



'The Mecca Agreement and the National Unity Government'

The Third Report

Phase II

Media Monitoring Unit

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Introduction

In our first report on the 'Palestinian National Unity Government and Prospects for Peace' we monitored an important stage during which infighting between the two main factions, Fateh and Hamas had peaked, and caused the death of many victims, including civilians, from both sides. The first report covered the period between 1/9/2006 to 30/12/2006, during which The Monitoring Unit staff reviewed and analyzed the three major newspapers: Al-Quds, Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, as well as Palestine Television (PBC) over three months.

This report, entitled 'the Mecca Agreement and the National Unity Government' covers the period between 1/12/2007 to 31/3/2007, whose political and national developments were a continuation of the last quarter of last year. This period was very grave, as infighting, victims and bloodshed continued during the first two weeks of the current year, followed by political developments that ended with an agreement known as the Mecca Agreement, leading to the formation of the National Unity Government.

The report monitors and analyzes the coverage of the three newspapers Al-Quds, Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah, as well as Palestine Television (PBC), the Israeli, American and international positions towards the agreement and the Unity Government. We were particularly interested in these positions since forming a new government was a national Palestinian need, as well as an international demand replete with political conditions that had to be met in order that political and financial siege would be lifted off the Palestinian people.

The monitoring process was not easy because of the intensity and scale of the event at the field level internally, and of the declared positions of different states externally.

Infighting

The first week of the current year, when the Monitoring Unit started work, witnessed a violent turning point between Fateh and Hamas. The press, radio and television were not far from these events and their impact, contributing to extreme media and political discourse, and reflecting on the field in further vengeance, killing and targeting. Both rivals used all available tools in this conflict, including the above-mentioned media channels, spokespersons, and most senior politicians.

This media and political escalation is a continuation of the previous period, which witnessed field escalation, and to which the three newspapers allocated large space in covering its events, and adopted an almost unified policy, to convey news on events and on the ground while refraining from addressing core issues related to these events. News and reports continued in such coverage that treated the victims as mere figures, and lacked analysis, and information that citizens need. Such a coverage even lacked the humanitarian aspects and the grave impact of infighting on the lives of individuals, groups and the nation as whole.

In most cases, these newspapers covered the number of casualties and were particularly interested in the organizational and political affiliation of one party rather than the other. They also highlighted the organizational and political identities of parties involved in assaults and killings, but overlooked the identity of the other party that committed similar acts, describing them as 'unknown.'

Following is a sample of what newspapers published during that period:

Al-Ayyam: 4/1/2007 Front Page:

'Including three Preventive Security Members and a Fourth Fateh Activist'
(subheading)

'Five Citizens Killed and Armed Clashes Resume in Gaza'

On the same day, Al-Quds had almost the same heading:

'Resumed Assassinations and Abductions in Gaza' (subheading)

'5 victims including 3 Preventive Security Members and a Young Woman and Finding the Bodies of a Child and a Woman'

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah had the following headline on its front page:

'Disguised Persons Abduct Deputy Minister of Health in Al-Bireh' (in the corner)

'Five killed including three Preventive Security Members and a Young Woman in Tragic Clashes'

'Fateh and Hamas Agree Again on Restoring Calm in South Gaza Strip and Officer Taweel Released'

Victims are mere figures, as newspapers were interested in the daily scores of victims, but did not reflect their daily suffering. They relied on stories reported by the faction or organization of the victim, while readers were not informed of the circumstances of the killing of the woman or the child, and newspapers were not interested in the tragedy or the suffering of their families.

On 5/1/2007, Al-Ayyam published on its front page the following headline:

'Shooting at the Car of the Deputy Mayor of Nablus and setting the Islamic Club in Jenin on Fire'

It is worth noting that Al-Ayyam and Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah adopted the policy of concealing the political and factional identity of the abductors in the case of the Deputy Mayor, and the factional identity of the abducted; although they are known in both cases. The abductors were Fateh activists, and the abducted person belonged to Hamas; Hamas runs the Islamic Club of Ramallah, a fact both newspapers dismissed.

Hence, we face a unique situation of selectivity in addressing events, which deprived ordinary citizens from their right of access to full and sufficient information presented with objectivity and neutrality.

However, very few news reports covering these events were published during that period.

On 5/1/2007, **Al-Ayyam** published a report on page 5 by Asma'a Al-Ghoul entitled: ***'Gaza where Nothing Flourishes and Grows Except Death'***

Despite its importance, the heading is possibly not appropriate, as death is the opposite of flourishing and growth. Nevertheless, it reflects a prevalent reality in which the security disorder and infighting peaked, and therefore the heading sounds emotional, arouses sentiments and draws a gloomy picture in which death, rather than anything else, prevailed.

