



“The Palestinian National Unity Government and Prospects for Peace”

The First Report

Phase II

Media Monitoring Unit

**March
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In Cooperation with the European Union

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Introduction

Ever since its inception, MIFTAH has sought to contribute to the development of the local media, utilizing several means including conferences, workshops, specialized publications training courses monitoring and analysis. While MIFTAH is fully aware of the difficult conditions under which the media operates, most importantly the Israeli occupation, absence of sovereignty and weak rule of law and institutions, it still seeks advancement with all possible means, through advancing the media discourse and improving the performance of individuals and institutions working in the media.

MIFTAH, through its Media Monitoring Unit, strives to follow up, analyze and examine the content of several major Palestinian media channels. The responsiveness of media persons towards this endeavor, their acceptance of objective criticism and their pursuit for change and improvement please us. This was the case during the implementation of the first phase of the “Monitoring the Media Coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict” project, implemented in cooperation with the Center for the Protection of Democracy in Israel-Keshev, which had monitored the coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in the Israeli media.

The second phase of the project seeks to take new avenues through monitoring, examining and analyzing the media discourse towards specific issues. It also comprises training young journalists, re-editing and layout of samples of newspaper front pages, publishing a journalism manual, conducting a journalist survey on issues related to media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, as well as publishing special reports that focus on specific prominent issues that attracted media coverage.

In this context, MIFTAH issued a special report entitled the “Bloody Sunday that addressed the coverage of the three main Palestinian newspapers-Al-Ayyam, Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah- of the bloody events that took place early October 2006 in the West Bank and Gaza, because of the major rift between “Fateh” and “ Hamas” and the tense and charged atmosphere in the Palestinian arena. The report addressed the role of these three main newspapers during that period.

This report entitled “The Palestinian National Unity Government and Prospects for Peace” addresses the media coverage of two main issues that the Steering Committee of the Media Monitoring Unit had identified: The efforts for the formation of the National Unity Government, and the prospects for peace between Palestinians and Israelis amid changes in the region, in particular following the Israeli war against Lebanon. The report covers the period between 1 September-31 December 2006, during which the Monitoring Unit staff recorded and examined the three newspapers, Al-Ayyam, Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah as well as Palestine Television (PBC) at 6:00-11:00 p.m.

In this report, the monitored topics are divided into:

A. Palestinian National Unity Government

This section comprises an analysis of newspapers and television regarding the attempts to form the Unity Government, and the accompanying internal strife that developed into bloody clashes. Questions addressed in this context include:

1. How did the Palestinian media cover the formation of the National Unity Government in terms of interest and emphasis?
2. Did the media succeed in conveying full facts and information about the issue?
3. How did the media address the issue of the National Unity Government and developments on the ground internally and with the Israeli side?
4. Was the Israeli media biased towards a certain side?
5. Did the media present beneficial reports or features on conflict and agreement over the formation of the Unity Government or did it merely publish different statements and positions?
6. How did writers address the issue of the Unity Government in their articles?
7. Did the media follow up the multitude of issues that accompanied internal clashes or did it fail to disclose information and facts?

B. Prospects for Peace

This section of the report addresses the media coverage of the Palestinian -Israeli conflict, and analyzes all issues pertaining to that in terms of both developments on the ground and diplomatic activity. Questions addressed include:

1. Did the media cover the Israeli positions and initiatives towards the conflict?
2. How did the Palestinian media cover the major diplomatic action, in particular that of the American administration and the statements of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice during her tour in the Middle East or during her meeting with President Mahmoud Abbas in New York on 19 September 2006, and British Prime Minister Tony Blair's visit to Ramallah and Jerusalem?
3. How did the Palestinian media deal with President Mahmoud Abbas' meeting with Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert?
4. Did the Palestinian media handle Israeli attacks professionally and objectively?
5. Was the media inciting?
6. How were the issues of the National Unity Government and the prospects of the revival of the political process linked?
7. How did the media address the issue of missiles launched from the Palestinian Territories in Gaza Strip against Israeli territories?

Necessary Comments

First

The report covers an extremely active period related to the issue of the National Unity Government and prospects for peace; hence it is not possible to address all details of events and their coverage. Specific samples and models were selected, examined and analyzed to serve this report. Such a report cannot cover all events that took place in the region pertaining to the National Unity Government, developments on the ground, diplomacy, and statements and initiatives from the parties of the conflict.

Second

Several samples and models were used in accordance with their connotations, relevance, importance and their logical sequence with the objective comments and criticisms, regardless of their chronological order. For example, there may be a comment on an item published or broadcast on September 5, 2006 together with an item published or broadcast on September 9, 2006 or November 30, 2006 or any other monitored day because they share a similar comment or outcome. It should be noted that there was an overlap in the media coverage of several issues, such as the efforts to form the National Unity Government, the Quartet conditions for recognizing this government, and negotiations in more than one location and through several mediators over the Israeli soldier held by Palestinian factions and the possible exchange for a number of Palestinian prisoners inside Israeli prisons. The correlation and overlap between the formation of the National Unity Government and the bloody clashes in the Palestinian Territories, specifically Gaza was also noted.

Daily Chronicle of the Palestinian-Israeli Conflict

Monitors followed up all what was published about the two main topics for this report, “the National Unity Government and the Prospects for Peace” on the front and inside pages, as well as articles and caricatures. Since articles express the views of their authors, but are subject to the decision of the chief editor, who may publish, block or edit them, they constitute a broad source of material for analysis and examination. This, however, may divert us from the main goal of this report and this project in general. Hence, we focused on news, reports and topics in newspapers, selecting two sample articles for comment and analysis.

The period of study was replete with events, to the extent that newspapers were exhausted in covering them from all angles. As usual, the newspapers were swamped with the daily, new and eminent news, but had fallen short of making their own reports, or raising their own distinctive questions about issues of concern to citizens.

To assert this point, samples of news coverage are presented below:

Al-Ayyam -September 1, 2006-front page

Israeli forces redeploy on the eastern peripheries of Gaza after withdrawing from Shaja'iyyah

The report, four columns by newspaper correspondent Fayez Abu Oun, provides details of the killing and destruction perpetrated by occupation forces.

Nablus: *Al-Aqsa Brigades Leader assassinated and a number of Israeli soldiers wounded*

Report by newspaper correspondent Ghazi Bani Odeh

In a third news item: *Tens of thousands of Israelis march demanding the release of the three soldiers.*

This report came in four columns, source (Reuters, AFP).

A fourth news item: (Karfan) *Occupation court in Ofra extends Dweik's detention along with a group of PLC members and ministers.*

This report came in three columns, by correspondent Husam Izzeddin.

In its inside pages, the newspaper published reports on Israeli assaults against citizens in several areas in the West Bank and Gaza.

Al-Quds newspaper, same date, had similar reports on the front page, but the news item on the Israeli demonstration news was absent.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, on its front page, published similar headlines as those of Al-Ayyam and Al-Quds, adding one headline: *The Churches of the Holy Land attack the Christian-Zionist Movement.*

In another event,

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah on November 9, 2006 front page

A Massacre swamps Beit Hanoun in blood

18 martyrs and tens wounded mostly women and children belonging to one family

Some may consider publishing the photos of the bodies of a mother and two of her children, victims of the Israeli aggression, acceptable, especially with the atrocious scale of crime committed by the occupation. The photos are painful, sad and definitely moving. Publishing such photos, however, may be considered indirect incitement and possibly harmful to the families of victims and their children who may see them.

Amid the concern about the aggravating internal conflict between Fateh and Hamas, the news items and reports on the Palestinian-Israel conflict receded sometimes, occupying less space on front pages.

An example is Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah on December 22, 2006, front page:
Occupation intends to construct a large settlement over Walaja land.

The main news item came in 5 columns entitled:
Calm in Gaza.. Fateh and Hamas assert dialogue for resolving problem.

It is noted that the three newspapers addressed the immediate daily issues of concern to the citizens' daily lives and unveiled aspects of occupation practices. The objective conclusion about this coverage is that it is mostly direct, objective, and is neither biased nor inciting. In fact, the coverage may be criticized for the inadequacy of details about all crimes perpetrated by the occupation troops in Gaza or Nablus. The newspapers did not present distinctive stories that cover, follow up and inquire about tens or even hundreds of human stories that touch, in varying degrees, on the lives of citizens in the areas subject to Israeli aggression.

Naturally, the news items and reports on the National Unity Government, and on diplomacy and initiatives to revive the so-called Peace Process receded to give priority to news on Israeli aggression.

It should be noted that these reports cover news items only, and the three newspapers present similar reports, with no clear distinction observed among them.

