

Palestinian Media Discourse: Diagnosis and Evaluation

The Unilateral Disengagement Plan

Media Monitoring Unit

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Media Coverage of the Unilateral Disengagement Process

This is the third report issued by the Palestinian Initiative for the Promotion of Global Dialogue and Democracy – MIFTAH, on the media coverage of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict in coordination with Keshev-Center for the Protection of Democracy in Israel. MIFTAH announced its initiative to monitor the Palestinian media in June 2004 and hence formed its own media unit in cooperation with a steering committee comprised of Palestinian media experts. The unit's goal is to develop the Palestinian media discourse to better serve Palestinian goals and rights by pointing out and changing the weak points in the Palestinian media through media reports, press releases, workshops and meetings with journalists and political and media decision makers. It also sought to achieve a higher level of professionalism in the Palestinian media because this is the only means of reaching an understandable, credible and truthful media discourse. Here, MIFTAH would like to stress that its positive and open relationship with the Palestinian media will inevitably help in reaching this goal, strengthened by a true desire for change by the Palestinian media.

In this report, MIFTAH addresses the Palestinian media discourse through the unilateral disengagement process. Although this process officially began on August 15, 2005, MIFTAH began its monitoring for the purpose of preparing the report at the beginning of August and carried through until the end of the month. Hence, it covers the voluntary evacuation of settlers as well as the compulsory evacuation, the start of the demolition of settlements, and coordination between the Palestinian and Israeli sides. Throughout the monitoring period, the Media Monitoring Unit recorded 120 hours of broadcasts from Palestine TV on a daily basis from 7:00 in the evening until 11:00 at night in addition to other time slots in the morning and evening hours that were not recorded but were monitored to corroborate the nature of the overall television coverage. In addition, three Palestinian newspapers were monitored on a daily basis.

To better explain the method of the media coverage of the disengagement and the overall framework in which it was carried out in order to understand the content of the Palestinian media discourse and the messages being sent by the media to the public, the Media Monitoring Unit divided the monitoring subjects into the following categories:

Information presented to the public on the disengagement, the settlements and crossings and the future of lands evacuated by Israel: The Unit's objective was to understand the nature and context of the press reports and television programs that provided information to the Palestinian public on the disengagement plan including the reasons for the plan, information on the settlements and the evacuation process. The monitoring also included the negotiations with Israel on the Rafah and Mintar crossings and the airport and seaport, in addition to the safe passage between the West Bank and Gaza via the Beit Hanoun crossing, the negotiations over the Salah Eddin axis and the deployment of Egyptian troops. The Unit also aimed at understanding the nature of information presented to the people about the future of lands to be evacuated by Israel, the greenhouses and the industrial zone.

The terminology used by the media for the disengagement process: Was this process a “withdrawal,” “liberation,” “disengagement,” “evacuation,” “departure” or “expulsion?” Also, was the Palestinian media influenced by the statements and language used by Palestinian officials in news bulletins, television programs and in newspapers?

Palestinian celebrations: How were Palestinian celebrations conveyed? Was the focus on official celebrations or were celebrations by the factions also shown? Hence, was the Palestinian media biased towards the reality of what was happening on the ground in Gaza or was it biased towards its desire for unified media coverage of celebrations? What was the nature of these celebrations, and what was the message that was being relayed to the Palestinian public? What about the songs that were played on Palestine TV during the disengagement, the background against which they were played and the slogans and messages the channel ran as newsflashes; were these slogans in the newspapers? The goal of this aspect of our monitoring was to understand the nature of the political mobilization and expressive language and therefore the content of the message the media sought to convey to the public.

Portrayal of the departure of settlers: What kind of pictures were shown and was there a focus on one aspect of the evacuation, i.e. showing the voluntary evacuation of settlers or forced evacuations of the settlers carried out by the Israeli army? Was there a presentation of the other’s viewpoint in the disengagement or were there direct interviews with Israeli government officials and decision makers in Israel? In general, how was the departure of the settlers, and therefore the conflict, portrayed?

Palestinian media sources: What were the sources used by the media to obtain information? Did they depend on their correspondents or on international press agencies? Thus, were they certain of the information disseminated to the public?

The confrontations: How were the confrontations during the disengagement process portrayed? Was the public provided with sufficient information about them? How was this information conveyed? Were the reasons behind these confrontations clear? Were there pictures from the scene of the confrontations?

The West Bank and Jerusalem: Was there coverage of what was going on in the West Bank? Were there programs or stories on the four settlements that were evacuated in Jenin? Was there focus on the wall? Were there programs on the settlements in Jerusalem and the West Bank? Hence, was the Palestinian media carried away in its coverage of the events in the Gaza Strip at the expense of events in the West Bank?

Here, MIFTAH would like to reaffirm that its use of the term “unilateral disengagement” is concomitant with the Arabic translation of the term used by Israel in describing its plan. MIFTAH is using this term because it is the closest description of what took place in the Gaza Strip. Israel, in taking this step, did not end its occupation of the Strip. Neither would it be accurate to say that what took place in Gaza was “liberation”.

The following is a presentation of our monitoring:

Information presented to the public:

In general, the Palestinian media offered a sufficient amount of information to the Palestinian public on all issues involving the settlements in the Gaza Strip in terms of the history of their construction, under which Israeli government they were built, the area of land they were established on and their population. Also, general information was given on the actions of the settlers towards nearby Palestinian quarters and the settlers' control over a large portion of Gaza's seashore, in addition to the large quantities of water used by the settlers in comparison to what is used by the Palestinian residents of the Gaza Strip. The Palestinian media also provided information on the greenhouses and the industrial zone in special newspaper reports or on the program "Open Day" on Palestine TV, which addressed these issues.

As for the crossings, the media conveyed the declared position of the Palestinian Authority (PA), which opposed any Israeli control over these crossings, showing that the PA does not want the Gaza Strip to be transformed into a large prison. Statements from Palestinian officials were published on the front pages of the three major dailies and on television, both on talk shows with exclusive interviews or in shorter interviews during the news bulletins.

The media highlighted the desire of the Palestinian side to coordinate the pullout from Gaza through presenting the statements of the Palestinian President, who confirmed that the Palestinians hoped the withdrawal would be quiet and organized. They also presented his attempts at coordinating the withdrawal, whether directly or through Quartet Committee envoy James Wolfehnsen. However, the message conveyed at the end of any news item or television report was that the party that decides on the outcome, level and nature of the coordination is Israel, which was the reality on the ground. Discussions over the crossing started long before the date for the withdrawal but have not been completed at the time of this report.

Thus, the Palestinian media was honest in disseminating the information to the public in that it did not portray an image that did not exist. However, the Palestinian media also did not try to raise the issue of the PA's acceptance in principle of a third party at the crossings where, assumingly, there would be no Israeli presence.