Was the media committed to neutrality and objectivity, and did it adopt a professional and optimistic discourse?

There was no indication of objectivity, neutrality or adoption of a professional and optimistic discourse in the media, the press in particular, towards infighting -as indicated in our previous reports.

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah had the following headline over eight columns on 5/1/2007:

'A Black Thursday in Ramallah and Gaza because of Occupation and Infighting' (in black font with red background)

'A Bloody Day in North Gaza: 7 Citizens Killed Including a Brigadier-General in the Preventive Security and 60 Others Wounded; The President and Haniyyeh Call for Calm, Withdrawal of Armed Persons off Streets and Resuming Dialogue'

On the same topic, the newspaper allocated large space for the coverage of Gaza events, and had the following heading on page 4:

'Gaza Under Fire of Civil War: 6 Killed and 45 Wounded in Clashes between Fateh and Hamas'

'Executive Force Assassinated Colonel Abu Al-Majd and his Escort, Wounded others during the Siege and Targeted his House with Rockets'

'6 Citizens Wounded by the Executive Fire during the Funeral of a Preventive Security Member in Deir Al-Balah'

'Besieging a Post for the Presidential Guard in Gaza and Abduction of a Hamas Leader in Assabra Quarters '

Headlines in Al-Ayyam were less sharp on that day:

'Gaza: 7 citizens Killed including a Colonel in Preventive Security, and 75 wounded in Clashes between Hamas and Fateh' P.1.

'Maghazi Refugee Camp: 6 Citizens Wounded in a Random Shooting during the Funeral of a Member of the Preventive Security' P.3.

Again, victims are treated as figures, and the organizational and political identity of the victims is asserted. This raises the question of neutrality, objectivity, and responsibility in news reporting. Amid such a grave situation, this may be considered incitement.

On 6/1/2007, the following heading appeared in P. 2 of Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah:

'Armed Persons Seriously Wound a Teacher in Farkha'

The newspaper did not mention the organizational and political affiliation of the teacher, although known, as the teacher is a Hamas activist shot by Fateh activists. The newspaper, however, did not mention that.

Alternately, another heading in the same newspaper appeared on P.2:

'Thousands March in the Funeral of Six Killed, Chant Slogans Opposed to Hamas and Executive Force in North Gaza'

The newspaper shows bias as it indicated and focused on Hamas and the Executive Force as the cause of death of the six citizens.

On 9/1/2007, Al-Quds published on its front page the following headline:

'The President is Concerned and Upset; Issued Orders to Prosecute Perpetrators'
(subheading).

'Institutions and Shops Set on Fire and Attempted Abduction in Ramallah and Bireh'

The 8-column report did not identify the affiliation of perpetrators. So did Al-Ayyam on 7/1/2007, which had the following heading on its front page:

'Shootings and Abductions in Nablus and Ramallah' Again, it did not mention the identity of the perpetrators, who were known members of Fateh and Al-Aqsa Martyrs Brigades.

On 13/1/2007, Al-Quds also published on P.2 a report from independent Ma'an News Agency under the following heading:

'They Crucified Him on the Wall and Killed Him'

'Sufyan Abu Zaydeh Narrates Details of the Attack on His House and the Moments when his Friend Mohammad Gharib was Killed'

There is nothing wrong about publishing such a report about an event that constituted a turning point in the infighting between Fateh and Hamas. Nevertheless, why were not other reports on similar incidents about killing innocent civilians published?

The coverage that highlighted specific incidents and overlooked others carried certain messages, amid accusations of lack of objectivity and neutrality against local press. Al-Quds newspaper published an article by Fateh PLC Member Issa Qaraqe' that raised serious questions about the circumstances that surrounded the assassination of Brigadier-General Gharib, and included strong criticism of the security services that did nothing to rescue him from an inevitable death.

Such articles and reports, that continuously questioned the reality of on-going events, were mostly necessary for citizens.

The scale of coverage of the three newspapers of the infighting during the period that preceded the Mecca Agreement and the formation of the National Unity Government, through reports, articles and cartoons, is explained by the fact that infighting escalated to a grave level that threatened civil peace. Alternately, the media coverage of the Israeli escalation in the West Bank, which included incursions, arrests and even assassinations decreased. Some newspapers considered the consequences of Gaza infighting similar to those of the Israeli occupation practices. Their coverage, however, gave priority to Gaza infighting and its repercussions in the West Bank, despite the gravity of Israeli practices, particularly in Jerusalem, where bulldozers embarked on pulling down Al-Magharbah Hill near Al-Aqsa. During that period, the three newspapers attempted to monitor the Israeli positions towards infighting, and were particularly keen on publishing Israeli assessments of the infighting published in Israeli media.

