



'The Bloody Sunday'

Palestinian Newspaper Coverage of the Bloody Events in the West Bank and Gaza Strip: Early October 2006

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Media Monitoring Unit

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Introduction

MIFTAH issues this report as the first in a series of special reports on the Palestinian media coverage of some current and crucial issues and events, an average of three reports annually. It attempts to monitor, study and analyze the form and content of material in the media and its address of different aspects. Through research, study and constructive criticism, it highlights the strengths and weaknesses of the media for the purpose of improving its performance and the quality of material it presents.

This series, in addition to broader and more comprehensive reports, constitutes a part of various media monitoring activities of the Palestinian Media Monitor at MIFTAH, under phase two of the Arab-Israeli Media Coverage Monitoring Project, implemented in cooperation with the Center for the Protection of Democracy in Israel-Keshev- which monitors and analyzes Israeli media coverage.

The Media Monitor selected the tragic events that took place in the Gaza Strip and parts of the West Bank at the beginning of October 2006 as its topic, because of their significance and gravity, and because these events came as a result of circumstances that need thorough examination. At the media level, many media professionals, analysts and observers hold the media partially responsible, and even accuse some media channels of a form of internal incitement that has possibly contributed to aggravating the tension.

Because of the extreme importance of this topic, MIFTAH chose to concentrate in this report on the three daily newspapers: Al-Quds, Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah during four days, October 1-4, 2006.

Prior to the “Storm”

Since the results of the Legislative elections in January 2006 in which The Islamic Resistance Movement “ Hamas ” won the majority of seats, while the National Palestinian Liberation Movement “ Fateh ” ranked second, and until the breakout of these clashes, the Palestinian atmosphere has been charged with polarization and mobilization. The Israeli and international siege of the Palestinian Government and people aggravated the internal tension, particularly as the Palestinian National Authority (PNA) employees stopped receiving salaries, and together with teachers, went on strike. The events that took place on October 1-2, 2006, which resulted in the death of 13 people and wounding more than 100, came amid this environment. We hereby monitor the three newspapers for September 30, 2006, as well as October 1-4, 2006.

Following are samples of the newspaper headlines one day prior to the clashes:

Al-Ayyam

Front Page:

“The Ministry of Interior (MoI) Threatens to Repress by Force a Protest of Security Services” (eight columns)

“Cairo Warns the Palestinian Extremist Stream of a Time when ‘Remorse Comes too Late’ ”

(Al-Masri today): “Egyptian-Jordanian Reservations against Haniyyeh Forming the National Unity Government.”

In its internal pages:

“Police and National Security Personnel Block Roads and Burn Tires in Protest of not Receiving Salaries”

“Gaza: Government Employees Continue Strike and Negotiations Completely Stalled”

Al-Quds October 1, 2006

Front Page

“Security Services Demonstrate Demanding Salaries” (5 columns)

“Egypt Warns Palestinian Extremist Stream of a Time when ‘Remorse Comes too Late’ ”

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah October 1, 2006

Front Page

“Ministry of Interior Decides to Confront what it Described as ‘Mutiny’ within Security Services as of Today”

“The Government Condemns the Assault against Minister of Culture”

Upon reading the internal pages during the four monitored days, we find a lot of exaggerated concentration on the internal Palestinian conflict. This indicates that editors focus on this issue in a manner that contributes to aggravating the tension and indirectly

promotes the factional differences as the main, or even the only issue worth examining, analysis and study, from the perspectives of specific factions rather than addressing it as a core national issue. It is noted that the interest of newspapers and columnists in other crucial, possibly more important issues, phenomena and problems, such as occupation practices and other social issues receded. A simple review of the three newspapers during that period attests to that. A quantitative statistical survey-which cannot be conducted in this special report- may be carried out in order to get detailed findings in this respect.

The nature of this special report does not allow for a thorough discussion of the articles for two reasons. Firstly, the articles express the views of their writers and are not the responsibility of newspapers. Secondly, a scientific analysis of articles requires a study of detail and use of standards of criticism, which is beyond the subject of this report. An example, however, of the language and jargon used in articles is the article entitled “When Will the Chaos End in Gaza?” by Omar Helmi Al-Ghoul, published in Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, October 1, 2006, page seven:

He attacks the “Hamsawi” government, as he described it, putting the blame fully on Hamas. He concludes that the cause of the chaos is the “Executive Force” led by Minister of Interior Said Siyam, adding that the deplorable Hamas Government must go.