Since the issue of operating the airport or the seaport is not on the negotiations agenda of both sides at the time being, the nature of the agreements that will be reached on the Rafah Crossing will determine the nature of future agreements on the airport and seaport. In this regard, the media seemed to accept the fact that the PA had agreed to the presence of a third party at the Rafah Crossing, which would assume the role of monitoring instead of Israel or who would unofficially coordinate this monitoring with Israel. The media did not focus on this issue and did not ask the crucial questions in this regard, specifically, what would be the role of this third party at the crossing, what would be the limitations on its authorities and with whom would coordination be carried out? Would the

authorities of this third party include consent over the entrance of individuals into the Gaza Strip or the prevention of its residents from leaving?

One of the most prominent television programs that shed light on the coordination with the Israeli side and on the PA's preparations for taking over the evacuated Palestinian lands was the program "The Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip" which was hosted by Ahmad Zaki. During the program, Zaki interviewed Dr. Mohammed Shteyeh, Minister of Housing and Public Works. The program was aired on Friday August 18, 2005 at 18:15 pm. Another important program was "Face to Face" (Wajhan Li Wajh) with Hasan Al Kashef, who hosted an episode called "Settlement lands after the withdrawal," which aired on Saturday August 27, 2005 at 19:30. His guest was Mr. Freih Abu Midein, Head of the Land Authority.

Palestine Television also broadcast a number of talk shows that addressed several issues related to the disengagement, including the program "The File" (Al-Malaff) on Thursdays at 19:30. The program topic was the legal status of the withdrawal and the Palestinian lands. The show's guests were Dr. Walid Hamami, professor of international law and Dr. Abdel Karim Jaradeh, a judge in the regular Palestinian courts. Dr. Hamami explained the legal dimensions of the withdrawal at the international level and Israel's motives, saying, "Israel wants to internationally declare that it no longer occupies Gaza. However, this position is in contravention with international law as long as Israel remains in control of Gaza's land, sea and air crossings." Dr. Jaradeh clarified the need for a legislation of laws allowing the PA to manage the evacuated land." There was also another program called "Life" (Al-Hayaa) hosted by Umaymeh Abul Khayr on Friday August 26, 2005 at 18:30. She hosted an episode called "The ramifications of the Israeli withdrawal in the international arena." Dr. Atef Abu Seif, a political analyst and writer and Mr. Mamoun Sudan, a political researcher, discussed Israel's aspired goals in carrying out the disengagement plan in the international arena. The program "Special Encounter" (Liqaa' Khaas) on Sunday August 28, 2005 at 19:30 aired an episode entitled "The natural resources in settlement lands and the future of electricity after the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza" which hosted Mr. Yehya Shamiyyeh, Deputy Assistant to the Minister of Energy.

Palestine TV also broadcast shows that presented the expectations of the Palestinian public after the withdrawal such as the program "The Bottom Line" (Akher Al-Kalaam) which aired on Monday, August 15, 2005 at 19:30. The program ran a live discussion with Palestinian laborers and presented their views and expectations of what they thought the PA should do to jumpstart the Palestinian economic situation. Some suggestions were the expedition of establishing short-term economic projects such as re-operating the industrial zone and greenhouses after their handover or long-term projects aimed at building the seaport and airport. Infrastructure projects were also mentioned. On August 22, 2005, the same program presented the viewpoints of dozens of Palestinian youths on the disengagement plan. Furthermore, there were a number of programs that aired live, which aimed at presenting people's opinions on the current events.

Coverage of the other: Palestinian journalists were denied coverage of the evacuation of settlers and the Israeli army from posts inside and around the settlements. They were

prohibited from entering the settlements at a time when hundreds of Arab and foreign journalists were allowed access. Palestine TV set its cameras up in positions outside the settlements at a distance of hundreds of meters and monitored Israeli movements inside the settlements. Its anchorman would then give a commentary from his position. At times, it was not clear what was taking place but the anchorman continued to give his own views. For example, the correspondent, Ra'fat Al Qadra, saw trucks in the Moraj settlement and reported that they were moving settlers' belongings. Because journalists were not allowed into the settlements, this could not be completely verified and was rather his own conclusion.

In an interview conducted by Palestine TV during its main news bulletin at 21:00 on Monday, August 15, 2005 Israeli army spokesperson Eitan Arousi was asked why Palestinian journalists were denied this right while other journalists from around the world were allowed. Arousi's response was that foreign journalists had applied for an Israeli press card that allowed them entry while the Palestinians did not submit this application. When the newscaster reminded him that the Ministry of Information actually had submitted requests for these cards, Arousi responded that the Ministry had done so too late, and their request could not have been processed on such short notice, adding that the request should have been put in long before.

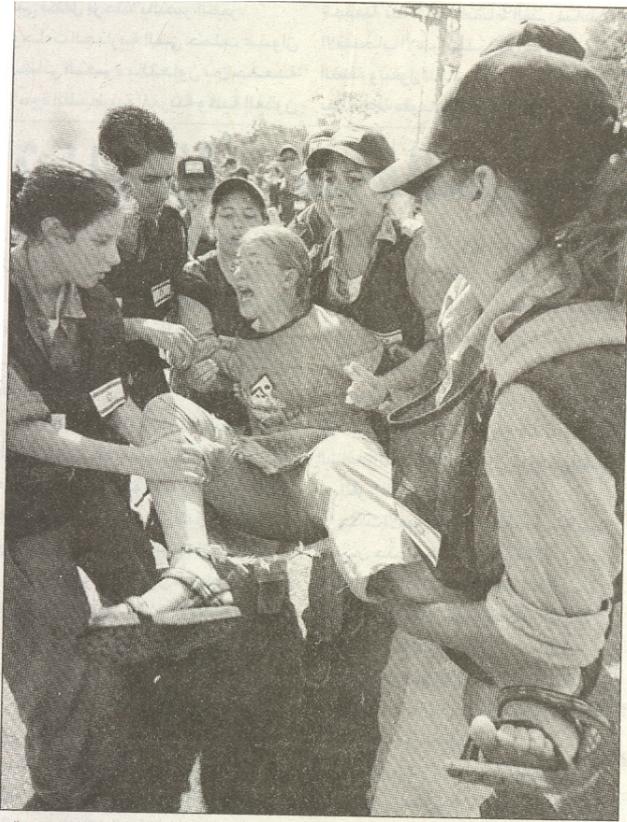
In any case, the Palestinian media was and continues to be denied this right despite that a month and a half have gone by since the date of this interview when the army spokesperson claimed "your ministry" had been too late. Because of this, the Palestinian written, audio and visual press was unable to offer coverage of the evacuation of settlers as a first-hand source. They had to suffice with broadcasting what Arab and international news agencies were transmitting without being able to confirm any of this information. For example, newspapers and television stations reported that some settlers were vandalizing and burning anything they could not take with them so their belongings would not fall into Palestinian hands. This news item was taken from Al Jazeera Satellite Channel. The Monitoring Unit was able to confirm this information because we saw an interview with one of the settlers who declared that he had done exactly this. However, when Palestine TV asked an official Israeli army spokesperson about settler vandalism in the industrial zone under the eye of the Israel army, he said this was a completely fabricated and baseless conspiracy. There was no way to confirm this claim given that Palestinian journalists were barred entry into this area. Furthermore, pictures of what was happening inside the settlements were taken by non-Palestinian media and television stations.