On 1/2/2007, Al-Quds published on its front page a report of the Israeli Shabak under the following heading:

'Shabak Report Predicts Infighting Would Not Stop'

In another report, ***'Israel Preparing for a War Scenario; Civil War and Massacres in the Strip, and Refugees Pouring to its Borders...'***

The newspaper did not cite a source, nor did it comment on or analyze the report, but sufficed in publishing Israeli evaluation and assessments that have often proved inaccurate and incredible.

Al-Ayyam published the same report, but under the following striking heading:
'Israel Plans to Rescue the Palestinian People from Internal Massacres'

Newspapers did not include any refutation or Palestinian commentary on these Israeli evaluations and assessments, possibly because the Palestinian press merely conveys, but

generally does not follow-up, analyze and verify information and reports, despite some variation between one newspaper and another.

The Mecca Agreement

The three newspapers extensively covered the deliberations and consultations that preceded the conclusion of the Mecca Agreement between Fateh and Hamas. This event, (just like infighting), dominated the press. Coverage was restricted to merely conveying developments, quotes and statements, mostly from international as well as local news agencies.

Despite the then on-going dialogue in Mecca, security disorder and infighting persisted. The three newspapers, however, played down their coverage and avoided the previous inflammatory language. This might have stemmed from a desire that such events would not affect the talks that Palestinians hoped would salvage them from infighting.

Exchange of accusations between Fateh and Hamas never stopped during that period. On the eve of the dialogue, Al-Ayyam published a report under the following heading:

'Mecca: Three Disputed Points and Three Points for Optimism'

The report quotes senior Fateh officials accusing Hamas of attempting to dominate security services prior to Mecca dialogue, in order to prove that it fully dominates Gaza and consequently will not conduct elections.

Furthermore, the three newspapers started to give more attention to Israeli excavations around Al-Aqsa Mosque, which concurred with Mecca dialogue, in a manner that led the newspapers to link both events. The excavations were described as the most serious since 1967 at the Palestinian level. Hence, as the newspapers were preoccupied with these two major events, their interest in the declining security disorder also receded.

On 7/2/2007, Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah published on P. 4 a news item under the following heading:

'Sheikh Tayseer Tamimi: Israel Commits a Massacre Against Civilization in Jerusalem'

It also published on the same page, a statement by Dr. Ahmad Bahr, PLC First Deputy Speaker, under the following heading:

'Dr. Bahr Warns of a Third Intifada and Calls Upon Negotiators to Agree on a Unity Government'

On 8/2/2007, Al-Ayyam published details of Mecca dialogue.

On its front page, Al-Ayyam had the following headline covering 6 columns:

'Negotiators in Mecca are Determined to Reach Agreement'

Under a main heading on P. 11, the newspaper wrote:

'The President at the opening session in Mecca: We will not leave until we Agree on the good; and we do not want black events to recur in Palestine'

Another heading on the same page was:

'Mash'al: We came to agree and have no choice but to agree. We will end internal conflict'

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah similarly wrote the following on 8/2/2007:

'The President and Mash'al: We will not leave this holy place except after agreement'

Al-Quds had the following headline on that day:

***'The National Consensus dialogue: Initiated in Mecca (subheading)
Abbas and Mash'al: No Room for Failure'***

On the other hand, the three newspapers highlighted the Israeli stand on the eve of the Mecca dialogue, but did not dig deep into analyzing and following up its background and dimensions.

The three newspapers quoted Israeli Prime Minister saying:

'Any Palestinian Government Must Honor the Quartet Principles'

They also quoted The Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni saying:

'The world will not accept a Palestinian government that does not renounce violence and recognize the right of Israel to exist'.

The newspapers also highlighted public reactions to Mecca dialogue, while its coverage was more inflammatory for the security disorder.

On 9/2/2007, Al-Ayyam wrote on the corner of its front page:

'Public celebration of the agreement'

Another heading written in red over eight columns on the same page:

'Mecca Agreement: National unity and political partnership; Appointing Haniyyeh to form the government and distribute portfolios'

The three newspapers contributed to preparing the public opinion then for a new phase of consensus, although such coverage was below expectations in terms of follow up and analysis of the dialogue and providing the audience with accurate information on the dialogue. The space and the headlines that the newspapers allocated increased the attention of ordinary citizens concerned with on-going events, in order to know whether the disputants agreed or not.