The newspapers were interested in publishing special reports on launching missiles from Gaza against Israel, news of which was published on the front pages of the three newspapers, with varying sizes depending on the resulting damages and the nature of Israeli response or comment,

Al-Ayyam on December 27, 2006
Olmert discusses response today (sub heading)

Underneath:
A strategic establishment is hit and two Israelis wounded as a result of missiles on Ashkelon Port and Sderot.

The news item occupied 4 columns, in red font and in the upper half of the front page. It was fully taken from news agencies that took their information from Israeli sources. Towards the end of the news report, the newspaper added a statement made by Al-Quds Brigades, the military arm of Islamic Jihad, in which it declares responsibility for the missiles.

This is mostly the pattern adopted in reports on Palestinian missiles against Israeli territories.

The newspaper had published a similar report the day before about similar shelling with a sub-heading: *One fell near a strategic establishment.*

Missiles launched on Sederot and Ashkelon and no casualties

Coverage of the National Unity Government

The newspapers covered the National Unity Government extensively, including the positions of Palestinian, Israeli and international parties. Newspapers might have given this issue even more than they should.

Headlines came as follows:

Al-Ayyam -September 2, 2006-front page:

Europe welcomes a Palestinian Unity Government that includes Hamas, provided it accept conditions of the international community

Also:

Haniyyeh: Formation of a National Unity Government is still at the beginning

On page 7:

Jabalya: Politicians assert the importance of forming a national unity government to confront current crisis

Al-Ayyam-October 11-2006

On its front page, the newspaper had a main headline of an 8-column news item, starting with the following subheading: *Failure of the Qatari mediation attempt dealt a fatal blow to the unity government project but did not bury it*

Three options: Dissolve the government, technocrat (merit-based) Government, or Early Presidential and Legislative Elections

In another headline:

Al-Shaer supports the formation of a professional government

This item covered three columns and was written by newspaper correspondent Ghazi Bani Odeh.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah-October 11, 2006
A front page headline over 4 columns:

Amr: The Qatari initiative failed and all options are open for the President

With the following subtitle: *Requested Hamas leadership to end its threats of civil war*

On the same page the following comments of the Government spokesman appeared:

Subheading: *We are not willing to give Israel legitimacy for free*

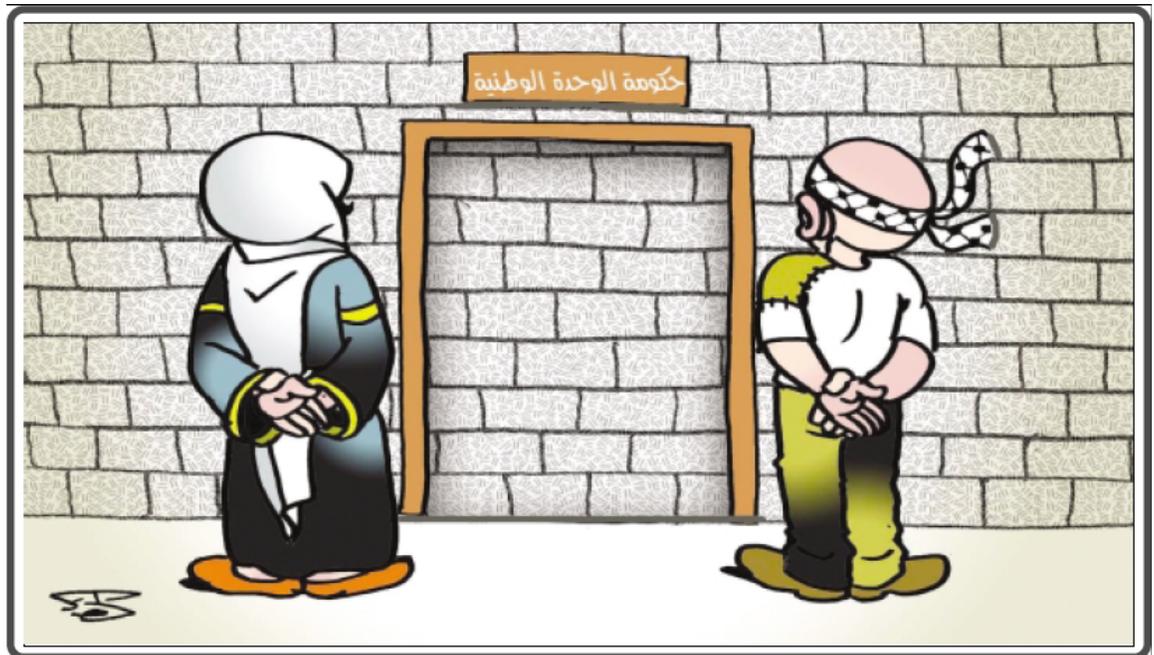
Hamad: *Qatari mediation has not ended and we have not reached a deadlock regarding the unity government.*

The three newspapers published on their front pages statement of the Egyptian Foreign Minister Ahmad Abu Al-Ghayt as such:

Abu Al-Ghayt: If Haniyyeh rejects the Arab Peace Initiative he must look for a solution by himself.

In details, there was an indication of Egyptian dissatisfaction with Hamas and its call upon Hamas to shoulder its responsibilities.

It is noted that the three newspapers on that day dealt with similar topics and wording.



Caricature "Al-Ayyam " 2-12-2006

Hafez Barghouti, Editor in Chief of Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah held Hamas responsible for the failure of the Qatari mediation, concluding in his article on the back page on October 11, 2006, that the National Unity Government is no longer on the agenda of the brothers in Hamas.

The writer of this article, who is also the Editor in Chief of the newspaper, considered himself one party in the difference between Hamas and Fateh regarding the Unity Government, and jumped into conclusions that may not be true, especially that Qatar did not announce the reason for the failure of its mediation and did not hold a specific party responsible. Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah published on the front page of the same day the following statement of the Minister of Information:

Rizqa: Qatari Minister accused certain parties of not desiring success for his mission in the Palestinian Territories,
Hence Hamas Minister was insinuating the responsibility of a party other than Hamas for the failure of the Qatari mediation.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah October 30, 2006 front page
Solana expects a Palestinian agreement over a new government within two days.



Caricature “[Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah](#)” 30-9-2006

Al-Quds-December 6, 2006-front page

Haniyyeh met faction representatives in Damascus.

Hamas awaits Israeli response on Mash'al's ideas on imprisoned soldier.

In the details, Hamas asserts that it is waiting for a response from the Israeli Government on proposals conveyed by Omar Suleiman, Head of Egyptian Intelligence, to Tel-Aviv on the soldier Gilad Shalit.

Tension, Clashes and Shooting at Haniyyeh's Convoy

In its special report published last October, MIFTAH presented samples of the media coverage of differences between Fateh and Hamas, and between the Government and the Presidency, and which developed in many cases to armed clashes, reciprocal abduction and assassination of leaders and cadres from both sides. It is possible to refer to that report, rather than repeat its content, despite its importance in terms of the negative role of the media. We shall present samples, rather than all what was published or broadcast, noting that the tense and charged atmosphere and the clashes had started before the period the report covers, and continued all through.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah-December 16, 2006-had the following headline in red covering 8 columns in its front page:

Horrific escalation that warns of a fierce civil war

The following subheadings came beneath it:

Hamas accuses President, Dahlan and the Presidential Security of attempt against Haniyyeh's life.

Fateh: Accusations against Dahlan are an explicit call for shedding Palestinian blood.

Erekat: What happened in Rafah and Ramallah is a destructive introduction and President gives his speech today.

Haniyyeh describes what happened at Rafah Border Crossing as the “*Dignity and Sovereignty revolution.*”

Zahhar: Those who shot at the Prime Minister's convoy shall be punished and will not sleep at their homes any more.

Tens of demonstrators and security men injured in Ramallah clashes... Forces demand a cease to all forms of accusations and incitement.

In the same issue, a 3-column item on the front page had the following heading:

Hamas will neither agree on referendum nor on early elections

Beneath it:

Al-Hayyeh: What war are you, Abbas, declaring against God and then against Hamas!

Another 2-column item on the same page:

Al-Shaer meets with the President and calls on Fateh and Hamas to stay away from incitement.

Al-Quds-December 16, 2006-front page:

Regretful events cause 38 wounded in Ramallah and Al-Bireh (8 columns)

A subheading on the top reads:

Appeal to President Abbas and Haniyyeh to stop bloodshed and resume dialogue.

These events took place when the Security Staff confronted a Hamas demonstration on the occasion of its anniversary that started from Al-Bireh Mosque.