The Palestinian media distinguished very clearly between the Israeli settlers who occupy the Palestinian land and between ordinary Israelis in general. It regularly translated and published opinion polls conducted by the Israeli media, which showed overwhelming public support for the disengagement plan from Gaza. The Palestinian daily newspapers also carried articles from across the spectrum of the Israeli press, which illustrated the Israeli internal debate on the issue.

In general, the coverage of the other was one of neutrality. Pictures, illustrated as below, were broadcast as they were received from foreign news agencies:

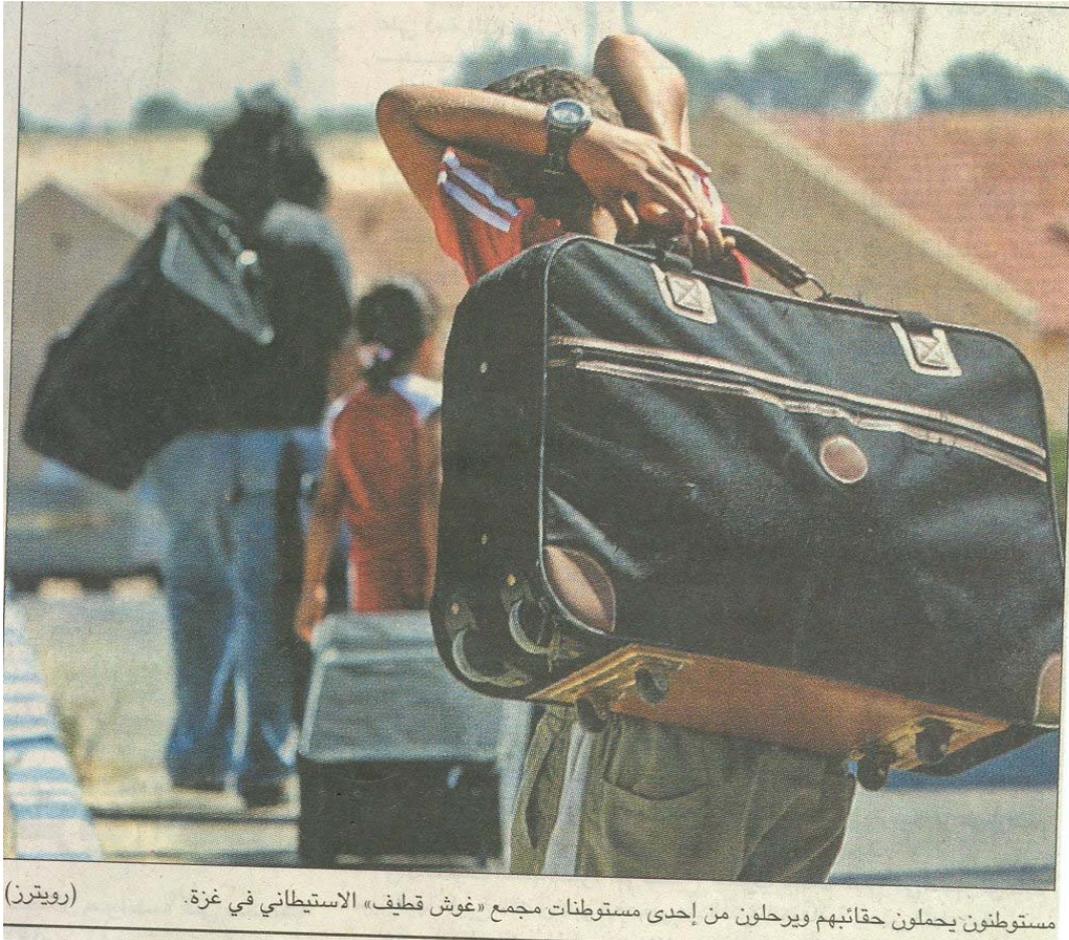


Caption 1: settler bidding farewell to her neighbors before leaving the Nissanit settlement in the northern Gaza Strip. In the frame: a settler showing the keys to his new apartment. (AFP)



شرطيات يحملن مستوطنة خلال عملية اخلاء نافيه ديكاليم. "ا.ق.ب"

Caption 2: Policewomen carrying away a settler during the evacuation of Neve Dekalim. (AFP).



Caption 3: Settlers carrying their luggage and leaving a settlement in the Gush Katif bloc in Gaza (Reuters).

Television stations showed incoming pictures of the settlers' evacuation taken from the Arab satellite channels. However, the coverage showed a clear Palestinian stance that was unsympathetic to the images, which Israel attempted to market to the world. These images showed the settlers as victims leaving their homes for an unknown fate. This was the image Professor Elie Wiesel tried to portray in his article published in the New York Times on August 21, 2005. Wiesel, who is a Nobel Peace Prize winner and a Holocaust survivor, is also a radical supporter of extremists in Israel.

In his article, he writes, "The images of the evacuation itself are heart-rending. Some of them are unbearable...Let's not forget: these men and women lived in Gaza for 38 years. Successive governments, from the left and the right, encouraged them to settle there. In the eyes of their families, they were pioneers...And here they are, obliged to uproot themselves, to take their holy and precious belongings, their memories and their prayers, their dreams and their dead, to go off in search of a bed to sleep in, a table to eat on, a new home, a future among strangers."

In contrast to the image portrayed by the Israeli and Western media which was largely sympathetic to the settlers and the task of the Israeli army and police in evacuating them, the images of settlers in the Palestinian media were defined by the years-long struggle on the ground. To the Palestinians, the "other" forcefully expropriated this land and built settlements on it, settlements which have continuously expanded in an atmosphere of bloody confrontations.

In regards to the Gaza settlers in particular, their portrayal was characterized by the domination of 8,000 settlers over more than one-fourth of the area of Gaza, which is 350 square kilometers while over 1.2 million people live on 260 square kilometers. Their image was also marred by their control over half of Gaza's beach barred to Palestinians, the demolition of Palestinian homes close to the settlements and the daily horrors endured by tens of thousands of people over the past five years as a result of the daily shelling of areas adjacent to the settlements. Hence, there was not a feeling of sympathy but rather one of relief that hundreds of thousands of Palestinians would now be able to regain their land and would be allowed the freedom of movement in their own cities from which they were deprived, and could even return to their beaches.

These were not the only factors that shaped the sentiments of the Palestinians during the evacuation. Information from the Israeli press also played a role. On August 17, 2005, Al Hayat Al-Jadida daily quoted the Israeli daily Maariv in an article entitled "News of a fictitious violent evacuation in one of the settlements." The article continues, "Israeli media sources are talking about a scenario agreed on between the Israeli army and the disengagement administration on the one hand and a Gush Katif settlement on the other in which a virtual evacuation is carried out by force."

