. The next day, *Ha'aretz* appropriately dedicated its main headline to this event: CROSSINGS' AGREEMENT: CONVOYS FROM GAZA TO THE BANK IN A MONTH. *Yediot Ahronot* also highlighted the agreement in its main headline, stressing only the associated fear: HUNDREDS OF PALESTINIANS WILL PASS THROUGH ASHQELON AND QIRYAT-GAT. *Ma'ariv* chose to publish a small item on this topic on page 8, under the headline THE RAFAH BORDER CROSSING WILL BE OPENED IN TEN DAYS. The other questions remained unanswered.

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict has arrived once again at an important crossroads. The disengagement has created a new reality in Gaza, while at the same time strengthening the Israeli stronghold on the West Bank. Coverage of the disengagement, as we have shown, was deficient in many ways, primarily in its disconnecting the disengagement from the context of the conflict, and turning it into an internal Israeli tragedy. The evacuation of settlements presented an unprecedented opportunity for deep examination of the conflict and its meaning, but this was impossible to do without attempting to understand what was going on in the relationship between Israel and the Palestinians, not only between Israelis. In this sense, the opportunity was missed by the media.

## **“FIRST AND EXCLUSIVE PUBLICATION”**

During the month of August, human rights organizations reported three attacks on Palestinians by settlers in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip. Only one of these events was reported in the Israeli media, in an item by Amira Hass printed on *Ha'aretz's* page 16 on August 19<sup>th</sup>. ISRAELI YOUTHS BROKE INTO PALESTINIAN GAS STATION NEAR SA-NUR AND DAMAGED PROPERTY. The two other cases were not covered at all. On Channel 1, there was one indirect, casual mention of Palestinian trees burnt by settlers. 48 minutes into the newscast on August 17<sup>th</sup>, Avi First reported: “And when there are no soldiers to be seen, it seems that even Palestinian palm trees are a pretty good target. And so another day of exhausting expectation ends in Shirat Hayam.” A few other items, all marginalized, told of demonstrations against the Separation Wall in Bil'in, and of the curfew imposed on the Palestinians during the disengagement. In an article published in *Yediot Ahronot's* weekend political supplement on August 5<sup>th</sup>, B. Michael tells of an Israeli soldier who shot a Palestinian, who was not trying to attack or threaten him, in the leg. Michael concludes his article with these words:

As promised, this is the first and exclusive publication of all of the above. For who has time to report such trivia, when there are still 200 boxes in some god-forsaken community in abandoned Gush Katif, full of socks and traumas, which were not interviewed, photographed and smothered with dripping empathy.

## “WE DIDN’T RAISE A MURDERER”

In the two weeks before the disengagement, four Palestinians and four Israeli-Arabs were murdered by two Jews, Eden Natan-zada and Asher Weisgan. Both explicitly stated that they had been motivated by the hope of delaying or preventing the plan’s implementation. But the media did not count these eight victims when they summed up the evacuation upon its completion. *Yediot Ahronot’s* main headline on August 24<sup>th</sup> read: 6 DAYS, 25 COMMUNITIES, 15,000 EVACUEES, 0 CASUALTIES. *Ma’ariv’s* main headline was: PEACEFULLY COMPLETED, and the sub-headline added: MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: THE EVACUATION OF ALL RESIDENTS FROM GAZA AND NORTH SAMARIA IS OVER; NO GUNSHOTS, NO SEVERE VIOLENCE, NO CASUALTIES.



PEACEFULLY COMPLETED  
MISSION ACCOMPLISHED: THE EVACUATION OF ALL RESIDENTS FROM GAZA AND NORTH SAMARIA IS OVER; NO GUNSHOTS, NO SEVERE VIOLENCE, NO CASUALTIES  
Ma’ariv, August 24, 2005, front page, main headline.



6 DAYS, 25 COMMUNITIES, 15,000 EVACUEES, 0 CASUALTIES  
Yediot Ahronot, August 24, 2005, front page, main headline.

Summing up the disengagement, on *Ma’ariv’s* double-spread on pages 2-3 on August 24<sup>th</sup>, Ben Caspit wrote:

[...] Problematic as it may be, controversial as it may be, the disengagement plan was fully implemented with almost no casualties, almost no violence, smoothly, quickly and elegantly (if we elegantly ignore, for the moment, the two Jewish terrorists who murdered eight Arabs over the past weeks).