المساعدة المالية القطرية
للجامعة الدول العربية

القدس
AL-Quds

القدس السبت 16 كانون ايار 2006 - الموافق 23 من ذي القعدة 1427 - العدد 13409

جريدة يومية يومية تأسست سنة 1951

مناشدة الرئيس عباس وهنية حقن الدماء، والعودة لطاولة الحوار

احداث مؤسفة تسفر عن 38 جريحا في رام الله والبيرة

البيرة-رام الله - نائل نخله- البلدة للصحافة-وكالات - شهدت شوارع مدينتي البيرة ورام الله بعد صلاة "الجمعة" امس احداثا مؤسفة اصبحت فيها 38 مواطنا يجرح مختلفه بينهم 6 حالات خطيرة، استدعت اجراء عمليات جراحية عاجلة.

وقال د. سمور صديقا مدير قسم الطوارئ في مستشفى الشجاع زويد ان 26 جريحا وصلوا الى مستشفى رام الله الحكومي في حين وصلت 11 جريحا الى مستشفى الشجاع زويد ومن بينها 6 اصابات خطيرة وجرحوا مائة اصابة اخرى.

ويمنع الاصابات وصلت 6 اشخاص زيدا بعد اعلان جنود 22 غدا بأنها مؤسفة جدا بعد تعرضه لاصطدام بالرصاص في رام الله حيث

تمتلك في دماغه، ووجدت اصابة خطيرة على جرحى، بالتوسمة، وترواح بين الرضوخ نتيجة العصب والتهرب والتهرب والتهرب، التي شنت الاطراف وبعثت العنق والتهرب، وذلك الاحداث في اماكن التجمع والاصطدام معطال عند اندلاع وسط القلعة، واستمعتا لقتل من اصاب حركة حماس لشهيرة جافورية في كبرى اطلاقها للقذفة الصخرة.

أخر ساعة

مهاجم مصرقة حميدة لتطويق الاحداث المؤسفة ورأب الصدع

شرا - علا الشهباني - رام الله - أكد رئيس الوزراء إسماعيل هنية، أمس، أن القوات مستعدة ولا تتراجع وتأتي في سبيل تهدئة الأوضاع على الساحة الفلسطينية، جات تصريحات هنية خلال مقابلة مع قناة الجزيرة الفضائية معيد صباح وزير الخارجية محمود الإبراهيم.

أبو ردينة: الاحداث المؤسفة في هبر راجع وتحمل مسؤوليةها من حرق القنصلت

«حماس» تنصح وحلان بمحاولة ائصال هيب... وصرام وبنجاب عباس بدفع تصديق

كروقات: تحصيل المسؤولية لاحتلال لخرابي على القتل... والتهرب لاحتفة

احتلال: «حماس» احتفل من الفجوة لخرابي وهي اصغر من ان تقرر هيب

رام الله - رام الله - ان بياناً صحفياً نقله عن مصادر حماس في رام الله

د. أبو عيشة لـ «القدس» توقيع اتفاق
بين الحكومة والموظفين المبررين فربما جدا

المستحصل لوقف كل
من يدفع باتجاه التصعيد

د. جفارة في رسالة
الى عباس وهنية

د. سمور صديقا مدير قسم الطوارئ في مستشفى الشجاع زويد ومن بينها 6 اصابات خطيرة وجرحوا مائة اصابة اخرى.

ويمنع الاصابات وصلت 6 اشخاص زيدا بعد اعلان جنود 22 غدا بأنها مؤسفة جدا بعد تعرضه لاصطدام بالرصاص في رام الله حيث

تمتلك في دماغه، ووجدت اصابة خطيرة على جرحى، بالتوسمة، وترواح بين الرضوخ نتيجة العصب والتهرب والتهرب والتهرب، التي شنت الاطراف وبعثت العنق والتهرب، وذلك الاحداث في اماكن التجمع والاصطدام معطال عند اندلاع وسط القلعة، واستمعتا لقتل من اصاب حركة حماس لشهيرة جافورية في كبرى اطلاقها للقذفة الصخرة.

أخر ساعة

مهاجم مصرقة حميدة لتطويق الاحداث المؤسفة ورأب الصدع

شرا - علا الشهباني - رام الله - أكد رئيس الوزراء إسماعيل هنية، أمس، أن القوات مستعدة ولا تتراجع وتأتي في سبيل تهدئة الأوضاع على الساحة الفلسطينية، جات تصريحات هنية خلال مقابلة مع قناة الجزيرة الفضائية معيد صباح وزير الخارجية محمود الإبراهيم.

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«حماس» تنصح وحلان بمحاولة ائصال هيب... وصرام وبنجاب عباس بدفع تصديق

كروقات: تحصيل المسؤولية لاحتلال لخرابي على القتل... والتهرب لاحتفة

احتلال: «حماس» احتفل من الفجوة لخرابي وهي اصغر من ان تقرر هيب

Al-Quds 16-12-2006

The newspaper published the following in 4 columns on its front page under the title "Akher Sa'a" (The last hour):

Egyptian efforts to curb the unfortunate events and bridge the gap

Beneath it the following subheading:
Abu Rudeina: Unfortunate events in Rafah Border-crossing are the responsibility of those who violated the law.

Hamas accuses Dahlan of an attempted assassination against Haniyyeh...And Siyam demands that Abbas starts an investigation.

Erekat: Holding Dahlan responsible is instigation for murder, and civil war.

Dahlan: Hamas moves from one scandal to another and is smaller than deciding my fate.

It is observed that the media tools have conveyed conflicting detailed statements and positions, and contributed to charging the atmosphere through concentrating on differences and giving attention to exchanged statements and accusations. Fiery exchange of accusations and statements found space on front pages, PBC bulletins as well as in talk shows and live commentaries.

Despite the negative role of the media that contributed to tension and was carried away by the statements of Hamas and Fateh, it succeeded, however, in many cases to follow up and interact with major events, including the murder of the three children Osama, Ahmad and Salam Baha Ba'lousha in Gaza.

Al-Ayyam-December 12, 2006-front page

Subheading: *In addition to killing a citizen and wounding others in an attempt to assassinate their father the Intelligence officer:*

This is how the three children brothers were killed on their way to school.

In the details, *anonymous armed persons shot yesterday at 6:45 with their automatic guns the car of Intelligence officer Baha Ba'lousha, in which his three children, Osama, Ahmad and Salam (9, 6 and 4 years old) were. This led to their immediate death, in addition to the death of Ba'lousha escort, Mahmoud Al-Habil (25 years old).*

The newspaper also published the photos of the bodies of the three children wrapped with the Palestinian "kafiyya" and Fateh banners. Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah published detailed reports about the topic and gave it great attention.

Al-Ayyam -December 15, 2006

The main news item on the front page came with the following subheading:

Egyptian mediation enabled Haniyyeh's return following a surprise Israeli decision to close the border-crossing.

One killed and 20 wounded due to chaos and armed clashes in Rafah border-crossing.

In a red heading covering 4 columns:

Ahmad Yousef and Haniyyeh's son were wounded in shooting at Prime Minister's convoy.

The newspaper also published an item covering 2 columns with the following heading:

Hamas accuses the Presidential Guard of attempting to assassinate Haniyyeh

It is worth mentioning that PBC broadcast a live transmission of the state of chaos and clashes at Rafah Border-crossing upon the return of Prime Minister Ismail

Haniyyeh to Gaza from his first tour, but it ignored in its news bulletin the following day the declaration made by Hamas and statements of its officials about Haniyyeh's "attempted assassination" and the shooting at his convoy after crossing Rafah border on his way back. The item focused on statements of Fateh and the Presidency officials responding to Hamas accusations of Mohammad Dahlan and the Presidency Guard of attempted assassination. PBC also broadcast a talk show about the Rafah events and the circumstances that accompanied Haniyyeh's return, in which its anchor hosted Rabah Mhanna, PFLP Political Bureau member and Maher Miqdad, Fateh spokesman, but no representative of Hamas, not even through incoming telephone calls.

It is worth noting that although the newspapers published what had been announced regarding the attempted assassination, they addressed the issue simplistically and with lack of interest, sufficing with publishing relevant declarations and statements. Although Al-Ayyam published in its internal pages relevant correspondents' reports, these, however, were not investigative reports such an event deserved, regardless of whether the charges of attempted assassination were proven or not.

Do newspapers exaggerate?

The newspapers gave a lot of attention and space during the monitored period to the issues of the National Unity Government and the diplomacy aiming –as announced- at reviving the peace process. We hereby present samples of the coverage of the newspapers of issues related to the Palestinian internal crisis.