When the agreement was declared, Al-Quds summed up the state of public suspense and anticipation in the following headline in red covering eight columns.:

'...They Agreed'

Such a headline was apt and carried several connotations. Such headlines are rarely used over eight columns was it not for the significance of the event.

The newspaper highlighted Israeli, American and international positions through the following headings:

'The White House imposes conditions on the Palestinian government' P.1

'British Foreign Minister: the agreement is an important development' P.3

'Israel: The Palestinian Government must honor international principles' P.3

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah published the news over eight columns on its front page, with the following headline in red:

'The birth of the Unity Government in Mecca'.

'The President appoints Haniyyeh to form the new government and asks it to honor agreements.'

The newspaper published statements of senior officials at Mecca on P.2:

'The President: A new phase and a government capable of taking off'

'Mash'al: We will not let our people down and there will be no cover for any infighting'

Haniyyeh: We will live up to the responsibility and we will keep the promise'

Hence, the event imposed itself. The security disorder caused frustration, anger and anxiety during its bloody peak and was reflected in the news, reports and headlines of the three newspapers. The event related to Mecca Agreement on the other hand, created an atmosphere of optimism and hope that the newspapers reflected as well.

The observer of these developments notes a corresponding shift in the headlines and in the interests of the newspapers.

On 10/2/2007, Al-Ayyam reported public joy over the Mecca Agreement on P. 7, under the following heading:

'Fateh and Hamas members hug and exchange banners' (subheading)

'Gaza streets rejoice over Mecca Agreement'.

The newspaper also allocated large space for the responses that welcomed the agreement.

On P. 9, a news report was published about a child who was deprived from her grandparent's house in Jabaliya because of infighting, under the following heading:

'After infighting prevented her from visiting her family for over a month, Mecca Agreement enables child Hazar to go to her grandparent's house in Jabaliya'.

In fact, such reports and humanitarian features were absent, or even absented during the peak of the security disorder and even before, during stability and civil peace. Several explanations and justifications were given for this voluntary or dictated absence, some related to the media or advertising policies of each newspaper, and others related to correspondents and available incentives. Features are not common in local newspapers, possibly because they require knowledge and experience that many journalists lack.

After Mecca Agreement

The three newspapers widely covered the consultations and deliberations of forming the National Unity government and published many relevant objective news reports. They, nevertheless, published statements of officials and factions, rather than dug deeper in the backstage.

These newspapers continued to cover Mecca Agreement and its impact on citizens, and on enhancing civil peace, reconciliation, and unity.

Cartoons were particularly prominent. Newspapers, which constituted a platform for exchange of attacks between spokespersons and speakers of Fateh and Hamas, adopted a new discourse in a swift shift.

On 10/2/2007, Al-Quds published a cartoon of the Dome of the Rock surrounded by a wall, and a fist drawn on it, in an indication that unity is a fence that protects Jerusalem.



Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah published a cartoon by Umayya Jeha of two elderly Palestinians hugging with the following comment:

'Wipe your tears Um Mohammad; if the blood of our son Mohammad who was martyred in the damned sedition is a sacrifice for the unity of our people against the occupier, we will offer all our children for the sake of Palestine and Al-Aqsa.'

Despite the significance of the idea, the cartoon was too direct and the comment was too long. It looked like a news item written in slang, while content was too emotional and irrational: *'We will offer all our children for the sake of Palestine.'*

كفّني دمك يا أم محمد... لو كان دم ولدنا اللي استشهد
في هالفتنه الملعونه قريه لوحده شعبنا ضد المحتل ..
مشه لاح نبخل بلك اولادنا فدا فلسطينه و الأقصى



On 10/2/2007, Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah uniquely published a news report that included interviews with citizens from Gaza speaking about the impact of the Mecca Agreement on their economic conditions. The report had the following heading:

'Citizens in Gaza: Mecca Agreement will activate the economic cycle and resolve the problem of salaries'

Newspapers rarely cover such topics despite their importance and their relation to the political and economic conditions. Hence, addressing topics related to political developments was a good approach. Newspapers should have detected public reaction to the agreement and its impact on their daily life, rather than suffice with official and political statements.

The coverage of public optimism and support for the agreement was also accompanied by news reports that analyzed the agreement, a significant progress in newspapers' interests and approach.

Israeli, American and International Positions towards Mecca Agreement

The interest of Palestinian newspapers in the Mecca Agreement and its repercussions was also accompanied with an interest in Israeli, American and international positions in general.

It was not possible for the Palestinian media to ignore such positions because of their significant and direct impact on the Palestinian issue, the future of the National Unity Government that was formed later.