This elegant dismissal of the Arab casualties also colored the actual coverage of both murder cases. In stark contrast with the coverage of terror attacks with Jewish victims, the coverage of the attack in Shilo, and to a great extent also that in Shfar'am, dealt mainly with the terrorists and not with their victims.

The names of the four Palestinians murdered by Asher Weisgan in Shilo appeared in the August 18<sup>th</sup> newspapers inside the stories, sometimes along with their ages and place of residence. But there were no headlines and no pictures. Except for *Ha'aretz*, none of the media outlets carried a story about the victims, their families and lives. Nor were the injured interviewed. The victims' names were not mentioned in newscast headlines either. It should be noted that Channel 2 only found time to report on the attack the following day, an hour and a quarter into the newscast. The coverage of the August 4<sup>th</sup> terror attack in Shefar'am was somewhat more balanced. The funerals were covered, and information was given about the victims and their families. But most of the story dealt with terrorist Eden Natan-zada. The central issues were the transformation of Natan-zada from an outstanding student to an ideologically driven murderer (*Yediot Ahronot's* headline on page 3, August 5<sup>th</sup>, read: HONORS STUDENT TURNS INTO TERRORIST); Natan-zada's stunned and concerned family (WE DID NOT RAISE A MURDERER, *Ma'ariv's* headline on page 5, August 7<sup>th</sup>); the question of his burial place (OVER OUR DEAD BODIES, *Yediot Ahronot* page 7, August 7<sup>th</sup>); and the intelligence failure that made this attack possible. The coverage of the Shilo attack focused on the amazement expressed by Weisgan's friends and relatives and the owner of the factory where he worked.

## Conclusion

The disengagement from Gaza Strip and the northern West Bank was the culminating moment in the implementation of Israel's unilateral policy, and one of the most extensively covered events in Israeli history, supplying endless human and political interest stories. Israeli reality never had never undergone such an explicit test, challenging the past (the settlements' location, the reason for their creation and their effect on Palestinian and Israeli life), the present (the evacuation's wider context) and the future (the implications of the evacuation on the destiny of both peoples). Yet Israel's mainstream media chose to disconnect the disengagement from the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, and present it as an internal Israeli affair.

As we have seen, an analysis of all the items referring to the disengagement in the Israeli press and television between August 1<sup>st</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup>, 2005 (over 2,000 items) reveals several patent editorial practices that created a simplistic view of the situation:

- The coverage played up the settlers' image as a dangerous and violent group, as well as their plans to resist evacuation forcefully and endanger the very feasibility of the disengagement. This was done in spite of contradictory information which was constantly sent in by the reporters on the ground but mostly marginalized and often presented under misleading headlines.
- The media incessantly dealt with the suffering experienced by Israelis as a result of the disengagement, and hardly focused on other aspects related to the evacuation. More than 1,200 items repeatedly told of the pain and hardship experienced by evacuees and evacuator. There was hardly any discussion of the disengagement's benefits, the price which the settlements had exacted from Israelis over the years, or the suffering they had caused Palestinians.
- The lack of historic and diplomatic perspective in the media's coverage suppressed the Palestinian side of the story throughout the period. In spite of the almost complete calm observed by the Palestinians during the disengagement period, they generally made headlines only under negative or threatening circumstances.

Both aspects of the coverage – presentation of the settlers as a particularly violent and dangerous group on the one hand, and the preoccupation with their plight on the other – contributed to a one-sided, simplistic framing of the disengagement. In this sense, the Israeli media followed the classic rules of Greek tragedy, expressing empathy for the heroes (the Israeli victims, evacuees and evacuators alike), shocking its audience, eliciting feelings of fear and pity, and leading up to a catharsis following the completion of the evacuation. Only then was it possible to breathe deeply, and conclude that “we went through this together”, with “zero casualties”.