Al-Ayyam-December 17, 2006-front page

President decides to call for early Presidential and Legislative Elections

The headline came on 8 columns preceded by the following subheading:

President: Our first option will remain a technocrat government that breaks the siege.

It is noted that the subject of the President's speech, his decision and reactions have taken up the entire front page, including the following headings on the same page:

Hamas rejects early elections: a constitutional violation and a coup against the will of the people.

Rajoub: The President's priority is forming the National Unity Government.

Dahlan: The President clarified in his speech that he does not fear elections and rejects the policy of charges of treachery.

Al-Quds did the same on that day

The main headline on the front page came over 6 columns:
Abu Mazen: Either a National Unity Government or early elections.

On the same page:

Abdul Rahim: Our people are increasingly convinced that the President is the Fiduciary on the national project, 2 columns.

Dahlan: Abu Mazen does not fear elections, 2 columns.

Rajoub: President did not close all doors, 2 columns.

Abu Rudeina: Farouq Qaddoumi does not represent the position of Fateh at Damascus meeting, 2 columns.

The Government and the PLC reject the call of the President for early elections, 2 columns.

Al-Aqsa Brigades threaten to target Haniyyeh, Zahhar, and Siyam in case Dahlan is targeted, 2 columns.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah had similar headlines.

It added on its front page the following headings:

Blair calls the international community to support President Abbas, 2 columns.

European Union supports President Abbas' efforts to achieve unity of the Palestinian people, 2 columns.

The interpretation of the three newspapers may be correct, and the subject matter of the speech, its content and the subsequent comments may be important, but delving into this topic and focusing solely on it reflects a kind of professional bankruptcy. The subject of the “Presidential call for early Elections” and each source of reactions and comments may be formulated within one item that contains all the major elements of the speech and the most important repercussions. Objective balance must also be maintained, through reporting and highlighting reactions and comments. The three newspapers gave more attention to statements and comments of Fateh and the Presidency than to those of Hamas and the Prime Minister.

The front and internal pages of the three newspapers were void of any political analysis or news analysis of their own about this subject, which they could have addressed deeply. It was necessary to raise several questions about the call, its constitutionalism, potential for success and its possible repercussions on the ground. Moreover, the newspapers should have presented the possible internal scenarios in particular, in addition to the Israeli and international levels.

Diplomacy and “Yousef’s Document”

The Palestinian media covered important diplomatic action and initiatives of different parties towards the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, and covered President Abbas' tour to several countries, as well as visits of several leaders to the Palestinian territories, including the visit of U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice on October 30, 2006 and that of British Prime Minister Tony Blair to Ramallah and Jerusalem on January 19. It is noted that topics of the National Unity Government, the imprisoned Israeli soldier, the prisoner exchange, the calm between occupation and most Palestinian factions in Gaza Strip, the Israeli and international siege against the Palestinian people and issues related to the Palestinian-Israeli conflict echoed throughout all initiatives and moves. Several officials indicated that resolving all these topics was somehow interrelated.

This was noted in Rice's tour in the region and her statements at the joint press conference with President Mahmoud Abbas in Jericho, as she said that she wished that the calm would spread to all Palestinian territories, reiterating Washington's position towards settlements and its refusal to deal with the Palestinian Hamas government. She said that she sought to move the Peace Process forward towards the implementation of the Road Map, adding that she "seeks to take the opportunity to expedite and intensify our efforts to reach a solution on a two-state basis."

The Rice-Abbas meeting attracted the major attention of the media, as PBC broadcast the press conference live, while newspapers allocated large spaces to the visit and the joint press conference. The newspapers, however, did not publish political or news analyses that may shed the light on the real goals of Rice's visit, its relation to regional developments, U.S. policies in the region or to Israeli political considerations.

The media did not present much useful material that unveiled the dimensions and results of the British Prime Minister Tony Blair's visit to the region. It only covered official meetings and the press conference with President Mahmoud Abbas.

Al-Quds- December 19, 2006-front page

Following his meeting with Abbas, Blair promises of an initiative in support of the Palestinians soon.

This headline headed an 8-column article and was preceded by the following subheading:

Abu Mazen: A government that seeks to break the siege and fulfils Palestinian, Arab and International legitimacies.

On December 24, 2006, newspapers published the document of Dr. Ahmad Yousef, the political adviser to Palestinian Prime Minister Ismail Haniyyeh,

indicating that this document was prepared by Yousef and some scholars and study centers in Norway, Switzerland and Britain, about the formulation of a solution with Israel. It includes an Israeli withdrawal from the West Bank to an agreed provisional line in return for a 5-year truce during which no Palestinian attacks will be launched inside Israel, or against Israelis wherever they are; similarly, no Israeli attacks will be launched against Palestinians or against Palestinians wherever they are.

Hamas spokesperson Ismail Radwan denied their knowledge of the document, saying that Hamas' initiative which Sheikh Ahmad Yassin-assassinated by Israel-had proposed consists of a full withdrawal of the Zionist enemy from 1967 land, including Jerusalem, the return of refugees, the release of all prisoners inside Israeli prisons and the establishment of the Palestinian State with Jerusalem as its capital.

Newspapers published statements of President Mahmoud Abbas rejecting the truce and a state with provisional borders, which Abbas considered a "trick to fool our people."

On December 25, 2006, Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah reported on its front page a statement by Nabil Amr, the Media Adviser to the President, saying: *The President is not informed of Yousef's document and no one is entitled to grant positions that involve concessions.*

This item covered 3 columns, with another statement occupying 3 columns by Ahmad Yousef saying, *"The truce document consists of European ideas presented to Hamas."*

In the details, Yousef denied presenting any document that the media considered the Hamas vision of an interim solution, adding that the ideas the media circulated are a mere European formulation that had not been circulated until that moment within Hamas institutions. He added that ever since Hamas came to government, it has been willing to conduct dialogue with the Europeans. Several meetings were held with Europeans at different levels to propose the truce and the political vision. The interest of the media in the Yousef Document and in the subsequent reactions is evidence of the importance of the topic and its political dimension.

The Document was published on December 23, 2006, the same day on which the Summit between President Mahmoud Abbas and Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert was held.

PBC and the three newspapers were highly interested in this meeting, the latter publishing major reports with photos and occupying 8 columns. They included several subheadings on the positive aspects of the meeting as well as the understandings and agreements reached. The reader of the headings would get optimistic and positive impressions that would soon vanish; Olmert disclaimed his

promises, delayed the lifting of a number of military checkpoints in the West Bank, retracted from releasing a number of prisoners away from the proposed prisoner exchange with the Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and postponed the release of US\$100 million of the Palestinian tax money Israel had seized.

لقاء ايجابي بين عباس واولمرت



أولمرت يلتقي عباس

■ اتفاق الجانبين على لجنة مشتركة لمناقشة قضايا الأسرى والمعتقلين والمطاردين
 ■ تحويل احوال للمسلحة ■ امتداد التهدئة للضفة وإعادة السيادة للمناطق (أ و ب) ■

رام الله - خاص بي بي سي - اتفق الرئيس محمود عباس ورئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي إيهود أولمرت مساء امس على تشكيل لجنة مشتركة للبحث في الافراج عن الاسرى كما ناقشة ضرورة توسيع التهدئة بين الجانبين لتشمل الضفة الغربية. في حين وافق رئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي على الافراج عن مبالغ مالية من المستحقات الفلسطينية للمستطاع.

جاء ذلك في تصريح لـ "البيان" اذ في المناطق الرسمية باسم الرئاسة تبيل ابو ردينة في اعقاب الاجتماع، ووصف ابو ردينة اللقاء بين الرئيس عباس واولمرت بأنه كان مفيداً، وأشار الى أنه مستتبعه اجتماعات اخرى عميقة.

وقال في سياق ذلك ان الجانبين اتفقا على تشكيل لجنة مشتركة لمناقشة قضايا الاسرى والمعتقلين والمطاردين، كما اتفقا على تشكيل لجنة مشتركة للبحث في الافراج عن الاسرى، كما ناقشة ضرورة توسيع التهدئة لتشمل الضفة الغربية. في حين وافق رئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي على الافراج عن مبالغ مالية من المستحقات الفلسطينية للمستطاع.

وقال في سياق ذلك ان الجانبين اتفقا على تشكيل لجنة مشتركة لمناقشة قضايا الاسرى والمعتقلين والمطاردين، كما اتفقا على تشكيل لجنة مشتركة للبحث في الافراج عن الاسرى، كما ناقشة ضرورة توسيع التهدئة لتشمل الضفة الغربية. في حين وافق رئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي على الافراج عن مبالغ مالية من المستحقات الفلسطينية للمستطاع.