There was also the news item sardonically broadcast by Palestine Television on the program "I and the Other" (Ana Wal-Aakhar) on August 20, 2005 that thousands who had refused to voluntarily evacuate were not actually residents of Gaza settlements but residents of West Bank settlers who had "infiltrated" without the Israeli army's knowledge. The program's host asked sarcastically, "Perhaps dozens could infiltrate into the settlements but thousands? That just doesn't make sense."

Hence, what reached the Palestinian citizen vis-à-vis the events were more or less theatrics aimed at drumming up international public opinion and foiling any future chances for evacuations from other settlements in the West Bank. Not only did the Gaza settlers receive large compensation packages that would allow them to live elsewhere inside Israel, but some settlers actually moved to settlements in the West Bank and Jerusalem. To the Palestinians, this meant that the evacuation was carried out at the expense of the future of the West Bank.



Cartoon: Al Quds, August 19, 2005 (page 38)

“Just come on, habibi. Anyone who sees you would think this is the land of your forefathers. You and I both know the truth.”

What also contributed to shaping these sentiments was the way in which the Israeli army dealt with the settlers. Each settler was assigned five soldiers who carried them off serenely to a vehicle that then drove them outside the settlement. Although some settlers did assault the soldiers, the latter’s response was additional self-restraint. This image prompted the Palestinians to compare between the brutal way in which the army treats them and the kids’ gloves treatment offered to the settlers.

Nevertheless, there was a bit of exaggeration on the part of Palestine Television. In one instance, the portrayal of a certain event may have been based on sheer imagination. On the program “I and the Other” (Ana Wal-Aakhar) which aired on Tuesday August 20, 2005 at 18:00, the show’s host, Hazem Abu Shanab introduced his program's topic that day, which was entitled “The scandals of the settlers and Israeli occupation forces.” The host went on to say, “The pictures coming out of the settlements are those that the Israelis want shown and are seen through Israeli eyes. However, the truth is different. 'I and the Other' observed what went on in the settlements: there was chaos and theft. Several Israeli scandals took place at the hands of the settlers at times and at the hands of the Israeli army at others. The settlers robbed the homes of their neighbors. We captured all of this and will show the entire world the truth.”

However, when the host tried to confirm his claim with testimonies from journalists he had contacted including reporters from Al Jazeera and “the news channel” and from his

guest in the studio, Al Jazeera correspondent Wael Dahdouh, there was a clear discrepancy between what he claimed and between eyewitness testimonies. Even the image of a settler burning a car, which the host claimed was because the settler wanted to get compensation from the insurance company, was only speculation and unconfirmed information. This conclusion may very well be far from the truth because the shot was of an old car with broken windows. Next to it was another old broken-down car that was clearly unused. Thus, the reason for burning the car could have been, like we said earlier in this report, to deprive the Palestinians of it. Also, the language used by the program's host was expressive of his personal emotions, which were not necessarily backed by facts.

A confused message to the people

The media coverage of the disengagement was mostly characterized by the confusion with which the Palestinian media portrayed events. The coverage was dominated by official discourse from the PA and the factions. The disengagement was "liberation," and a victorious omen for eradicating the occupation. It was "evacuation," "departure" and "expulsion" from the settlements; it was a "withdrawal" from Gaza that occurred because of the sacrifices of our people and their steadfastness and because of the shed blood of our thousands of martyrs and wounded. It was a "unilateral withdrawal" decided on by Israel so it could maintain control of the West Bank and Jerusalem. It was a "withdrawal" said the PNA President, which we want to take place quietly. What concerns us is their "departure" from our land, said the Prime Minister. It is a victory for the armed struggle and the Qassam rockets, said the Palestinian resistance factions; a historical achievement and a conspiracy aimed at evading implementation of the roadmap.

All terminology was used to describe the disengagement plan and the reasons behind it. Hence, there was a lack of a clear and specific message explaining to the Palestinian people what really went on in Gaza and the reasons behind it. There was exaggeration and competition over who would "reap the political fruits" and thus, what should follow the disengagement at the Palestinian level to be able to move forward in the direction of eliminating the occupation from the remaining Palestinian lands in the West Bank and Jerusalem.

The following are examples of headlines in Palestinian newspapers during the disengagement to further clarify the above:

Al Ayyam, front page August 11, 2005

PLO Executive Committee: the withdrawal is a historical test of our people's ability to provide real security in Gaza districts.

Al Ayyam, front page, August 12, 2005

Qurei': The upcoming Israeli withdrawal from the Gaza Strip is the first response to our people's steadfastness.

Al Quds, front page August 14, 2005

Haniyyeh: The withdrawal, an achievement of the resistance and a first step to regaining rights.

Al Hayat Al Jadida, Page 2, August 14, 2005

The President: The withdrawal is part of the solution but not the solution; all must bear responsibility in making it happen.

Al Hayat Al Jadida: Front page, August 15, 2005

The invaders begin to leave Gaza

Al Hayat Al Jadida : Page 4, August 15, 2005

Fateh : The Israeli withdrawal is a victory for our people and their resistance; Fateh prepares to form a higher national committee.

Al Hayat Al Jadida: Page 5, August 15, 2005

Mohammed Dahlan: The price of the liberated land is our martyrs and wounded.

Al Quds: Front page, August 15, 2005

Beginning of settlers' departure from Gaza

Abu Ala': The Israeli withdrawal is a step towards the implementation of the roadmap.

Al Ayyam: Front page, August 16, 2005

Ahmad Qurei': We reaffirm the need to make the withdrawal a success as a first step towards liberation and the establishment of the state.

Al Ayyam: Front page, August 18, 2005

Al Barghouti: The liberation of the Strip is the start of the collapse of the entire settlement project.

Al Quds: Front page, August 19, 2005

The withdrawal stunts the Israeli dream of a state from the Euphrates to the Nile.

Al Ayyam: Front page, August 23, 2005

Abbas: The evacuation of Gaza settlements is an Israeli rectification of wrong conditions.

Al Ayyam: Page 4, August 23, 2005

The disengagement is a cover for settlement construction in the West Bank.

Al Hayat Al Jadida: Page 3, August 23, 2005

Abbas: The departure of the occupation and settlers from the Strip is attributed to the martyrs, prisoners, wounded and disabled.

Al Quds: Front page, August 28, 2005

Al Qidwa: What happened in Gaza and the northern West Bank is not liberation and the road is still long.

Palestine TV broadcast the same contradictory messages. The overall messages of its programs were manifested in titles such as "Heralds of Victory" and "Victory in Gaza" which aimed at endorsing the idea that what happened in Gaza was "a victory for the Palestinian resistance." It showed pictures of the settlements and of celebrations and slogans such as "Heralding in victory" or "Victory in their eyes" in an attempt to compete with Hamas over "the victory."