In its coverage of the disengagement, mainstream Israeli media adopted the basic narrative underlying the concept of unilaterality, which considered evacuation a necessary move, calling for no explanation or criticism. This concept is based on the disengagement's planners' basic assumption that there is “no partner” on the other side. Consequently, the disengagement was presented as a one-sided, internal affair which Israelis experienced amongst themselves, while suppressing an entire set of crucial questions about the future of the region.

## Appendix: The first two reports

These are the summaries of the first two reports issued by **Keshev** as part of the project “Media Monitoring – Words Can Kill”. This unique project, jointly carried out by the Israeli organization **Keshev** and the Palestinian organization **Miftah**, monitors the media on both sides of the conflict. Our goal is to change those patterns of coverage in Israel and in the Palestinian Authority which encourage prejudice, incitement, defamation, misrepresentation, de-legitimization and dehumanization of the other side.

We hope our reports will encourage a more balanced, responsible and sober coverage, which will present the public with a full picture of reality, its complexity and the contradictions we live with. Words can kill, but they can also offer hope.

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Media Monitoring Project; “Words Can Kill, Too”, January 2005

### “When Thy Enemy Falls”

#### *Coverage of Arafat’s Death in the Israeli Media*

#### Summary

This report examines coverage of Yasser Arafat’s illness and death in the three main Israeli daily newspapers (*Yediot Aharonot*, *Ma’ariv* and *Ha’aretz*) and in the main television news editions (Channel 1, Channel 2 and Channel 10), from the first reports of his illness on October 25, 2004, until November 19, a few days after his burial.

**Below are the principal findings of the report:**

#### **1. Introduction: Arafat Dies but the Conception Lives**

Israeli media reports on Arafat’s condition reflected, more than anything, the “conception” that has taken hold in recent years in Israel, which maintains that there is no Palestinian partner for peace and that Yasser Arafat alone is responsible for what has transpired in the region. This problematic conception was exposed in full force in internal disputes within Israeli military intelligence that were revealed in a series of interviews published in *Ha’aretz* beginning in the middle of 2004. In these interviews, former senior military intelligence officers, Gen. Amos Malka, Amos Lavi and Matti Steinberg, strongly criticized the outlook adopted by the security establishment and the Israeli government, which held that Arafat is solely responsible for the collapse of the peace process and the wave of violence that has consumed the region.

In its news coverage of the past few years, the Israeli media has adopted this “conception” almost without criticism. An examination of the coverage of Arafat’s death reveals that the conception underlies reporting about the man himself, his potential successors and Palestinian society in general.

#### **2. The Man with the Hairy Face, the Kaffiyeh and the Pistol: Arafat’s Image as He Lay Dying**

In general, Israeli media outlets represented Arafat in his dying days as a mythical figure, Satanic, a larger-than-life enemy, and his death was anticipated with explicit rejoicing at his downfall. Headlines in *Yediot Aharonot* and *Ma’ariv* frequently featured denunciative and disparaging expressions like: Good Riddance, Has His Day, Arafat’s Finished, the Man with the Hair on his Face, Man of Blood and Man of Evil, Arch-terrorist, and Matters as Dead.

Anticipation of Arafat’s death and delight at his impending demise were expressed in such headlines as: “The Arafat Era, Finally, Approaches its End” and “How Much Longer Must We Wait?” (*Yediot Aharonot*, November 8 and November 11, 2004).

In profile stories and descriptions of the image and life of Yasser Arafat those components that were consistent with the “conception” were emphasized and those that contradicted it were minimized. On the Channel 2 news, Ehud Ya’ari stood out in portraying Arafat’s demonic image, which he interspersed with anecdotes and testimony about Arafat’s real intentions. Oded Granot, on Channel 1, on the other hand, did not negate “the conception”, but nevertheless depicted Arafat’s image in a less impassioned manner and gave expression to other more complex sides of his character, including his role in the peace process and his support for a two state solution.

