Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech at Bar Ilan University

Media Monitoring Unit

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Introduction:

The speech delivered by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday, June 14 at Bar Ilan University's Begin–Sadat Center in Tel Aviv, came in the context of his attempt to respond and deal with a new political situation created by the new US administration and the EU. This new policy is aimed at aborting previous double-standard approaches for dealing with certain aspects of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. On the one hand, the US Administration has always demanded that Palestinians fully commit to the Road Map and its conditions, while it did not request the same level of commitment from Israel. It left Israel to behave according to its own convictions regarding settlements, borders, the wall and checkpoints. This has helped to justify the subjugation of Palestinians through imposing new realities in their daily life. From the US administration's first day in office, the differences in policy from George Bush's Republican administration were apparent. Statements from the new US officials began to address the danger of continuing with settlements in the Palestinian territories, mentioning Palestinians' right to self-determination and the establishment of a Palestinian state. This change in American policy reached its climax during the speech delivered by US President Barak Obama entitled "A New Beginning" for reconciliation with the Arab and Muslim world at Cairo University in Egypt on June 4. President Obama publicly made defined and clear demands for halting settlements and recognizing the two-state solution, demands which mean a compliance with the Road Map.

Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech was more of an attempt at deceit and maneuvering. It was a desperate endeavor to please the US administration and the international community on the one hand and an attempt to preserve his narrow right-wing government, on the other. This was very clear by Netanyahu's many difficult if not impossible conditions which he set as prerequisites for his consent to the idea of establishing a Palestinian state. These conditions will effectively kill any prospect for negotiations on several issues. For example, demanding that the Palestinians recognize the Jewish identity of the state of Israel, the declaration that Jerusalem would remain the unified capital of Israel, the demilitarization of the future Palestinian state and monitoring of its borders, in addition to his total rejection of the right of return, leaves nothing left to negotiate over between the two parties.

Palestinian papers' coverage of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's speech

The three Palestinian papers gave a lot of space on their front pages to Netanyahu's speech as main news items, in addition to local and international reactions to the speech which, as we mentioned before, was full of political pitfalls. The three papers also allocated their regular columns and cartoons to commenting on the speech. As expected, the three papers focused on four issues raised by Netanyahu. From a Palestinian perspective, these issues are the most difficult and dangerous, which are the recognition of Israel as a Jewish state, rejection of a settlement freeze, Jerusalem as the unified capital of Israel and rejection of the refugee right of return.
**Al-Quds newspaper:**

The main news item on the front page of Al Quds newspaper was as follows:

*Disregarding the Road Map and the Arab initiative, conditioning recognition of the Jewish character of Israel and unified Jerusalem as its capital (subtitle)*

*Netanyahu challenges Obama and refuses to freeze settlements and offers Palestinians a semi state (main title)*

In its main news item, the paper highlighted Netanyahu's clear rejection to freezing settlements and his condition of recognizing Israel as a Jewish state. The news described Palestine as a "semi-state", which, according to Netanyahu, is a demilitarized state without Jerusalem as its capital. Moreover, the paper considered his speech a challenge to US President Barak Obama. Within the context of the news piece, the paper pointed to Netanyahu's disregard for the Road Map and the Arab Peace Initiative.
In addition to the main news item, several news pieces followed related to local, Israeli, Arab and international reactions.

The regular column (Al Quds editorial) entitled "Nothing New in Netanyahu's Speech," analyzed the speech and its meaning. As expected, the writer attacked Netanyahu's speech and described it as deceptive and an attempt "to react to President Obama's famous speech in Cairo. Mostly, it is an attempt to contain the tension between Israel and its biggest ally due to Obama's firm position on the need for Israel to comply with the two state solution and halt all forms of settlements." The important thing in Netanyahu's speech, according to the article, is what was between the lines rather than his actual words. In short, there was nothing new in Netanyahu's speech that the world does not know about him and his right-wing coalition.

Al Quds' cartoon was also sarcastic towards Netanyahu's speech, depicting him as a scrap vendor, trying to sell old conditions in an attempt to buy time and procrastinate by proposing these old conditions as new to move forward in peace negotiations.
In another cartoon, the cartoonist is asking where the "small and non-viable" Palestinian state can fit in the great Israel, which controls this state, and the Road Map, "custom tailored for it."