Al-Quds 24-12-2006

الرئيس ركّز على قضايا القدس والاستيطان والأسرى والجدار العازل

قمة عباس - أولمرت : تفاهات على عدد من القضايا



(أ. ف. ب.)

● الإفراج عن 100 مليون دولار و ٢٥٥ مليون شيكل ● توسيع التهدئة لتشمل الضفة ● لجنة للإفراج عن أسرى
 ● ترتيبات خاصة بالمطاردين ● لجنة خاصة بعودة مبعدي كنيسة المهد ● إزالة حواجز في الضفة ● تفعيل حركة المرور على المعابر ● إعادة المكانة القانونية والأمنية للمناطق (أ و ب) ● تفعيل اللجنة الاقتصادية المشتركة

كتب حسام عز الدين، وعبد الرؤوف ارناؤوط :
 اتفق الجانبان الفلسطيني والإسرائيلي، مساء امس على تشكيل عدد لجان لتطبيق قضايا تم الاتفاق عليها خلال الاجتماع الذي عقد مساء امس بين الرئيس محمود عباس ورئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي إيهود أولمرت، في القدس الغربية.

ووصف رئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي في تعليقه الخبر الفلسطيني، مساء امس، اللقاء الذي جرى بين الرئيس عباس ورئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي أولمرت، بأنه "مفيد"، إلا أنه قال إنه لا يريد رفع سقف التوقعات. وفي رده على سؤال إن كانت هناك زمة لتطبيق ما تم الاتفاق عليه قريباً، قال عرفات لصحفيين إنه اتفق على وضع الفلسطيني يريد أن يرى بموجبه التفاوض، هناك جدول زمنية محددة وتامل بأن يتم تنفيذ كل ما تم الاتفاق عليه.

وأعلن، صباح عرفات أنه سيتم اختتاماً من اليوم تسليم قائمة بإسماء رؤساء اللجان والمفاتيح من الجانب الفلسطيني، الى الجانب الإسرائيلي.

حساس : لاتعلق إلا ما لا يؤدي تغييراً في الموقف الإسرائيلي
 عزّز ما قبله، قالت حركة حماس مساء امس إنها لا تعلق إلا ما لا يؤدي تغييراً في الموقف الإسرائيلي من الرئيس محمود عباس ورئيس الوزراء الإسرائيلي إيهود أولمرت، الذي عقد مساء امس في القدس، والذي تعهد في وقت الحكومة الإسرائيلية. وقال الناطق باسم الحكومة الفلسطينية هادي حمد: "لا أرى أن هناك تغييراً في موقف الحكومة الإسرائيلية".

وأضاف ما عقب أنها تحاول أن تعطي الوضع الفلسطيني الحالي تحت

Al-Ayyam 24-12-2006

عباس وأولمرت يتفقان على لجان للإفراج عن الأسرى وحماية المطاردين وإزالة حواجز

إعادة ١٠٠ مليون دولار و ٣٥ مليون شيقل من مستحقات السلطة قريباً وإحياء عملية سلام ذات مغزى



رام الله - أحياء أجنبية - مناصر حمدان - وكالات
 اتفق الرئيس محمود عباس ورئيس الوزراء
 الإسرائيلي أيهود أولمرت على تشكيل لجنة للبحث
 في الإفراج عن الأسرى ومبعوثي كتيبة المهدي،
 وسفارة المطاردين، ويبحث في توسيع التهمة
 لتشمل الضفة إضافة إلى الإفراج عن ١٠٠
 مليون دولار من الأموال الفلسطينية
 المحتجزة لدى إسرائيل، وفق ما أعلن رئيس دائرة
 العلاقات في منظمة التحرير مسائب عريقات
 أمس في رام الله.
 وقال عريقات في مؤتمر صحفي إثر لقاء عباس
 وأولمرت مساء أمس في القدس أنه «تم الاتفاق على
 تشكيل لجنة مشتركة للاتفاق بطلب مشترك على
 لتحرير الوجود المتبقي للإفراج عن المعتقلين» في
 السجنين الإسرائيلي، وأشار عريقات إلى أن
 الجانب الفلسطيني سيقيم اليوم أسماء بأعضاء
 اللجنة المشتركة التي ستبحث في أسماء المعتقلين
 المسبيين.
 وأوضح عريقات أن الرئيس عباس والوفد الذي
 قادهم نحو رام الله برئاسة وزير الخارجية
 أبو مازن أسمر على أن يكون هناك
 بحث جدي في ملف الأسرى لأنه هو الخلل في
 القضية، مشيراً إلى «الدور العكسي الذي يلعبه
 المعتقلون في هذا الملف»
 وأشار عريقات إلى أنه «تم التوافق أيضاً على
 (تسمية) الأخوة الثوب والوزراء المعتقلين» في
 إسرائيل، وأضاف من ناحية ثانية أنه «تم الحديث
 (خلال اللقاء) عن التهمة في قطاع غزة (...) وعن
 توسيع هذه التهمة لتشمل الضفة الغربية».
 من ناحية أخرى، بحث عباس وأولمرت في

الرئيس عباس وأولمرت يتساقطان لدى القلعة في القدس مساء أمس. تصوير عمر الرشيدي

[Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah 24-12-2006](#)

Articles

It may be said that the victory of Hamas in the Legislative Elections has largely contributed to activating article writing on internal affairs, as many different opinions have emerged. However, since September 2006, as MIFTAH started monitoring Palestinian media, many writers aligned behind one point of view or another: either holding Hamas responsible for the deterioration of Palestinian conditions at the internal and international levels, or holding the occupation, the U.S. and the West responsible.

We hereby present samples of these articles:

In an article published on September 10, 2006, entitled: *Unity Government Postponement or Procrastination* in *Al-Ayyam*, Dr. Abdul Majid Sweilem criticized the declaration of Dr. Saeb Erekat, Head of Negotiations Department at the PLO, that the issue of the National Unity Government would be postponed until after President Mahmoud Abbas' visit to the U.S. The author particularly criticizes Erekat's statement that the issue of the unity government was premature by saying: *“Why must the media understand from Dr. Saeb Erekat's statement that postponing the decision on the issue of the government is linked to the President's visit and dependent on the outcome of that visit.”*

He adds: *“Are we facing an option that may be postponed or altered in light of the expected outcome? Would it not have been better, stronger and more feasible to go to the U.S. after completing the Government's program and its preliminary structure? Is the postponement and considering the issue premature strength for, or pressure against us?”*

The author concludes by saying, *“We need to listen carefully to what the Americans and Europeans are saying, more now than ever, to their vision, concepts and strategies; we need to beware of their targets and tactics more than*

before, and to realize how to distinguish between their positions and margins of differences among them and the limits and ceilings of such differences. We must do all that while being ready, with our own vision, positions and cards, most importantly our agreement, unity and willingness to address everything with flexibility, so long as this does not threaten such unity or our joint agreement.”
End of quote.

While the author is free to express his opinion, conclusions and appeals, it should be noted that he ignores the fact that the internal conditions at the time were not appropriate. The author does not indicate the responsibility of Hamas at this level. Moreover, the title and the context of this article may be understood as holding one side responsible for postponement and procrastination, although reality and subsequent developments also indicated the responsibility of Hamas in procrastinating, postponing and retracting from agreements.

Another sample: In an article published on November 22, 2006 in Al-Ayyam, entitled “*The National Unity Government: Stalling!!*” Samih Shbeib concludes that “*Hamas is embarking on negotiations to form the National Unity Government in order to buy time and count on what will happen in Lebanon, and hence count on international changes, most importantly the deterioration of Republicans in the U.S. .*”

Towards the end of the article, the author wonders whether “*Fateh and the Presidency will be able to endure the period of marking time?!1 and how long will stalling last?!1*”

It should be noted that the author holds Hamas responsible for prolonging negotiations, and even accuses it of seeking to buy time. While his conclusions may be correct, he has not clarified how future developments in Lebanon or international changes may have an impact on the outcome Hamas desires by prolonging negotiations. He also did not mention the role and responsibility of Fateh and the Presidency in prolonging negotiations, while Fateh was leading the general strike of public employees and which contributed to weakening Hamas position especially as it lasted for a long time and coincided with the unity government negotiations.

Sources of news and reports

Palestinian newspapers heavily rely on reports and news from news agencies, particularly on foreign or non-local news. For example, we find on the front page of Al-Quds on September 5, 2006:

Saudi Foreign Minister: Security Council discusses Arab-Israeli peace on the 23rd of the month [Reuters].