### **3. “The Palestinians Spread Declarations”: Who Knows Best How the Chairman Feels?**

A prominent phenomenon found in almost all of the media outlets was scorn for Palestinian sources of information. Almost all of the media outlets clearly distinguished between “reliable” sources and Palestinian sources. In news reports, Palestinian sources never “say” or “announce”; they “spread declarations,” “maintain their version,” “continue to insist,” “disseminate information,” “assert,” or at times they “admit,” and so on. Special contempt was reserved for the PLO representative in Paris, Laila Shahid. Keshev’s report presents several examples that show how assessments of Arafat’s condition were derided and dismissed when they were expressed by Palestinian sources, but the same assessments were presented as undisputed fact when they were made by Israeli sources, sometimes in the same newspaper and on the same page.

### **4. The Woman by His Side: The Media and Suha**

The media’s treatment of the Chairman’s wife and her conduct at his deathbed was characterized by a certain colorfulness that was reminiscent of gossip columns, replete with Orientalist and even chauvinist elements. *Yediot Aharonot* and the Channel 2 news edition were especially prominent in this regard. In *Yediot Aharonot* the headlines spoke of Suha as a demonic woman, motivated by money and ruling with a high hand over Arafat’s circle: “Blonde Ambition,” “The Young Woman Whose Eyes Shine at the Millions of her Inheritance,” who plans “Burning Revenge against Abu Mazen” while “Her Finger is on the Respirator Button”. Only in some profile stories, published in back pages, was it possible to find a more complicated picture of Suha’s role and her motives, such as the reasons for her distance or distancing from her husband, but these details did not make it into the headlines. On Channel 2, the news anchors did not miss an opportunity for amusement with chauvinist jokes about Suha and open disdain for her and her motives. Thus anchor Gadi Sukenik allowed himself to summarize the subject in a few words: “Not much of a relationship, but it was worth it”.

### **5. “Shock and Confusion on the Palestinian Street”: What Do They Think of Arafat on the Other Side?**

Reporting on what transpires on the other side is one of the most important roles of the media, especially in places and situations where there is crisis and conflict. Though the Israeli media referred to the mood and reactions on the Palestinian side, almost every media outlet that was examined did not base its descriptions of Palestinian reactions on significant Palestinian sources and what was depicted was superficial and general. Aside from Amira Hass of *Ha’aretz*, who lives in and reported from Ramallah and was able to present a more complex and deeper picture, most reporting was limited to chance conversations with Palestinian passersby. Each of the media outlets gave a different picture of Palestinian attitudes toward Arafat’s condition. Some spoke of “fear,” “mourning” and “shock” on the Palestinian street, and some of “indifference” and “lack of interest” – with the same degree of decisiveness and generalization.

### **6. “Battles of Succession in the Palestinian Authority”: A First Step toward the Next Conception?**

Newspaper headlines and television news anchors’ pronouncements generally dealt with “battles of succession” and an “expected outbreak of violence”, even while the reporters themselves reported assessments (including those of the Israeli security system) that foresaw a smooth transfer of power, orderly elections and Palestinian unity at the difficult moment of the death of their leader. In advance of the funeral, headlines in all of the newspapers warned of riots. A report in *Yediot Aharonot*, for example, declared “The Masses Are Liable to March on Jerusalem, Police and IDF at Highest State of Alert”. However, articles in the same edition featured assessments by security forces that maintained that the funeral would pass quietly. In *Ha’aretz*, the headlines also emphasize a frightening scenario: “Highest State of Alert in the Police and IDF, Police Worried: Demonstrative Attacks and Riots on the Temple Mount”. The bottom line is that none of the furious prophecies presented in the headlines materialized.

### **7. “Returning the Guns to Them”: Is a New Era of Israeli Gestures Really Beginning?**

Opposite the image of Palestinians in newspaper headlines and news broadcasts, an image that consists of indifference and violence, anarchy and battles for succession, the media outlets presented a positive and conciliatory view of the Israeli side. The steps taken by Israel following the Chairman's illness and death were presented as gestures toward the Palestinians: The government permits Arafat to leave to receive medical care anywhere in the world and will agree to his return to the Muqata'a; Israel will allow East Jerusalem Palestinians to vote in the elections; the IDF exercises restraint during the mourning period; the IDF allows Palestinian policemen to carry weapons, and more. Even when reports in the same media outlets made it clear that the "gestures" were offered in response to pressure on Israel from the United States, and even when it was reported that the gestures were made for lack of an alternative or were conditioned on certain Palestinian behavior, the headlines almost universally presented these moves as generous acts by the Israeli side.