**Al-Ayyam newspaper:**

As with Al Quds newspaper, the main news item in Al Ayyam described Netanyahu's speech as cancelling out the issues in the conflict.

*He put a number of preconditions for accepting a demilitarized state* (sub title)  
*Netanyahu's speech: canceling out the two issues of Jerusalem and refugees, opposing any halt to settlements and insisting on the Jewish character of Israel* (main)
In addition to the main news item, Al Ayyam published three other news pieces regarding the Palestinian Authority, President Obama and Arab Knesset member Muhammad Barakeh's reactions to Netanyahu's speech.

Also, Al Ayyam's regular column addressed Netanyahu's speech. The writer described him as garrulous and speaking nonsense. The writer, Hassan Al Battal, tried to link between Netanyahu's speech and US President Barak Obama's speech at Cairo University. He believed that Netanyahu's speech was basically an attempt at evasion by which he wanted to say: "There is no need for Palestinians and Arabs to engage in a rhetoric circus. Let's leave matters to US – Israeli, and Israeli – world Jewry debates!!"

Al Ayyam's cartoon was the frankest and clearest in commenting on the challenging and evasive nature of Netanyahu's speech. The cartoonist described the speech as a slap in the face to US President Obama. The implications here are very clear- after delivering his reconciliation speech in Cairo in which he promised to work for a better future for the
region, Netanyahu's speech came as a painful slap in the face to President Obama, who strives for change!

**Al Hayyat Al Jadeedah newspaper:**

Al Hayyat Al Jadeedah newspaper was no different in its coverage of Netanyahu's speech from the other two papers (Al Quds) and (Al Ayyam). Its main news item read as follows:

*Netanyahu's speech: rejecting a settlement freeze and the return of refugees and accepting a demilitarized state on condition of recognizing Israel as a Jewish state (main)*

*Palestinian Authority: Netanyahu's stance sabotages all peace initiatives and the US Administration should shoulder its responsibilities (subtitle)*
The paper did not publish a picture of Netanyahu while delivering his speech similar to Al Quds and Al Ayyam. Instead, it published a picture of American peace activists raising banners against settlements in front of Bar Illan University, during the speech.

There was also a picture of President (Abbas) during his meeting with the mayor of Paris at the presidential headquarters in Ramallah.
Al Hayyat Al Jadeedah ran one separate news item commenting on the speech, which was President Obama's comment on it.

Al Hayyat's regular column ("Our Life" by Hafez Al Barghouthi) was different in style from the regular columns of Al Al quds and Al Ayyam. It tried to link the context of Netanyahu's speech with the divided Palestinian reality and the weak Arab reality, represented in the weak Arab peace initiative that is not supported by "an alternative option," in addition to the Palestinian state of division. The writer put the lion's share of
responsibility on the Arab world and the Palestinians. If the reality was different, Netanyahu would not have delivered his belittling speech to the Palestinians and Arabs. He "played on the current situation of Arabs and Palestinians, which lacks conciliation and is unable to take on any action because of the perpetual impotence flowing through their veins."

Al Hayyat newspaper was the only paper that did not assign the daily cartoon to Netanyahu's speech. Contrary to Al Quds and Al Ayyam, the cartoon addressed the state of Palestinian division and its impact on Palestinian history.
Findings:

- Coverage of the three Palestinian papers: Al Quds, Al Ayyam and Al Hayyat Al Jadeeda of Prime Minister Netanyahu's speech was very good. They succeeded in highlighting the most important points in the speech. They commented on and addressed them with a high level of media professionalism by giving space in the regular columns to raise the necessary questions following the speech. Their cartoons also addressed the subject in addition to several reports and news items for commentary and reactions at the local, Arab and international levels.

- The Monitoring Unit feels that Al Hayyat Al Jadeeda's failure to assign its daily cartoon to addressing Netanyahu's speech was a shortcoming. It should have addressed the speech through its cartoon, which is considered one of the most creative instruments for expressing its position as a major media outlet in Palestine.

- The three papers successfully and professionally addressed Netanyahu's speech, without being dragged into media rhetoric full of incitement and slander. Through their coverage and commentaries, the papers exposed some of Netanyahu's intentions and his obvious policy, aimed at freezing and maintaining the status quo.