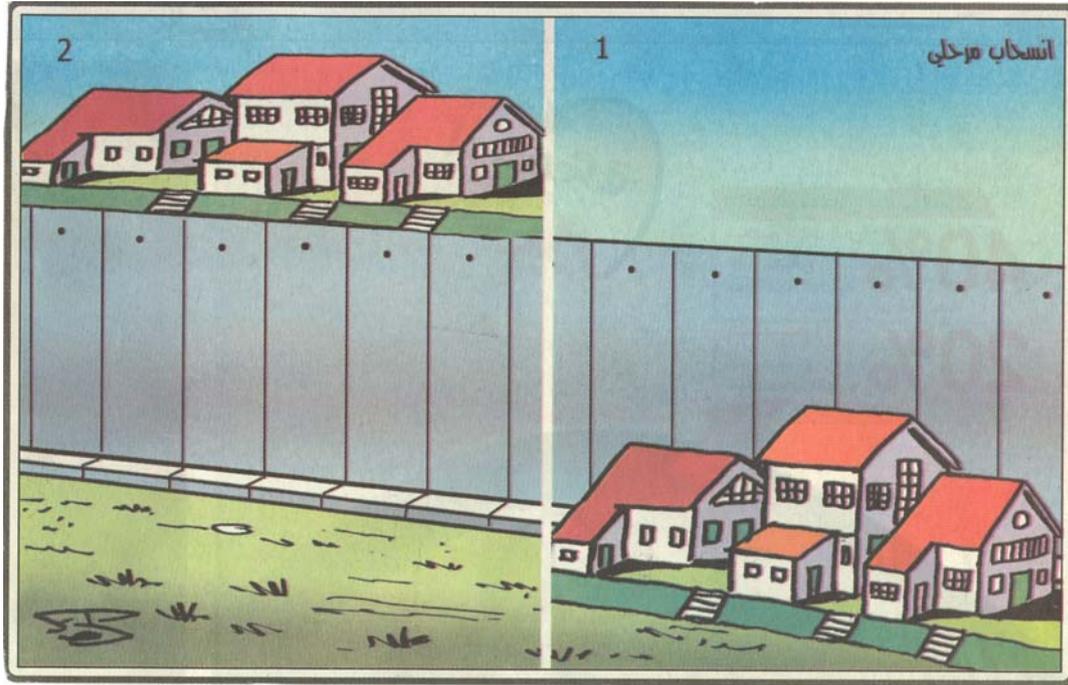
However, it also broadcast statements by the Minister of Information, Nabil Shaath on Monday August 8, 2005 in which he said, "Gaza will not be liberated because the Israelis will be present in the air and on the seashores. Therefore, there is no need for exaggerated joy." Palestine TV also aired an interview conducted with President Abbas by Abu Dhabi satellite channel on Friday August 26, 2005 in which he said that, "What is happening is a departure not a withdrawal and there are lands in Gaza that Israel refuses to leave."

The source of confusion in the media was the confusion conveyed by the Palestinian Authority in dealing with the disengagement through its many messages to the public. For example, in order to compete with Hamas, which said the disengagement was a result of the resistance-in particular Hamas' operations and the Qassam rockets- the PA's response and hence the media's, which was clearly biased towards it, was that the disengagement was a result of the sacrifices of our martyrs and wounded.

Hence, the PA lost the message it had been trying to focus on for some time, which was that this was a unilateral step by Israel aimed at ridding itself of the legal responsibility of the Gaza Strip and at giving itself more room to maneuver in responding to any military operations coming from the Strip. It was an individual step aimed at consolidating the settlement process in the West Bank and isolating Jerusalem from its Palestinian surroundings by expediting the construction of the separation wall in light of the media focus on the disengagement. It was also a step aimed at disillusioning the international community in that the political process was initiated by Sharon and that if the Palestinians prove their ability to control the security situation in Gaza it will be possible to consider a longer-term process or the implementation of the "roadmap". Above all, it was a step to strengthen the Israeli economy and security and to abort the "roadmap" as expressed by Dov Weisglass, Sharon's advisor and former head of his office, in the Israeli daily Haaretz on October 6, 2004.

Hence, the focus should have been on the political dimension of Sharon's plan and on informing the Palestinian public that this individual plan, which caught the attention of the world, necessitates that we strengthen the Authority and its ability to control and impose order and the rule of law on areas evacuated by Israel. This would allow us to move forward instead of being drawn into a verbal competition with political organizations.

The caricature published in Al Ayyam newspaper on Thursday August 11, 2005 on its back page embodies one understanding of the disengagement as seen through the eyes of many Palestinians in terms of Israel's goal of annexing West Bank settlements to Israel through including them inside the wall:



However, this confusion did not prevent the media from focusing on the following issues, even if in varying degrees:

First: Legally Israel still occupies the Gaza Strip; it controls its airspace, its sea and its crossings. Therefore, since the Palestinian territories are one geographical unit, the withdrawal of the occupation from one part of it does not mean an end to the occupation as long as this piece of Palestinian land is not sustainable in isolation of the remaining occupied areas.

Second: Since the international community declared that this step was part of the “roadmap,” the Palestinian people are now waiting for the post-Gaza step. Are there going to be means of implementing the “roadmap” or not?

Third: Much of the focus was placed on the talks with the Israelis, both the direct talks, those with Quartet Committee envoy Mr. Wolfehson and talks with Egypt over the most important issues relating to the withdrawal from Gaza, in particular the crossings. The Palestinian media conveyed the statements of Palestinian officials and influential figures with complete transparency.

Fourth: Statements by international officials were highlighted, in particular those who were negotiating daily with the Israelis such as the American Coordinator for Security Affairs General William Ward and James Wolfehson who expressed their rejection of Gaza turning into a large prison.

Palestinian celebrations:

Palestine TV highlighted the popular nature of the celebrations and the Palestinian joy at the departure of settlers from part of their occupied land, showing the unity of the Palestinian people and their support for their political leadership. It focused on the slogan, “Gaza today...tomorrow the West Bank and Jerusalem” in a clear attempt to mobilize the people in that the disengagement was a step towards liberation.

Palestine TV conducted a number of interviews with citizens on their viewpoints in which they expressed their happiness. Some of the interviewees owned land taken over by the settlers from which they had been barred entry. Others suffered from Israeli army shelling of their homes over the past five years. Some had sons killed by Israeli occupation forces. All expressed their joy at the departure of the settlers. The TV also highlighted the statements of Palestinian officials and their speeches, in particular those of President Mahmoud Abbas and ministers Nabil Shaath and Mohammed Dahlan. In his speech during a festival organized by the Youth Society in Gaza, President Abbas stressed the importance of considering the withdrawal as part of a process that aims at reaching an end to the occupation of Jerusalem and the West Bank. He also stressed the importance of the building process that would follow the departure of the occupation from Gaza and how this would provide work for the people.

The TV also broadcast carefully selected patriotic songs that were reasonable in terms of quality and allotted time. In the background, pictures of occupied Palestinian land and the people were shown. Palestine TV also broadcast interviews with Arab artists and intellectuals especially from Egypt, who expressed their happiness over the departure of the settlers and their hope that this would be a step towards the final eradication of the occupation.