#### **8. "Is the Chairman's Death Good?": The Media and Abu Mazen**

In the media's treatment of Arafat's successors, especially Abu Mazen, the conception that there is "no partner" weighed heavily, making it possible to identify the first signs of the next "no partner" conception. Headlines such as "A New Middle East," "A New Era," and "Now There's a Partner" jubilantly stressed that a new era has begun and created expectations for substantial change following the death of our greatest enemy, thus solidifying Arafat's existence as the "non-partner". Referring to his replacement, Abu Mazen, the Israeli media offered three principal explanations, all of which led to the same conclusion: Abu Mazen is Arafat's successor and is no different from him (therefore there is no partner for peace); Abu Mazen is different from Arafat but weaker than him (therefore there is no partner because he will not be able to bring about change); Abu Mazen is different from Arafat and able and willing to accept Israel's demands (therefore, as soon as this is revealed not to be the case, he will immediately become a non-partner). Building up the expectation for rapid change is indicative of an outlook that does not give a full picture of the complex reality and of the point of view of the other side.

#### **9. Conclusion: Toward the Days Ahead**

After four years in which the vast majority of the Israeli media embraced the old conception, in the period that we examined it was possible to identify the first signs of a new optimism, but also of a new conception, one that says: In Arafat's time, he was alone was responsible for the situation; now that he is gone, our hands are extended in peace but we "understand" that after his death there is still, apparently, "no one to talk to". In the media's coverage of Arafat's final days there is virtually nothing that might lead Israeli news consumers to understand the extent to which the future of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict depends on both sides, and not just the other side. The optimism emanating from the Israeli media after Arafat's death is qualified, and it is based on complete disregard for Israel's role in the conflict. We hope that this report and its conclusions will help bring certain changes to the conduct of the Israeli media, changes that will make possible coverage that is more balanced and more responsible and less impassioned, that will present the full picture of reality to the public, its complexity and the contradictions that we live with. Although words can kill, they can also offer hope.

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## Quiet, We're Disengaging!

### *Israeli Media Coverage of the Tense Ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian Authority following the Sharm e-Sheikh Understandings*

#### Summary

#### 1. Introduction

On February 8, 2005, at the Sharm e-Sheikh summit, Prime Minister Ariel Sharon and Palestinian Authority Chairman Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen) declared a ceasefire after more than four years of Intifada. Since the summit, the two sides have exchanged mutual recriminations on intentional and unintentional violations of the understandings that were reached. This report examines how the major Israeli media outlets covered the ceasefire, how they interpreted the actions (both positive and negative) of both sides, and how they dealt with each side's pronouncements concerning violations of the ceasefire by the other side.

The report focuses on a period of 32 days, between April 9 and May 10, 2005, and examines patterns of coverage in six major Israeli media outlets: The newspapers *Ha'aretz*, *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ma'ariv*, and the nightly television news broadcasts on Channels 1, 2 and 10.

In a long and difficult conflict like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, periods of ceasefire and relative calm – like the one examined in this report – are no less important than more violent periods. The two sides arrive at a ceasefire when they are exhausted, injured and distrustful. Almost naturally, both sides tend to overlook cases in which they themselves violate the agreements that led to the ceasefire and to see in the other side's violations proof that it intends to resume the circle of violence. Each side tends to see its violations as unintentional and the other side's violations as the direct result of policy. Moreover, in situations like these, decision makers (in our case, Israeli decision makers) are likely to issue declarations that are not meant to strengthen the ceasefire, but rather, to prepare the ground for blaming the other side in the event that the ceasefire ends.

This is why it is important that media outlets, which provide their consumers with information on this unstable state of affairs, provide balanced, reliable and checked information that attempts to independently examine events in the field and critically interpret official pronouncements. As this report shows, the media outlets examined did not perform their duty in this regard.