On another topic, taken from Agence France Presse (AFP): *During a meeting with Abu Ala'a:*

Chirac asserts the need for re-launching dialogue on the Palestinian Question
From Associated Press (AP), the newspaper published a 7-column report entitled:
Olmert retracts from unilateral withdrawal from the West Bank and supports resuming talks with Palestinians

Al-Ayyam September 30, 2006, front page

Abbas: No progress in government talks

Hamas adheres to its reservations towards the Arab Initiative

The item occupied 4 columns (AFP).

Another heading:

Rice meets eight Arab Foreign Ministers on Tuesday in Cairo to discuss the peace process (AFP)

Al-Quds September 30, 2006

Page 2:

Rice will propose a peace initiative that incurs a heavy military and political cost on Israel without prior consultation with it. No source was identified for this report.

موقع الكتروني اسرائيلي :

رايس ستطرح مبادرة سلام تكلف اسرائيل ثمانيا عسكريا وسياسيا باهظا ودون التشاور معها

وشهدت المصادر الامريكية والاسرائيلية المتحاوية بحسب الموقع الاسرائيلي، على ان اسرائيل ستدفع ثمنا عسكريا وسياسيا باهظا في مبادرة السلام الامريكية الجديدة وذلك علفيا لها على اخذها في حرب لبنان الثانية.

ورد الموقع الاسرائيلي ان رئيس الوزراء الاسرائيلي ايهود اولمرت ووزير امته عمير بيرتس ورئيس هيئة الركان العامة في جيش الاحتلال الاسرائيلي يواصلون التمسك بخطة تهم القتل لمان دولتهم انتصرت في الحرب الثانية على لبنان، دون ان يأخذوا بعين الاعتبار بلرة التراجع الكبير في التعاون الاستراتيجي بين اسرائيل وامريكا.

واوضح الموقع الاسرائيلي ايضا ان الجلسة التي عقدت في الثالث عشر من شهر ايلول الجاري بين وزيرة الخارجية الاسرائيلية تسيبي ليفني والرئيس بوش كانت فاشلة، وان الرئيس بوش توصل الي نتيجة مفادها ان القيادة الاسرائيلية الحالية تتمتع بقصر نظر كبير وليس باستماعها قيادة الدولة العبرية لتحديد في وقت الحرب.

بناء على ماتقدم، اضافت المصادر الاسرائيلية والامريكية، بان الحكومة الاسرائيلية بقيادة رئيس الوزراء اولمرت ستدفع ثمنا انقصاعها في حال الترقب للسياسات الامريكية الجديدة في الشرق الاوسط، وان الاتفاق بين واشنطن وتل ابيب قبل الاعلان عن مبادرة لحل النزاع الاسرائيلي الفلسطيني بات في خير كان بسبب القرار الامريكي الاستراتيجي بان القيادة الاسرائيلية غير مؤهلة لقيادة الدولة ولقيادة مشاريع سلام مع الفلسطينيين تطرح من قبل واشنطن.

وكتيجة حتمية لفقدان الادارة الامريكية ثقها بالقيادة الاسرائيلية، فقد امر الرئيس بوش وزيرة خارجيته رايس بالبدء في طرح المبادرة الامريكية الجديدة للسلام في الشرق الاوسط، دون ابلاغ تل ابيب بها مسبقا.

وخلصت المصادر الامريكية والاسرائيلية الى القول ان التراجع في العلاقات الاستراتيجية بين واشنطن وتل ابيب بعد خسارة حرب لبنان ستلحق بظلالها على العلاقات الثنائية بينهما، مشددة على ان الادارة الامريكية مطعنة جدا على نتائج استطلاعات الراي العام في اسرائيل والتي نشرت في الاسبوع الماضي والتي اكدت ان فقط سبعة بالمئة من الاسرائيلية يريدون ان يواصل اولمرت مهامه كرئيس للوزراء في الدولة العبرية.

• قالت مصادر سياسية وامنية وصفت بانها رهيبة لمستوي في واشنطن وتل ابيب، ان العلاقات الاستراتيجية بين الولايات المتحدة الامريكية والدولة العبرية، تشهد في الونة الاخيرة منعطفنا خفيرا للغاية، وذلك بعد ان بدأت الادارة الامريكية بوضع مدى جدوى هذه العلاقات.

وقالت المصادر ذاتها لوقع الانترنت الاسرائيلي ديكا التخصص بالشؤون العسكرية والاستراتيجية ان الرئيس الامريكي جورج بوش، هو اول رئيس امريكي منذ اقامة الدولة العبرية في العام 1948 يطلب من المؤسسات الامنية في البلاد فحص قوة اسرائيل العسكرية وهل باستطاعتها الصمود امام هجوم عربي.

واضافت ان بوش اتخذ هذا القرار في وج العدوان الذي شنته اسرائيل على لبنان، وفي ظل الاخفاقات التي كانت من نصيب جيش الاحتلال الاسرائيلي في مواجهته مع مقاتلي حزب الله، الذين ثبتوا انهم يتمتعون بقدرة فئانية عالية للغاية مقابل الجندي الاسرائيلي.

ولقدت المصادر ذاتها الى ان مجلس الامن الدولي عقد في 21 من الشهر الجاري جلسة خاصة ليبحث الملف الاسرائيلي الفلسطيني، وان وزيرة الخارجية الاسرائيلية التي تواجدت في نيويورك، قررت مقاطعة الجلسة احتجاجا على انعقادها، وفي نهاية الجلسة التي شارك فيها جميع وزراء الخارجية من الدول الدائمة العضوية في مجلس الامن، لم يتخذ أي قرار، ولكن المصدر اكدت ان الاجتماع عقد بمباركة وتشجيع من الادارة الامريكية ومشاركة وزيرة الخارجية كوندوليزا رايس، ومع ان الدولة العبرية رفضت عقد الجلسة الا ان الولايات المتحدة قررت عقدها، في اشارة واضحة الى ان العلاقات بين البلدين لم تعد كما كانت عليه من ذي قبل، على حد تعبير المصادر التي تحدثت الى الموقع الاسرائيلي.

واوضحت المصادر نفسها ان الرئيس الامريكي جورج بوش، اصدر اوامره الى وزيرة خارجيته رايس، في العشرين من الشهر الجاري بان توظف على قرار الرابعية الدولية القاضي بدعم حكومة وحدة وطنية فلسطينية تشارك فيها حركة حماس هي توملئة لمبادرة امريكية جديدة لحل المشاكل العالقة بين الطرفين الاسرائيلي والفلسطيني.

وكذت المصادر ان الادارة الامريكية تضع في هذه الايام اللمسات الاخيرة على مبادرة السلام الجديدة، التي من المحتمل جدا ان تبدأ بعرضها وزيرة الخارجية الامريكية خلال زيارتها القادمة الى منطقة الشرق الاوسط.

Al-Quds 30-9-2006

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah September 30, 2006

Page 14:

Otte: *European Union (EU) will deal with the Palestinian Unity Government based on its program not its composition* [source is the Kuwaiti News Agency KUNA]

These samples have been mentioned in order to give an idea of the degree of reliance on foreign news agencies, in issues the newspaper and its correspondents should play a larger role, provide accurate information and raise the suitable questions that make their coverage distinctive and highly professional. It seems that often the three newspapers, and even the television, copy from each other or from one main source even in terms of style, headlines or reports.

Monitoring Television **Incitement through Pictures, Words and Songs**

The message of the media wins respect and succeeds in achieving its short and long-term objectives when its discourse is sound, simple, objective, humane and direct, and free from exaggeration or intimidation, provocation and direct or indirect incitement. A television report which focuses on human dimensions in covering the results of Israeli aggression may succeed in conveying the reality accurately and smoothly more than a report that focuses on ugly pictures and words of hostility, incitement or continuous complaint. This also applies to the language and the specific words selected to express a specific situation or position. For example, the Palestinian media uses the word “massacre” extensively in describing the event of killing of a number (three or more) of Palestinian victims by Israeli fire. This frequent use of the word “massacre” that is not based on a logical approach, undermines the value of the word and weakens the media’s credibility.

Despite the comments made in previous reports about the use of bloody and ugly pictures and photos, such as torn and burnt human bodies and other pictures that harm children and adults, PBC continued to show such pictures. So did Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah and to a lesser extent Al-Ayyam. Such photos did not appear in Al-Quds, either due to its own decision or possibly because of Israeli military censorship, since it is published in occupied Jerusalem, while Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah are published in Ramallah which is under the PA “control.” Such photos do not serve the purpose of conveying the victim’s message, but hurt human feeling, reflect disrespect to the rights of victims and their families, and contribute to spreading a culture of violence and reprisal.