متى تنتهي الفوضى في غزة

إذا الفوضى والتهرب الأمني، الذي تمارسه القوة التنفيذية، التي يردها وزير الداخلية سعيد صيام، وكتائب القسام التي يفودها الجعبري وغيرهم أن لها أن تثقف وعلى 'حماس' وحكومتها اليائسة أن ترحل وتفسح المجال أمام تشكيل حكومة وحدة وطنية تخرج الشعب من حالة الفوضى الأمنية التي تفودها القوة التنفيذية والأفان الشعب العربي الفلسطيني سيكفون مسيرة مظلمة وسيدخل شتتا أم أبينا نفل الحرب الأهلية التي لا تحمد عقباها. وأن الأوان على الرئيس أن يتخذ خطوة جديدة بشأن الحكومة، وعليه أن يعيد النظر في آليات تعامله مع حكومة 'حماس'، كما أنه مطالب باستخدام صلاحياته الدستورية، والعمل الجدي لإيجاد حلول لازمة الرواتب، وتشكيل حكومة وحدة وطنية من كل القوى الواغية بالمشاركة وتحجيل حماس مسؤولية تعطيل تشكيل الحكومة فيما إذا جاءت الحوارات بشأنها بالفشل. وعلى 'حماس' أن تكف عن سياسة جر الساحة التي دوامة الحرب الأهلية، وأن تعيد الاعتبار للمصالح الوطنية العليا وأن لا تبقى أسيرة الحسابات العنصرية الصغيرة والقوية. وقيل كل شيء محاكمة المجرم الذي القى القنبلة البدوية على المضربين من منتسبي الأجهزة الأمنية، بعد تحديد الجهات التي تقف خلفه والمسهرير به للسام الذي العلم فحول يقوم كل مسؤول وفرد في المجتمع بمسؤولياته لمنع فتيل الحرب الأهلية التي لن تخدم أي قوة فلسطينية.

While the writer is certainly free to express his views and opinion, the aim of this example is to shed light on the atmosphere of tension and polarization that preceded the violence. It should be noted that a considerable number of articles addressed controversial issues objectively and responsibly, proposing solutions to end the crisis.

An example is an article entitled “ For our Winds Not to Wither (*Hatta La Tathhab Rihana*”) by Talal Okal in Al-Ayyam, October 1,2006, in which, towards the conclusion, he calls for reversing the prevailing atmosphere, demanding the Fateh and Hamas leaderships assume their national responsibilities.

حتى لا تذهب ريحنا؟!!

بقلم: طلال عوكل

نحتاج الى مبادرة جريئة من قبل الرئيس، ومن قبل قيادتي حركة حماس وحركة فتح، تستهدف تبديل الاجواء والمناخات الداخلية، وإنهاء ما يشبه حالة الحرب التي يعيشها قطاع غزة خلال اليومين السابقين، ومن اجل العودة الى طاولة الحوار، بغرض اعادة رص الصفوف، واعادة ترتيب البيت الفلسطيني الداخلي بما يؤهله للتعامل مع الاوضاع والتحركات الدولية والاقليمية المستجدة بكفاءة وبما يخدم المصلحة الوطنية الفلسطينية، وحتى لا تذهب ريحنا فنصبح على ما فعلنا نادمين.

Coverage of Violence

The media coverage of the violence and clashes that erupted in Gaza and parts of the West Bank was similar in the three newspapers, Al-Ayyam, Al-Quds and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah. The newspapers focused on reporting facts and incidents, publishing photographs, the accompanying statements and calls for calm, or statements and releases that exchange accusations and responsibility between Fateh and Hamas. On October 2, 2006, the day after the bloody events, the front pages of the three papers were replete with reports and photos of events, and the pertinent statements and views. It is also noted that the front page of Al-Ayyam also included statements of President Mahmoud Abbas covering four columns, while Prime Minister Haniyyeh's statement was published beneath in smaller font and covering two columns only. Al-Quds published Prime Minister Haniyyeh's statement on page 2 with reference on the front page, while it published the President's statement on four columns. Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah published the President's statement in a main headline under a main item, followed by the Prime Minister's statement. It also published a two-column report on the front page on the President's statement in which he re-affirmed his commitment to the agreement reached with Hamas about the determinants of the program of the National Unity Government. In addition to the consideration for the administrative hierarchy within the PNA, there is a need to provide a form of balance in space allocated to the coverage of both parties and their statements.

Diction and the Use of Language

The tragic events that took place on the first Sunday of October 2006 require pondering in terms of dimensions and lessons learnt. At the media level, there is a need for a critical performance appraisal to check how it can address similar events in the future. The coverage of the three newspapers must be subject to examination, analysis and critique.