The first part of the report (Sections 2 – 5) concerns coverage of Israel's actions and failures to act; the second part (section 6) concerns coverage of the Palestinian Authority's actions and failures to act. In both parts, this report does not attempt to determine to what extent each side fulfilled its commitments, nor how "justified" its accusations were against the other side. The report, rather, seeks to examine news coverage of these questions and to scrutinize to what extent the media outlets provided their consumers with information that was checked, investigated and complete on the complex reality of the fragile ceasefire – information that can enable media consumers to attain an informed outlook on the current stage of the conflict.

#### 2. How was violence by the IDF against Palestinians covered?

During the period covered by this investigation, 9 Palestinians were killed by soldiers' fire in six separate incidents and more than 100 Palestinians were injured. In the media outlets that were examined, there appeared 42 items about these incidents. The reports were relatively minor and were minimized by various editorial techniques. Incidents in which Palestinians were injured by IDF soldiers' fire were almost never reported, even when they resulted in serious injuries.

The report examines two main incidents in depth: The killing of two Palestinian youths in Beit Liqiya, on May 4, 2005, and the killing of three Palestinian youths in the Philadelphi corridor, on April 9, 2005 – to which the Palestinians responded by firing mortars. The initial reports on these incidents were all based on the official IDF version of events and lacked critical examination of this version. After the IDF published its own investigations of the incidents, their most severe findings were played down by all of the media outlets except for *Ha'aretz*. Independent critical perspectives appeared only in opinion

columns and in one investigative report that appeared far away from the news pages. None of the media outlets devoted news space to significant questions that arose from these incidents – such as IDF policy on opening fire in the midst of a ceasefire.

### **3. How were Palestinian reactions to these incidents covered?**

In coverage of these incidents, the Palestinians' reactions were suppressed or played down by all of the media outlets. Channel 2, *Yedioth Ahronoth* and *Ma'ariv* simply ignored most of the reactions. Channel 1 and *Ha'aretz* gave a little more space to the reactions. Where they were reported, Palestinian reactions appeared in the body of news items and were not mentioned in the headlines. This lack of balance is especially pronounced when it is compared to coverage of Israeli reactions to Palestinian actions. For example, Abu Mazen's criticism of Israel after the killing of the three youths appeared only in minor form, within the body of news items. By comparison, the Minister of Defense, Shaul Mofaz's, criticism of the Palestinian firing of mortars in response, appeared in the front page headlines of all of the newspapers and was prominently covered in the television news broadcasts.

### **4. How was international criticism of Israel covered?**

In the weeks after the Sharm e-Sheikh understandings were reached, various international actors criticized Israel and claimed that it was not fulfilling its commitments. Such criticism pointed out that Israel was avoiding cooperating with Abu Mazen, that it was not releasing prisoners, and especially, that it was continuing to build in the settlements. Criticism on the latter subject was voiced by the United States President, George W. Bush. This criticism was played down by most of the media outlets and its significance was minimized: Israel and the United States, it was suggested, simply agree to disagree on the matter of construction in the settlements.

### **5. How was intra-Israeli criticism covered?**

Criticisms of government policy by senior politicians and security officials were similarly confined to the margins. During the period examined, 28 items containing such criticisms appeared, 19 of them in *Ha'aretz*. In the items in *Ha'aretz*, as well as the few critical items that appeared in the other media outlets, the critiques were minimized through various editorial techniques.

### **6. How were the Palestinian Authority's actions and failures to act covered?**

#### **A. How were Palestinian violations of the Sharm e-Sheikh understandings covered?**

In most cases where Israeli officials accused the Palestinian Authority of not abiding by its commitments, the media outlets accepted these criticisms without investigating the allegations on their own. In most cases, the media outlets did not enable Palestinian sources to respond to the charges against them. Channel 10 was exceptional in this regard because it regularly aired Palestinian responses. All of the media outlets, including Channel 10, emphasized Palestinian violations in the headlines and confined Palestinian responses to the body of the news items.

#### **B. How were Palestinian actions in keeping with the Sharm e-Sheikh understandings covered?**

During the period examined, there were mentions of measures taken by the Palestinian Authority in the spirit of the understandings: Implementation of administrative and security reforms, unification of the security apparatuses, strengthening of the rule of law, disarming of armed organizations, and renewal of security coordination with Israel. These items were played down in the newspapers and confined to the margins of the television news broadcasts and more than once they appeared under headlines that emphasized Palestinian violations of the understandings. In addition, these reports sometimes appeared alongside analyses by Israeli security officials that consistently diminished the significance of the actions taken by the Palestinians.