The media coverage of the celebrations also portrayed the disengagement as a victory for the Palestinian people that all Palestinians had achieved through their steadfastness and sacrifices. The television adhered to the slogans of the PA, which called from the start, for peaceful and civilized celebrations that would show the Palestinians as unified people. Citizens were reminded of the slogan, “One celebration and joy for all.” The people were constantly reminded of the challenge of building Gaza through the repeated broadcasting of an excerpt from President Abbas’ speech before the Palestinian Legislative Council (PLC) on August 10 in which he said, “The difficult test is not just that the Israelis safely leave Gaza, and this is what we hope to achieve, but also in finding ways to maintain these properties in the future, how to utilize them and how all of the people can benefit from them and not just this or that person.” After President Abbas’ speeches, the slogan “Together we will possess the land” and “Together, we will build our land” flashed across the screen.

Palestine TV’s coverage of the celebrations completely disregarded the celebrations of Hamas and other Palestinian factions, focusing exclusively on the celebrations of the Palestinian Authority.

The Lebanese song, “The cry of a hero” was the theme song for all celebrations shown on Palestine TV, broadcast several times a day. Following are the lyrics:

Oh home, your glory has been written in the skies. Don't say gold is valuable. The soil of my country is valuable
Our determination in troubled times can only be stopped by a giant – its cries reaching high
Your wedding and glory were marked by the crossing of swords
Your cup is filled from the spring of glory – fill it and let me drink
No matter how long I am away from you, wait for me
The utmost request from you I will return with my soul and my money

During all this, the channel broadcast several messages on its tickertape advising people not to enter the evacuated areas immediately after the settlers and army leave. One warned of suspicious objects in these areas, calling on the public to wait until Palestinian security forces finish their work. Another message called on them to cooperate with and help Palestinian security. There were also messages calling on Palestinians to celebrate under the same flag to promote national unity. Another called on people to respect the rule of law and not to try and lay claim the evacuated lands under the pretext of ownership but to resort to the Palestinian Authority with their request. The most prominent slogans were “Gaza today...tomorrow the West Bank and Gaza,” “Gaza first,” “The world said yes to the Palestinian state and no to settlements” and “Preserving public properties, preserving the homeland.”

The Palestinian written press covered all the festivities in its news stories without excluding any factions. Its coverage was complete with pictures from the festivals. However, these pictures were usually selective with a clear bias towards highlighting those of the PA and Fateh.



رفح- مئات المواطنين، يرفعون الاعلام الوطنية، يزورون مواقع انتشار قوات الامن الوطني قرب المستوطنات المنوي اخلاؤها • (عدسة: اياد البابا)

Caption 1: Rafah – Hundreds of citizens raise Palestinian flags and visit posts where national security forces have deployed near settlements to be evacuated. (Iyad Al Baba)



غزة - آلاف المواطنين يحتفلون ببدء جلاء المستوطنين وقوات الاحتلال عن القطاع خلال مهرجان أقيم أمام مكتب الرئيس محمود عباس، أمس. (رويترز)

Caption 2: Gaza – Thousands of citizens celebrate the start of settlers and occupation forces leaving the Strip during a festival held in front of President Mahmoud Abbas’ office yesterday. (Reuters).



Caption 3: *Citizens celebrating the Israeli withdrawal in Rafah (Iyad Al Baba).*

Coverage of the confrontations:

In general, the Palestinian media, under the indirect influence of the PA and in line with its declared policy, carried out a clear campaign against the use of rockets, pointing out their negative impact on the Palestinian people, especially after a number of these rockets fell on Palestinian homes, killing and wounding children.

However, during the disengagement throughout August, there were no violent confrontations between the Palestinian resistance factions and Israeli occupation forces in Gaza. Some expected violent confrontations to break out between the settlers and the Israeli army. However, the only blood that was actually shed was Palestinian blood in three terrorist operations carried out by the Israelis. In Shefa Amr, a settler killed four Palestinians on August 6, 2005; in the settlement of Shilo, another settler killed four Palestinians as well on August 17, 2005 and in Tulkarm, Israeli occupation forces killed five Palestinians including three teenage boys on August 25, 2005. Here, allow us to note that the Palestinian media coverage of these events was objective and presented the human dimension.

For example, Al Ayyam daily published an investigative report on August 19 about the family of one of the workers who was killed in Shilo. The wife of one of the victims said providing food for their children was what forced her husband to work in the settlement of Shilo after he failed to find work elsewhere. Palestine TV conducted interviews with the families of the victims and conveyed the story in an appropriate and humane fashion. In the end, the criticism we directed in our first report to the Palestinian media on the

need to focus on the humanistic dimension of the struggle instead of broadcasting pictures of the victims while lying in hospital covered with blood received a positive response.

The West Bank and Jerusalem:

At the same time that Israel was carrying out its disengagement plan in Gaza, it was expediting the construction of the separation wall in the West Bank, especially around Jerusalem. It was also formulating plans to confiscate more land to expand the Maaleh Adumim settlement with the aim of linking it to Jerusalem. It was also building housing units in the Ariel settlement and in the Jordan Valley and was transforming the Qalandiya checkpoint, which had seemed temporary, into an international crossing.

While these and other topics were making headlines in Palestinian newspapers, Palestine TV did not cover them sufficiently in their news bulletins. The exception to this was the program "Talk is Allowed" (Al-Kalaam Masmouh) hosted by Saed Khatib, which aired an episode entitled "The measures in Jerusalem" in which Minister Hind Khoury, Abdel Qader Husseini, Khalil Tufakji and Ziad Hamouri were guests. The show presented the problems faced by Jerusalemites and the PA's shortcomings in dealing with these problems. Other than this, the subjects of Jerusalem, the wall and settlements in the West Bank were largely absent from the programs on Palestine TV. Rather, pictures of events in Jerusalem on Palestine TV came from Arab, international or even Israeli sources even though there is a direct correlation between the Israeli disengagement plan and these issues.

Coverage of the evacuation from Jenin settlements:

The coverage of the evacuation from Jenin settlements was weak in general in both the newspapers and on television. The reason for this is because the evacuation from the Jenin settlements was not of the magnitude of the evacuation of settlers and the Israeli army from Gaza. The Israeli government announced that the evacuation of settlements [in Jenin] did not entail the departure of Israeli troops from there. The Palestinian media covered the sudden evacuation of settlers from the Ganin and Kadim settlements, which took place on August 15, 2005 and also reported the news of the expedited evacuation of Sa-Nur and Homesh on August 24, 2005 in news reports through Palestine TV correspondent Nasser Abu Bakr.

Conclusions:

In general, Palestinian media outlets presented the public with the information available to them and exerted a particular effort in reporting on the disengagement.