Diction in the Main Headlines

The three newspapers had different headlines about these events and used hyperbolic language, possibly delivering a negative message that contributed to aggravating the tension and deepening the rift.

In details:

- 1- On October, 2, 2006, Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah had the following headline in red on its front page and over 8 columns:

“The internal strife (*Al-Fitnah*) Reaps the Lives of 9 Citizens and Wounds more than 100 in One Day”

الفتنة تحصد أرواح ٩ مواطنين وتجرح أكثر من ١٠٠ في يوم واحد

The use of word “strife” (*Al-Fitnah*) in describing events is an interpretation and a point of view, rather than objectivity and accuracy in describing the events. It even sends an indirect message insinuating that the differences and fighting have become irreversible. In language, *Al-Fitnah* is a difference in the opinions among people and the possible fighting among them. It could have been described as tragic clashes that erupted between a limited number of persons or groups. Some may argue that the editor considered what happened as sedition or the start of a sedition, and that he described events as he saw or interpreted them, or to warn of possible repercussions. However, one cannot deny that the word sedition gives a negative connotation and a message that some may interpret as aggravating the rift, fragmentation and tension.

- 2- Al-Quds published a main 8-column report on the same day, October 2, 2006, in large font headline over a black background, unlike the usual layout. It selected the following words:

“Ferocious Clashes (*Ishtibakaat Dariah*) Warn of a Disaster in the Strip”

In smaller font, the following words were above it:

“9 killed and tens wounded”



شبكة
٢٠٠٦ فلسطين في الازمن
(٣٠ شباط في اسرائيل)

٣٣
صفحة

الوزير ناصر الدين الشاعر:
الحكومة لن تقرض نفسها على الشارع

غزة - د ب أ - قال وزير الدفاع ناصر الدين الشاعر نائب رئيس الوزراء ووزير التربية والتعليم العالي منس ان الحكومة الفلسطينية بقيادة حركة حماس لن تقرض نفسها على الشارع الفلسطيني ولا تستعمل مداهمة القاتل التورية.

والشارع في فلسطيني لا يستعمله الحكومة لتستغل الحكومة دخول في أي حور ومطش دا على حمل جثثهوا الفلسطيني الي هو الامان ويخرج من الامة العارية سواء في بقا الحكومة التي تشكلت حكومة وحد وشيعة في حكومة لتقرر قريه.

عقيدس ٢٠

JERUSALEM - Monday - October 2 - 2006 - No. 13336
جريدة يومية خاصة تأسست سنة ١٩٥١
الأثنين ٢ من تشرين اويل ٢٠٠٦ الموافق ١٠ من رمضان ١٤٢٧ هـ العدد ١٣٣٣٦

٩ قتلى وعشرات الجرحى

اشتباكات ضارية تنذر بكارثة في القطاع




هنية: اتفقت مع الرئيس على استئناف الحوار	٢	غزة - مراسلو «الشرق» - قتل ٩ مواطنين واصيب اكثر من تسعين آخرين بجراح بينهم مصور قناة «العربية» في قطاع غزة خلال اسوأ الاشتباكات مسلحة داخلية مؤسفة.
الاحداث المؤسفة في صور	٩	وقعت امس بين عناصر امنية من قوات امن الرئاسة والقوات والامن الوطني وبين افراد من القوة التنفيذية التابعة لوزارة الداخلية ما يندرج بحرب اهلية.
استنكار الاحداث المؤسفة	٣٠	كما فاضت الشرارات غيرة بين قوات امن الرئاسة والقوة التنفيذية في حجة منطقة الدار ١٠ حيا الذي ان وقع هذا الحادث من توترات من جهة قائد الكادر حصة العياض من توترات فوسطن والنوع بالته وخلاصة القضية لهم ١٠ الاجراءات الامنية اللازمة لتجرح.
اصابة ٨ مواطنين في نابلس		والثالث الصادر العموية في مستشفى الشفاء بمدينة غزة ان العيان في العيان قتل اثناء مرور بمكان قريب من توشان اعلان النار في اعداء نوع مدينة غزة فيما قتل فوفان جرس خلال تواجده في حي الشيخ رضوان شمال مدينة غزة.
احراق مقري الحكومة والاصلاح في رام الله والخليل		وكذا ٣٠ جمعة الشفاء مدير العلاقات العامة في مستشفى الشفاء ان العيان ان العيان تولى جرح اصابة بعوار تاري تاراس اثناء اعلان النار بين مسلحين من الجاسين.