The following sample is one of many others that indicate the recurrence of the same mistakes in the Palestinian media.

PBC broadcast on November 8, 2006 a report about the killing of 18 Palestinians in Beit Hanoun by Israeli shelling, describing the event as a massacre. The report included an eye witness speaking about the “massacre” with his clothes covered with blood.

Back to the studio, the newscaster broadcast the following phrase:

A “massacre” in Jenin this morning results in 5 martyrs, and a new massacre in Beit Hanoun results in 18 martyrs and 35 wounded.

Live coverage continued for events, comments and reactions, including:

A phone call with a person named Yousef Al-Farra, whom the newscaster described as “analyst,” and who described the Israeli operation in Beit Hanoun that day as “violent,” adding “Jews are known for being blood thirsty” and we are in need of unity in order to unite and confront the fierce enemy.

Dialogue continues inside the studio: *Israel does not want peace and kills any Israeli who wants it, such as Rabin.*

The show is replete with violent and ugly pictures, as well as emotional and inciting comments, run through the comments of anchors, guests or eye witnesses,. We definitely are not trying to underestimate the ugliness and gravity of the crimes committed by the Israeli occupation forces, but seek to have a comprehensive, human and objective coverage so that that it achieves its desired role of conveying information and reality to Palestinian, Israeli and foreign audience, who may be neutral or biased in favor of one party or another.

PBC broadcasts long, patriotic and instigating songs upon Israeli attacks in between programs and news bulletins, including a song named: *Al-Ard Bitkalem Arabi* (The land speaks Arabic).

Examples of songs broadcast on November 19, 2006 between programs and segments or during live coverage include *Akhi* (My brother) by the late Mohammad Abdul Wahhab, with clips of assault victims, and which urges on “holding swords.” These lyrics and the accompanying shots instigate emotions and nurture hostility against the other side.

Dialogue and the National Unity Government

On September 20, 2006, 7:40 p.m., PBC broadcast a talk show for anchor Hasan Al-Kashef entitled: Red Line, which hosted Nabil Amr, Media Adviser to the President of the PNA and member of Fateh Revolutionary Council. The topic was the internal and political conditions and President Mahmoud Abbas’ visit to New York and efforts for forming the National Unity Government.

The dialogue was unilateral with respect to orientation and discussion. It was obvious that Fateh’s point of view was highlighted, marketed and given the

chance. The least to say is that it was one-sided and biased because it did not present the other opinion. The program should have given the chance to a participant from Hamas to respond and present the other point of view. Even if Hamas refuses to participate in PBC programs because it accuses it of bias against Hamas, the anchor should have sought to host a political analyst or a media person if he failed to host a prominent Hamas member, in order to counterbalance the position of Nabil Amr, who benefited from the opportunity to attack Hamas and its positions and present his charges.

On the issue of the National Unity Government, Nabil Amr said that efforts were still stalling without getting into details. The anchor did not argue the points of difference or agreement and did not present new information to the public.

At the 9:00 news bulletin of the same day, the news came in the following sequence:

First item: *The martyrdom of a citizen in north Gaza and a female killed in Beit Hanoun.*

Second item: *Abbas conducts talks with President George Bush about Israeli aggression and prospects of peace.*

After the news, the television broadcast an interview with Nabil Abu Rudeina, Spokesperson for the Presidency from New York who was accompanying the President, in which he said that there is international consensus over the Unity Government that is based on International legitimacy. He clarified that President Bush was committed to his vision of two states and that the International position is as such: If the Palestinian Government does not meet the Quartet conditions, funds will not be disbursed nor will PLC members be released.

The third news item was on the Quartet meeting in New York about the National Unity Government, the continued assistance to the Palestinian people and the condition that the Government recognizes Israel, after which financial support would be provided.

This was followed by news reports on sit-ins and demonstration in Ramallah and Gaza.

The first news item in the 9:00 news bulletin on September 24, 2006 was: *The Executive Committee of the PLO asserted that the retraction of Hamas from the National Unity Government agreement led Arab and international parties to refrain from providing assistance to the Palestinian people.*

The second item was: *President Abbas meets Ismail Haniyyeh this week to agree on the basis of forming the National Unity Government.*

The third item: *Judge at Ofra Israeli Court approves claim of Israeli Military Prosecutor to extend the detention of 21 PLC members in addition to the ministers of Finance and Jerusalem Affairs.*

Fourth item: *The Liberated Prisoners Society started distributing food packages among prisoners' families upon a request of President Abu Mazen.*

Arab and international news followed.

It is possible to note the following:

The chief editor highlighted the news on holding Hamas responsible for stopping aid to the Palestinian people. This deliberate move could not have possibly been done professionally, since this was not the most important news item in the bulletin, nor was it fresh news in the first place. It was a repeated position stated many times in the Executive Committee statements as well as others. The editor or the person responsible for the news bulletin did not bother mention the position or a comment of Hamas while he/she should have, since this is the Palestine Television and is supposedly for the Palestinian people and does not express the views of one faction or stream. This news item could not have been selected for national considerations either, while the second item-the Abbas-Haniyyeh meeting-deserved being broadcast first and the news about extending the detention of PLC members and ministers deserved priority over the Executive Committee news item.

The significance of the fourth news item about distribution of food packages among families of prisoners may be questioned; the phrase *upon the request of President Abu Mazen* was not necessary at all. If not hypocrisy, the least it may be described as is a form of propaganda for the President, taking into consideration the negative atmosphere that prevailed during that period and the competition between the Presidency of Fateh and the Government of Hamas over everything, including simple and ordinary matters, such as distribution of aid, which comes neither from the Presidency nor from the Government. Claiming credit in this manner can neither be justified professionally nor ethically.

The sequence of news in the 7:00 p.m. news bulletin on October 20, 2006 came as follows:

1. A statement by Nabil Abu Rudeina, Spokesperson for the Presidency, about a last minute failure of the efforts to form the Unity Government but adding that the President was keen on continuing dialogue until an agreement is reached.
2. A statement by Nabil Amr denying the collapse of the negotiations over the Unity Government but talking about a critical situation.
3. A statement by Khalil Al-Hayyeh, Head of Hamas Bloc in the Parliament speaking about "serious continuation of dialogue."

4. A report on the participation of thousands of citizens in the funeral of the elderly “Rabah Hejji,” 57 years. The editor or correspondent added “the farewell bidders demanded the intervention of the International Community to stop the Israeli massacres against our people” and to provide International protection.

The observer is certain that this expression was not uttered by any of the farewell bidders, and it is not possible for them to put forward such a demand during the funeral of a martyr, but that it was a projection of a political position on an incident in which the human aspects of the martyr should have been highlighted, in addition to the gravity of the crime of the occupation in killing this old man. This would have been a good report had the correspondent or the TV crew exerted an effort in this direction, and would have made a much more significant service than the political message that it sought to convey. It seems, however, that the media has acquired the easier habit of political jargon that prevails in the Palestinian political discourse which allows the correspondent or the editor in the newsroom add whatever he/she pleases of generic concepts or expressions the accuracy or the truth of which he/she would not be held accountable for, as these terms are within the “national consensus” and would harm no one directly.

The truth is, however, that these additions and this projection of political positions weaken the media message, divert it from its track and lead to its dispersion. Instead of providing the public with rich and informative material on the real dimension of the Israeli crime, attention is diverted towards politics, which repels the audience and makes the report mundane, even boring.

Moreover, the word “thousands” may not be realistic. It means an unknown number which the correspondent estimates at thousands; were they three or four or... nine thousand? We do not aim in this case to know the real or the approximate figure of farewell bidders, as it is not significant in this context. What really matters is to uncover the details of the crime and the details of the life of this elderly with its humane dimensions. The report could have highlighted some aspects of his life, which would have established the real image of the repressed and displaced Palestinian who carries none of the attributes of terrorism as identified by the other side, or even by some Western media upon talking about victims on the Palestinian side. Had this topic been treated with the attention it deserved, it might have taken the lead in the bulletin.

5. A report on crowds of citizens gathering in Beit Lahiya in front of the house of citizen Wa’el Rajab following an Israeli threat to shell it.

The report said “the citizens asserted that the policies of assassination and house demolitions will prove futile with our people,” adding that “the citizens stressed their unity in defense of their just cause and in confronting Israeli policies; they appealed to President Mahmoud Abbas and Prime Minister Ismail Haniyyeh to move forward with forming the National Unity Government.”