Palestine Television exerted noticeable efforts by setting up a special studio exclusively for the disengagement. From the morning, it would host a number of Palestinian officials and representatives of political factions. The program would receive phone calls from ordinary citizens who wanted to express their opinions and feelings on the disengagement and their hope for positive results. Many citizens from various Palestinian cities and from the Palestinian Diaspora called into the program, which is an indication that the number of viewers is constantly rising. What aided this endeavor was the coordination between

the Ramallah and Gaza studios and the television channel's live transmission. At least four correspondents in four different places were transmitting live to their viewers in the following manner:

- Adel Al Zanoun: Gaza City and Nitzarim.
- Samir Khalifeh: near the Kfar Darom settlement
- Mohammed Joudeh: Khan Younis City
- Ra'fat Al Qidwa: near the Moraj settlement

Furthermore, the Palestinian media offered detailed information on the methods with which the PA would deal with the evacuated lands in former settlements, the method with which the rubble from the demolished settlements would be removed and the ministerial committees established for this purpose. The print media reported on the demand of certain factions for a parallel body to supervise and follow-up the process of receiving these lands. The television did not broach this subject, neither on its programs nor during its news bulletins, but sufficed with reporting on the meetings of the factional follow-up committee set up for this purpose with President Abbas.

The coverage of the other was, in general, characterized by its neutrality. The media presented pictures of the settlers as incoming from foreign press agencies, given that Israel did not allow Palestinian journalists entry into the settlements and witness the evacuation first-handedly. The coverage also conveyed a clear Palestinian position, which was unsympathetic with the image Israel tried to market to the world in that the settlers are the victims leaving their homes for an unknown future.

In terms of the celebrations, the Palestinian print media covered all the festivals in their news articles and did not exclude any celebrations from any Palestinian organization. Their coverage was accompanied by pictures from the festivals and statements from their organizers in spite of their clear bias towards showing the celebrations of the PA, as previously mentioned. Palestine TV, on the other hand, committed to broadcasting PA celebrations and disregarded festivals from the factions.

Here, MIFTAH would like to point out the following points of weakness detected in the media coverage during the disengagement:

First: lack of a media message:

In general, the Palestinian media was largely affected by the confusion the PA in dealing with the disengagement. This was apparent in that this confused and contradictory official PA discourse dominated over the media including the terms used for the disengagement including – “withdrawal,” “liberation,” “evacuation,” “expulsion” and “unilateral separation” – and the reasons that motivated Israel to take this step. Hence, the Palestinian media was unable to send out a clear media message about what should be done after the disengagement. Is the disengagement a step that should be invested in as a precursor for implementing the “roadmap”? Or is it a step that should be invested in to promote popular resistance? This confusion was apparent in varying degrees. For example, on Palestine TV, the lack of a media message was clearer than in the printed media.

There was lack of a clear and specific message that portrayed to the Palestinian people what was really happening in Gaza and the northern West Bank and therefore, what should follow the disengagement at the Palestinian level in order to move forward in eliminating the occupation from the remaining Palestinian territories in the West Bank and Jerusalem. Hence, there should have been more focus on the political dimension of Sharon's plan. The Palestinian people should have been informed that this individual scheme, which caught the interest of the world, necessitates that we consolidate the unity of the PA and strengthen its ability to control and impose law and order on the land evacuated by Israel instead of being dragged into a verbal competition between political organizations.

Second: Absence of a counter image

At a time when Israel was trying to portray the evacuation of settlers from Gaza as a historical concession to the Palestinians, there was no counter Palestinian image of the victims of the settlement enterprise or of people who were forcefully uprooted from their land. Nor were there any images of the destruction caused by the occupation army and its settlers, not just in Rafah, Khan Younis and Beit Hanoun but in a number of cities and refugee camps in Gaza. Given this lack of vision and planning, the Palestinian media was unable to highlight the truth of the Palestinian reality, which can be summarized as desperation and destruction created by the occupation. In place of these images, the media showed images of "victory" celebrations. Even though the only victims during the disengagement were Palestinian - in Shefa Amr, Ramallah and Tulkarm - this was not addressed adequately to show the true face of the occupation and settlements. In addition, the continuing construction of the separation wall and the isolation of Jerusalem from its Palestinian surroundings was absent from Palestine TV coverage.

Here we cannot point the finger at the Palestinian media in general. Rather, we put the blame on the Ministry of Information, which should have organized tours for foreign journalists to show them the destruction left behind by Gaza's settlements. The Ministry should also have distributed special translated or English-language programs among the foreign press. This shortcoming in the media could have been avoided if the Ministry of Information had created a media working group in Gaza and the West Bank mandated to carry out this task and had allocated a budget to cover its costs. The relevant ministries did form media working groups, but each group worked individually without any coordination between them, which led to confusion that could have been avoided.

Third: Omission of information

The Palestinian media did not try to uncover the PA's motives behind its efforts to coordinate with the Israelis. Neither did it address the reasons why the PA accepted the presence of a third party at the Rafah Crossing. The media did not reveal who actually proposed this third party nor did it give any information about it. Was the third party to be the European Union or the peace keeping troops in the Sinai? Perhaps this lack of disclosure was a Palestinian demand. The press simply conveyed the statements of Palestinian officials on their acceptance of a third party in order to undermine Israel's excuses for insisting on moving the entire crossing including the crossing of individuals,

to the tri-point juncture between the Palestinian, Israeli and Egyptian borders. We are not here to decide whether the PA's efforts to turn Sharon's unilateral disengagement plan into a bilateral coordinated step with the Palestinians was an erroneous policy. However, the Palestinian media could have sought to find answers to these inquiries and present them to the Palestinian public, who remained uncertain of the PA's actions. The media could have provided more information on the motives behind accepting a third party and on the nature of this party's role.

Just as there was an omission of the reasons behind the presence of a third party at the Rafah Crossing for the movement of individuals, there was also a lack of information about why the PA accepted or did not accept to move the point of entry and exit of goods to and from Gaza to the Karim Shalom crossing at the tri-point border, built in the Dahniyyeh area.

MIFTAH is not saying that the PA's acceptance of this is wrong because this is related to the Paris Economic Protocol and what is known as the "customs cover." In the end, this is an issue that should be determined by economic experts. Nonetheless, MIFTAH would like to say that this issue was not given due justice in the print or visual media. Therefore, the Palestinian public was in doubt over whether moving the commercial crossing was to their benefit or not.

Furthermore, the Palestinian media did not try to find out why the Palestinian leadership did not demand compensation for the Palestinians given that Israel and its settlers exploited their land for 38 years. Is it because what happened was a unilateral Israeli step or because the time for proposing this issue is already passed? Why was the rebuilding of Gaza not proposed to the Quartet Committee and its envoy? It was important for the Palestinian people to know the reasons why the Palestinian leadership did not broach this subject instead of giving the people the impression that its leadership had forgotten about it or that it is simply unconcerned.

Here, MIFTAH would like to stress that this disregard for events led to confusion. If nothing else, the fact that it did not delve into the motives for certain actions weakened the public's confidence in the media. The occupation of some PA offices was also disregarded and the kidnapping of the French Television photographer Mohammed Wafi was covered but without reporting on the motives behind the kidnapping, who the abductors were and what happened afterwards.