The word “clashes” is an objective description of events, but the word “ferocious” is an extreme exaggeration, as it is usually used to describe extremely violent battles or wars. What happened essentially in Gaza and to a lesser extent in the West Bank cannot be described as ferocious. The remaining words in the headline were relatively acceptable and carried a positive message that warns of further developments. However, the use of the word “disaster” or *karitha* is an inappropriate exaggeration, since “disaster” carries a different connotation. Linguistically speaking, the word “disaster” connotes great damage, loss or destruction and is the matter that causes extreme distress, (In Arabic, the word *karitha* is masculine, not feminine as used in the paper, a common mistake committed because of the social inherited association between words with negative

connotations and the feminine.) The reader will find it odd had the editor used the word in the masculine rather than the feminine (*karith* in place of *karitha*).

3- On Monday October 2, 2006, Al-Ayyam published on its front page a main report using red and black font, giving the day of the events a name as follows:

“The Black Sunday: 9 Killed and 105 Wounded in Gaza Strip”

In smaller font above it:

“The Executive Force Intervened to Put an End to Protests by Force, and Tension Moved to the West Bank”



The newspaper is free in innovating names or terms to describe the events and the atmosphere. The rest of the headline constituted objective reporting. The subtitle may be interpreted as holding the Executive Force responsible, by saying, “intervened to stop protests by force”. The second part of the subtitle includes an insinuation that tension had been prevailing in the West Bank and Gaza since the victory of Hamas in the Elections. Tension has no sparks that spread, but sparks are a result of actual bursting of clashes that indeed took place in Gaza, where matters exceeded tension to bursting.

Day 2 of Events

These were the main headlines of the three newspapers covering Day 2 of the bloody events, in order to give an idea about the size and prominence of the coverage.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah October 3 2006

Front Page:

Main headline covering 8 columns:

“The Sedition Continues: One Citizen Dead and 17 Others Wounded in Rafah Clashes”

Subtitles came as follows:

“7 Citizens Wounded in Nablus and Jericho and the Destruction of “ Hamas” Institutions in Jenin and Qabatiya”

“Comprehensive Strike in the West Bank and Security Services on Gaza Streets”

In another topic and over 4 columns:

“Abbas: No Authority in Palestinian Territories Confronts the Authority of the President”

Underneath, in smaller font: “We will Hold Accountable all those Proven to be Responsible for Recent Events even if it was the Minister of Interior”

Al-Ayyam October 3, 2006-12-21

Front Page

“Bloody Clash in Rafah kills Two and Wounds Twenty”

On page three:

“Two Escorts of the Prime Minister are Wounded and a Third from Fateh during Clashes in Nablus”

In a subtitle above it:

“Anonymous assault on the House and Car of Al-Jazeera Reporter in the District”

Al-Quds October3, 2006

Front Page:

The main headline covering 8 columns was:

“Egyptians Mediate... And Clashes Continue”

In a subtitle above it and in smaller font:

“3 Casualties and Tens Wounded in Jericho, Nablus and Rafah”

In the Wake of the Events

On October 4, 2006:

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah

Front Page:

“Al-Ahmad: Two Weeks for Forming a Unity Government before President Uses his Powers” (4 columns)

“Haniyyeh: We will not Allow a Civil War and the People do not Need New Elections” (3 columns)

“Abdul Rahman Denies any Fateh or Al-Aqsa Brigades Communiqué that Threatens with the use of Violence” (2 columns)

“Cautious Calm two days after the Sedition” (2 columns)

هدوء حذر بعد يومين على الفتنة

Al-Quds October 4, 2006

Front Page:

“Rice Calls on Palestinians to Form a Government that Honors the Quartet Principles and to End the Infighting” (8 columns)

“Marches and Statements in the West Bank and Gaza Denouncing Infight and Demanding Conciliation and Preventing Bloodshed” (4 columns)

In a subtitle above it:

“Assaults against some Institutions, Schools and Teachers Continue”

Al-Ayyam October 4, 2006

Front Page:

“Cautious Calm in Gaza Strip and Sad Events in Nablus” (3 columns)

هدوء حذر يخيم على قطاع غزة وأحداث مؤسفة في نابلس

Haniyyeh: “We are Opposed to Infighting and Civil War” (1 column)

هنية : نحن ضد الاقتتال الداخلي وضد الحرب الأهلية

عمرة - الغدبة أكد رئيس
الوزراء الفلسطيني اسماعيل
هنية، أمس، أنه يرفض الاقتتال
الداخلي، وأن حكومته لا يمكن
أن تسمح بحرب أهلية، وذلك
بعد مواجهات دامية قتل خلالها
عشرة فلسطينيين وجرح أكثر من
مئة آخرين.