This report is very important and should have taken the lead and received extensive coverage that highlights the great peaceful and humane form of resisting occupation and its aggression. Although it is not the first of its kind, it is a phenomenon worthy of the attention of the media.

A variety of other reports appeared in the bulletin about Israeli aggression in the West Bank. Some of them deserved taking the lead in the bulletin, while the first three reports could have been merged into one simple item. Moreover, the local bulletin would have been better without these items at all since they do not provide anything new or useful and do not exceed rhetoric used by politicians or public figures, or even by low-ranking speakers of the fifth or sixth level.

Live Coverage and Breaking News

The major improvement in the coverage of PBC of hot topics, especially those related to Israeli attacks against Gaza Strip, including the crimes committed in Beit Hanoun, Beit Lahiya and the north Gaza beaches, should be noted. TV cameras were following up the events in some cases, which should be the case always. PBC often substituted telephone calls with its correspondents, an official or ordinary citizen either at the location of the event or close to it. The news text on the screen seemed to present breaking news as they came in.

The visual coverage of the Israeli aggression in the West Bank, including occupied Jerusalem, remained almost non-existent. Despite our knowledge of the limited resources of PBC, particularly during the period covered by this report because of the siege and stopping many aid programs, the enormous gap in the visual coverage of events, however, between the West bank and Gaza must be noted for purposes of objective comparison and scientific research.

Outcome

First: Newspapers were largely concerned with the issue of the formation of the National Unity Government in terms of form, the surrounding statements, as well as the details of points of difference and agreement. However, they were “swamped” with minute news details and a huge number of articles addressing the issue until it became boring, even ridiculous to readers, especially after a lot of optimistic statements that almost determined the specific time or date on which the Government would be formed. This included the announcement of PLC member Mustafa Barghouti, following his mediation attempt between Fateh and Hamas, that the Head of EU Foreign Policy Javier Solana was caught up in the “untruthful” Palestinian atmosphere, when he towards the end of October predicted the birth of the National Unity Government in a matter of hours or days. Newspapers and PBC are criticized for giving attention to any statement given by any official at any rank, if it mentioned the buzz words “national unity government.” They should have paid more attention to real

progress in this context, if any, and ignore the multitude of statements that are neither useful nor harmful to the issue. These were possibly published merely to cover space, or simply because they were uttered by one or another of the many spokespersons from Fateh or Hamas, although they may include nothing new or useful to this issue.

Second: The Palestinian media -newspapers and PBC- failed to improve their professional performance in reports and news on the hot issues of Israeli occupation practices in the West Bank and Gaza. They repeated the same old coverage methods and styles, and sometimes fell into the trap of incitement; they broadcast or published images and words that are not helpful in supporting the Palestinian story and its acceptance by others.

Third: The newspapers' follow up of the statements and special reports on the peace process, including those issued by the American Administration and the visits of Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice to the region, as well as other U.S. and European officials, in addition to statements of Israeli Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, Israeli Minister of Foreign Affairs Tsibi Levni and Palestinian statements, was good. These reports, however, were mostly taken from foreign sources and were devoid of the necessary analysis that would examine their seriousness and their impact on the internal Palestinian conditions. Moreover, the newspapers did not sufficiently receive the messages Hamas had sent regarding its willingness to reach a peaceful settlement, and did not follow them up properly, either by posing the appropriate questions to Hamas' officials, or through surveys and investigations that would shed light on the real positions of Hamas towards a long-term truce or the recognition of 4th June 1967 borders.

Fourth: The media, regretfully, contributed to aggravating the conflict between Fateh and Hamas, increasing the internal tension and charges, through reporting and highlighting multitudes of exchanged statements and accusations between Fateh and Hamas, or between the Presidency and the Prime Minister's Office, which reached the level of reporting the swearwords used. Some acquit the media of the responsibility for positions and statements, but in fact the attention they received in front pages or in the leads of news bulletins and talk shows contributed to the tension and differences and heightened the probability of aggravated reactions in the media, hence a cycle of suspicion and charges that paved the road for the acceptance of the idea of violence. This was mostly manifested during the clashes that took place between Hamas and Fateh particularly in Gaza. This report does not address the coverage of the satellite channels of the two main topics addressed in this report; it is worth noting, however, that the permissibility with which some satellite channels tackle the Palestinian issues contributed to the aggravation of the tension. These channels granted the opportunity for any fame seeking person to score positions and launch threats and accusations, hence leading to further internal tension.

- Fifth:** The PBC has witnessed large improvement in following up breaking news and in providing a variety of talk shows. Live coverage, however, was sometimes restricted to telephone calls with correspondents; there was a bias in selecting guests in talk shows, despite the fact that it sometimes hosted political figures that neither belonged to Fateh nor Hamas, such as Bassam Salhi, Qays Abu Layla and Dr. Hanan Ashrawi. Moreover, the outdated official patterns in sequencing news items, as well as a lack of sufficient attention to human aspects in the coverage of Israeli attacks or infighting and a weakness in the PBC coverage of the West Bank continued to prevail in news bulletins,
- Sixth:** The newspapers and PBC continued to heavily rely on foreign and local news agencies' reports on local news. The degree of reliance on foreign news and reports has largely increased. Moreover, specific sources of some reports were not mentioned, hence undermining its credibility.
- Seventh:** The media coverage of local issues and hot issues was quite similar in the three newspapers, as none of them was distinctive, but all followed and covered the same topics and issues taken almost from similar sources and followed the same style of presentation. It should be noted that it is not possible to rely totally on these reports in terms of accuracy and scientific objectivity.
- Eighth:** The media did not stop using general and ambiguous words in corroborating statements and declarations of groups or parties. It also continued attempts to project political positions on specific events, such as involving the political conflict between Hamas and Fateh in the strike of the public employees.
- Ninth:** The newspapers were void of any investigations or reports on social issues. There were not sufficient investigative reports or comprehensive reports on economic and social deterioration, the increase in the rate of immigration or the potential for immigration. They strictly focused on political and event-oriented news. The conflict between Fateh and Hamas received exaggerated attention.
- Tenth:** The coverage of the newspapers and PBC of the violations against media workers and institutions, such as abduction, shooting, beating and burning offices and cars and threats to life, was good. It, however, did not play a role in unveiling the relevant facts. Nevertheless, it is understood that refraining from publishing all facts and names of the responsible persons and parties is attributed to their concern with the security disorder and chaos that prevail in the Palestinian Territories, and which may threaten the lives of the workers in the media, and the existence and property of their institutions.

Recommendations

In light of the above, and the detailed monitoring of the three major Palestinian newspapers: Al-Quds, Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, and Palestine Television (PBC), MIFTAH recommends the following:

- First:** MIFTAH believes that its previous and often reiterated recommendation regarding the establishment of a higher media council has acquired even more importance under the current circumstances. This council, which is professional and independent from the executive power, and which consists of prominent professional, intellectual, media and civil society leaders, is extremely important. It will contribute to providing support, care and protection to the Palestinian media and develop its aptitude and its tools.
- Second:** MIFTAH calls upon media institutions, particularly PBC, to refrain from the use of bloody and ugly pictures of victims, and to refrain from incitement, instigation and dissemination of expressions of hostility and hatred.
- Third:** MIFTAH calls upon Palestinian journalists and workers in the media to bolster solidarity among them and revive the Union of Journalists and its presumed role in providing an enabling environment for the practice of the profession, or set up the adequate bodies that would enhance social and financial solidarity among them.
- Fourth:** MIFTAH invites journalists and media channels to adhere to sound professional principles in their coverage of events and issues, including accuracy, objectivity, integrity, neutrality, lack of exaggeration, use of appropriate speech and concern with the level of writing and styles in published material. MIFTAH, hence, calls upon media institutions to seek to improve the conditions of journalists and workers in the media through providing financial incentives and appropriate training and development programs.
- Fifth:** MIFTAH calls upon media institutions to improve their sources of private information, news and reports, and not restrict themselves to news agencies. It is worthy to note the need to advance to the level of inquiring journalism and investigative reporting, rather than filling pages with repetitive news that is consumed by “fast media channels,” such as the Satellite television channels or the Internet. It is worth noting also that Ramattan news agency and the Palestinian Media Network (Pal-Media) have exerted remarkable effort in conveying and covering the different news conferences broadcast by PBC.
- Sixth:** MIFTAH calls upon the Executive Power to grant the National television station, PBC, the care and support it deserves, through providing the necessary funding for recruiting qualified staff and purchasing modern equipment that would advance its performance.
- Seventh:** MIFTAH asserts the need for the PA institutions and the civil society organizations to play an effective role in protecting and supporting journalists and in following up and holding the parties that target them or their institutions accountable.