Fourth: Justifying discourse

We must also note in this report that Palestine TV played the role of censor to the statements of the PA president when he condemned the suicide bombing in Beer Sheva on August 27, 2005 as terrorist. On its front pages on August 28, Palestinian newspapers printed the president's words verbatim: "This is a terrorist operation that we denounce and condemn." As for Palestine TV, it sufficed to report that the President condemned the operation without mentioning that he described it as terrorist. During the noon news the President's statement was broadcast live but after the word "terrorist" was edited out. In the local news, the President's statement was disregarded altogether. The main news

broadcast at 21:00 transmitted the President's denunciation of the operation without showing a picture of him.

Newspaper clippings:



1. The President: *We denounce the terrorist operation in Beer Sheva and call on Israel to reaffirm its commitment to the calm and truce.*

Ramallah - (AFP) – *The President of the Palestinian Authority, Mahmoud Abbas, condemned the attack that took place yesterday in Beer Sheva in southern Israel, considering it a “terrorist operation.”*

In a brief statement to the press in his Ramallah office, Abbas said, “This is a terrorist operation and we condemn and denounce it.”



الرئيس خلال لقائه د. حنا ناصر.

استقبل وفدا من لجنة الانتخابات المركزية

الرئيس يستنكر العملية في بئر السبع

الانتخابات المركزية، والدكتور رامي الحمد الله أمين سر اللجنة، وعمار الدويك مديرها التنفيذي. واستمع الرئيس من الوفد الى شرح عن عمل اللجنة والاستعدادات الجارية لاجراء الانتخابات التشريعية في الخامس والعشرين من كانون الثاني المقبل.

ودعا الرئيس، الجانب الإسرائيلي إلى تأكيد التزامه بالهدنة ووقف عمليات التوغل والاعتقالات في المناطق الفلسطينية، فالتهدة والهدنة هما في مصلحة الطرفين وفي مصلحة عملية السلام. من جهة ثانية استقبل الرئيس عباس امس حنا ناصر رئيس لجنة

رام الله - وفا- أعرب الرئيس محمود عباس، عن استنكاره للعملية الإرهابية ضد المدنيين، والتي وقعت صباح امس في بئر السبع جنوب إسرائيل. وأكد الرئيس في بيان صدر عنه، ضرورة التزام الجميع بالهدنة وضبط النفس على الرغم من الاستفزازات الإسرائيلية، والتي كان آخرها قيام قوات الاحتلال باغتيال خمسة مواطنين في مخيم طولكرم ثلاثة منهم أطفال.

Caption: The President during his meeting with Dr. Hanna Nasser

2. [The President] received a delegation from the Central Elections Committee



The President denounces the Beer Sheva operation

Ramallah – Wafa – *President Mahmoud Abbas expressed his condemnation of the terrorist operation against civilians which took place yesterday morning in Beer Sheva in northern Israel. In his statement, the President stressed the need for all to abide by the calm and practice self-restraint in spite of Israeli provocations, the latest of which was the Israeli army assassination of five citizens from the Tulkarm Refugee Camp, three of whom were children.*

The President called on Israel to reaffirm its commitment to the calm and the truce and to halt its incursions and assassinations in the Palestinian territories, saying the calm and the truce were in the interests of both sides and in the interest of the peace process.

President Abbas also received yesterday Dr. Hanna Nasser, Head of the Central Elections Committee, Dr. Rami Hamdallah, CEC Treasurer and Ammar Dweik, its Executive Director.

The President listened to the delegation's explanation of the Committee's work and the ongoing preparations for the upcoming Legislative elections, to be held next January 25.

It is of little importance whether we agree or disagree with the President's description of the operation as terrorist. However, what is noteworthy is that Palestine TV allowed itself to play the role of censor on what is allowed and what is not allowed for the PA President to say. It is also important to know who was responsible for omitting the President's statement that was reported in all the print media. Was it the Minister of Information? The television station's Central Elections Committee (CEC)? Was it the head of the channel's news section or the news editor? Or was this a government decision?

It is time for change in the Palestinian media discourse. The justifying language that the Palestinian media has grown so accustomed to does not serve the Palestinian cause. It is not enough, in terms of the media, to say that the PA denounces the operations, which was a response to Israeli violations and the killing of five Palestinians in Tulkarm, four from Ramallah-area villages and the same number in Shefa Amr. Why was the military

operation condemned if it was a response to Israeli violations? This kind of media discourse cannot positively have an impact on world opinion and does not influence Israeli public opinion either.

Terrorism is a term understood worldwide as the killing of non-combatant civilians. Hence, when Israel killed the five young men from Tulkarm, it was exercising terrorism – state terrorism. When a settler killed four workers from Ramallah-area villages in the Shilo settlement, he also carried out an act of terror. And when a Palestinian organization kills civilians in Israel, it is also exercising terrorism. It is time to call things by their real names. The issue is about using terms with clear connotations that have an affect on local, Israeli and international public opinion. The President’s attempt to positively influence Palestinian media discourse should be respected and addressed instead of disregarded or censored. This is possible through distinguishing between people's right of self-defense and resisting the occupation through legitimate means guaranteed by international law and between illegitimate means.

Fifth: Sources of information

MIFTAH would also like to point out that the Palestinian press still largely depends on international media sources in its news even when the topic is Palestinian news. The majority of information on the settlements and the evacuation was from French press agencies, the Associated Press, Reuters and the Israeli press. Regardless of the importance of these sources, they should not constitute an alternative to Palestinian sources, which offer credibility to Palestinian papers.

In this regard, MIFTAH welcomes the establishment of independent Palestinian news outlets such as the Maan independent news agency and the Palestine News Network. It hopes these outlets will constitute a new path for the Palestinian media that will contribute to its development and promote its independence.

Sixth: Coverage of the other

MIFTAH believes coverage of the other was greatly impacted by Israel not allowing Palestinian journalists into the settlements during the evacuation process, which denied them the ability to verify the news and pictures they received from international and Israeli press agencies. MIFTAH would like to stress that continuing to deny Palestinian journalists the right to access information sources through denying them press cards that would allow them movement like their colleagues from international press agencies does not serve in understanding the other. Neither does it help in promoting the independence and professionalism of the media. In the end, it is one form of ongoing negative discrimination against the Palestinian media.

Seventh: MIFTAH would like to recall its previous position that calls for forming an “Independent Media Council” comprised of media specialists, civil society institutions, dignitaries and PLC members, in addition to a government representative. The Council’s task would be to supervise the media in general with the PLC acting as a reference for this Council. It would also stress on the fact that the liberation of the media from subordination from the executive authority is the basis for being able to carry out its role

and the only way to guarantee its professionalism. MIFTAH would also like to point out that establishing a government press office that covers government activities and deals directly with the Palestinian and international press is the most professional and credible way of presenting information and official politics and positions.