وقال هنية للصحفيين «نحن
لا نريد القتال داخليا ونحن ضد
الاقتتال الداخلي ونحن لا يمكن
أن نسمح بحرب أهلية ولكن هذا
(التمة ص ١٧)

It is observed here that the positive news about the calm did not receive the same degree of attention or prominence as the events themselves. This is an assertion that newspapers are interested in exciting and fresh news, rather than the importance of the subject and its repercussions on the street and readers. Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah editor gave the headline of “Ending the Tragic Events” two columns only on the front page, while in Al-Quds there was no indication of the recession of events to the level of cautious calm, as described in Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah and Al-Ayyam in a headline over 3 columns. We recall that reports on events came as main topics over 8 columns. Some may argue that this is only normal in the media that always seeks suspense. We cannot deny that, but upon coverage of serious and bloody events, other considerations must be taken into account, including social and national responsibility, without infringing on objectivity and the right of readers to get information and facts.

It is worth noting that the three newspapers did not publish any detailed investigative report on how the situation erupted, but only published general descriptive reports.

Findings and Conclusions

1. The media generally contributed to spreading tension during the days that preceded the bloody events in terms of the size and prominence of coverage. It sufficed to playing a negative role of conveying facts, statements, and disputes between parties of the conflict, Fateh and Hamas. The three main newspapers even manifested a degree of bias in favor of Fateh, with clear interest in Fateh propositions as well statements by its leaders, most notably the President, through highlighting the statements and activities of Fateh and Security Services, the majority of whom are Fateh. At the same time, interest in Hamas' propositions or statements of its spokespersons was at a lower level, bearing in mind that the three newspapers claim to be independent political newspapers.
2. The three newspapers failed to reach objective conclusions regarding the orientations of the disputing parties prior to events. This was evident in the front pages of the newspapers on the same day of the bloody events, which were void of any warning that is required from the press, in a situation that was clearly volatile. These newspapers usually publish on important occasions an editorial by the Editor-in-Chief or a prominent political figure on their front pages. This did not happen on that day, or the previous day, despite the situation that necessitated it. The front pages of the three newspapers asserted the tension and charge in the air. Moreover, some observers and analysts noted a kind of "incitement" especially that the three newspapers highlighted the Egyptian warning against the so-called "extremist stream". It should be noted that the internal pages were replete with articles carrying different views, many of them warning of potential deterioration. Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah was distinguished in the number of articles directly attacking Hamas and holding it responsible for all what happened.
3. The newspapers published conflicting numbers of casualties, especially during day 2. This undermines their reliability as sources of documented information. As such, there is a need to find sources of information or to rely on the most accurate story among the three.
4. The newspapers were, in different degrees, not committed to professional standards in their reporting of the events, which requires presenting facts and information, and investigating their truth and accuracy. They did not publish a comprehensive and credible report that can be used as an objective reference on facts and events as they occurred and not gear them in a certain direction.
5. It should be noted that the three newspapers succeeded in granting the events sufficient coverage on day 2, in terms of allocated space on front and internal pages, as well as photos and distinctive layout of front page. The three newspapers should be also commended for relying on their own reporters and sources in their reports, without ignoring the reports of foreign news agencies or radio and television stations.
6. There is a need to warn of the absence of "humanization" of coverage. Victims are not mere figures, but Palestinian citizens who had nothing to do with neither Hamas nor Fateh. The newspapers should have documented their

names, conditions and photos. They should have interviewed their families and shown interest in the wounded.

In conclusion, MIFTAH recommends the following:

1. Emphasis should be placed on the utmost importance of the commitment of journalists (editors and reporters) to professional standards generally in their coverage. Journalists should seek accuracy in facts, figures and neutrality in reporting facts and events, as well as objectivity in addressing them. In particular, they should show unremitting commitment to professionalism in the coverage of a serious issue like the bloody events.
2. Media institutions should be called upon to seriously consider training journalists on investigative journalism, and provide an opportunity for journalists who work in this field, through providing the necessary funding and the sufficient time to conduct investigative reports. These have higher professional value and grant the newspaper that adopts them a higher degree of credibility.
3. MIFTAH renews its call to establish a Higher Independent Media Council that provides supervision and oversight, but not censorship. Such a council is far from the intervention of the executive power, and provides support to media institutions, enabling them to function at a higher degree of professionalism and in a free and protected environment.
4. MIFTAH invites media staff and journalists to prepare and sign a Declaration of Principles and Code of Conduct. This code includes principles to be agreed upon in terms of the need for objectivity, integrity, and accuracy in work, and giving professional considerations priority in media coverage and activities.