## 7. Conclusions

During the period examined, the Israeli media played down Israeli violations of the Sharm e-Sheikh understandings and highlighted Palestinian violations. Criticism of Israel, by Palestinian, Israeli and international actors, appeared infrequently and always on the margins of the news. Criticism of Palestinians, by contrast, was covered profusely. In general, policy questions concerning Israeli violations of the ceasefire received secondary attention, as the media coverage mainly focused on the disengagement plan. These patterns of coverage and editing, which broadly covered each Palestinian attack on Israelis, provided media consumers with a clear and unequivocal situation report: Israel is abiding by its commitments and in the vast majority of cases it is not endangering the ceasefire. The Palestinian Authority, on the other hand, is consistently breaking its commitments and its leader, Abu Mazen, does not want or cannot keep the ceasefire for any length of time. The ceasefire is therefore bound to collapse – and the Palestinians bear exclusive responsibility for this. In this sense, the Israeli media continues to operate according to the prevailing established point of view, according to which the Palestinian Authority is not a “partner for peace”. This perspective also forms the basis for the unilateral disengagement from the Gaza Strip.

## **KESHEV Publications**

- “Quiet, We’re Disengaging! Israeli Media Coverage of the Tense Ceasefire between Israel and the Palestinian Authority following the Sharm e-Sheikh Understandings” (August 2005).
- “Channel Two’s Virtual Reality: Coverage of Events around the Sharbaty Family Home in Hebron” (April 2005).
- “A Dog’s Life: Whose Blood is Worth More – That of Palestinian Civilians or a ‘Jewish’ Dog?” (March 2005).
- “‘Israeli Gestures’: How were Israel’s Steps Covered?” (February 2005).
- “Bush: Territorial Contiguity for the Palestinian State” (February 2005).
- “The Prisoner Release Issue in the Israeli Print Media” (February 2005).
- “When Thy Enemy Falls: Israeli Media Coverage of the Death of Arafat” (January 2005).
- “Behind Defensive Shield: The Israeli Media and the Re-occupation of the West Bank” (May 2003).
- “Incitement is Hazardous to Life: Words Can Kill, Too” – Keshev Memorandum on the Sixth Anniversary of the Assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin (November 2001).
- “State-backed Discrimination: Pirate Radio Broadcasts, 1998-2001” (June 2001).
- “Jewish Media or Israeli Media? An Evaluation of the Coverage of the Violent Clashes between Arab Citizens and the Police in October 2000” (March 2001).
- “Targeting the Temple Mount: A Current Look at Threats to the Temple Mount by Extremist and Messianic Groups” (January 2001).
- “A State Held Hostage by Extremists – Mapping Groups that Endanger Democracy” (October 2000).
- “Shuvu Banim – Portrait of Dangerous Messianism” (November 1999).
- “A Look at the News: News Coverage on Two Television Channels in Israel (January 1999).
- “Pirate Radio in Israel: Alternative Media or a Danger to Democracy?” (April 1998).

**KESHEV** – The Center for Protection of Democracy in Israel was established by a group of jurists, academics and concerned citizens following the assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in order to defend and promote democratic values in Israel.

**KESHEV** researches and methodically collects information on trends that de-legitimize democratic institutions, organizations that maintain anti-democratic ideologies or practices, ideologically based incitement and violence and the conduct of the media in Israel. The material is collected and analyzed for publication in studies, reports and information sheets.

At the beginning of 2005, **KESHEV** launched a long-term project called “Media Monitoring: Words Can Kill, Too”. The goal of this project, which is carried out in partnership between **KESHEV** and the Palestinian organization MIFTAH, is to change patterns of discourse and coverage in the media in Israel and the Palestinian Authority, which express prejudices, incitement and defamation, bias, de-legitimization and de-humanization of the other side. All of **KESHEV**'s reports appear on the organization's website: [www.keshev.org.il](http://www.keshev.org.il).

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