The media particularly focused on the Israeli position towards the agreement, through monitoring statements of Israeli officials, and linking them to the Israeli escalation against the Palestinian people on the ground. Such escalation included the excavations initiated on the eve of Mecca dialogue, and the preceding and subsequent incursions, arrests and even assassinations, which Palestinians interpreted as an Israeli attempt to influence negotiators in Mecca, and send the political message that Israel is the only decision-maker in all Palestinian affairs.

On the eve of the Mecca Agreement, Israeli officials were competing over giving relevant statements, and which occupied the headlines of the three newspapers.

On 8/2/2007, Al-Ayyam published the following statement by Olmert on its front page:

'Any Palestinian government must honor the principles of the quartet'

Similarly, Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah reported the same statement by Olmert.

On 8/2/2007, Al-Quds reported on p.2 the following statement of Israeli Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni:

'The world will not accept a Palestinian Government that does not renounce violence and recognize Israel's right to exist'

Newspapers merely conveyed Israeli statements and positions, some of which sounded like an attempt to blackmail and influence negotiators in Mecca.

On 10/2/2007, Al-Quds published the following statement on p. 2:

'Livni: Hamas does not represent Palestinian interests'

On the same page, the newspapers published the following statement by Shimon Peres:

'Details of the Agreement Must be Examined Thoroughly.'

It is worth noting that the three newspapers expressed interest in all Israeli positions, although it was restricted to statements of Israeli officials, rather than an analysis and a thorough examination of these positions, which is what the audience actually need amid overlapping circumstances in which external parties influence internal conditions.

On 10/2/2007, Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah reported on its front page the following Israeli position:

'Mecca Agreement does not satisfy conditions of the international community'

Another headline over eight columns on the front page was written in red:

'Israel responds to Mecca Agreement by storming Al-Aqsa Mosque'

It is normal for Palestinian newspapers to show interest in the Israeli position, as well as the political and field positions towards the agreement and to analyze them rather than simply state them, because of the impact of the agreement on the other side, Israel, which seemed to be keen on the continuation of Palestinian infighting. Hence, when Palestinians succeeded in striking the agreement, Israelis started their political blackmail to influence international positions.

On 11/2/2007, Al-Ayyam reported on its front page the following statement by Minister Avigdor Lieberman:

'Lieberman: The National Unity Government may give Hamas legitimacy'

In another heading on the same page:

'Peres: Hamas must recognize Israel'

It is noted that Palestinian newspapers reported conflicting statements of Israeli officials towards Mecca Agreement, but did not point out that such conflict was not over the fundamental Israeli position towards the National Unity Government that resulted from Mecca Agreement.

Israelis tried to maintain some ambiguity in their positions towards the Mecca Agreement. Hence, they were neither for the agreement nor against it. At best, they opted for waiting. The Palestinian media, however, did not analyze and follow up this position.

On 12/2/2007, Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah wrote on its front page:

'Reiterating Israel's demand that any Palestinian government accept the Quartet's conditions (subheading)

'Olmert prefers to wait before declaring a decisive position towards the Mecca Agreement'.

On the same day and over the same topic, Al-Ayyam had the following headline on its front page covering six columns:

'Olmert: We neither support nor oppose Mecca Agreement but we are studying It' (subheading)

'Washington examines dealing with non-Hamas ministers and Israel renews its demand to implement the Quartet's conditions'

An interest in American and international positions, particularly European, accompanied the interest in Israeli positions towards the Mecca Agreement and the National Unity Government. Newspapers reported these positions through a series of reports by news agencies and Israeli media, and which later proved inaccurate and incorrect.

On 16/2/2007, Al-Ayyam published the following headline, reported from Israeli media, on its front page over four columns and in red:

'Washington informs President of its decision to boycott all members of the National Unity Government'

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah reported the same news in the following manner:

'U.S. informs President of its decision to boycott the Unity Government because of its lack of commitment to the Quartet's conditions'.

Al-Quds published the main news on its front page, over four columns and in the following manner:

'President appoints Haniyyeh to form the Unity Government and the U.S. threatens to boycott it'

In another 4-column news item:

'No distinction between Fateh, Hamas and independent ministers'

'U.S. will boycott all Government Members if it does not respond to the three conditions'

It is noted that the three newspapers did not bother verify the news, but sufficed with reporting it from Israeli media, without identifying the nature of these sources or the media it is citing.

In fact, U.S. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice denied the news the next day. Palestinian newspapers published U.S. Secretary of State statements.

On 17/2/2007, Al-Quds had the following headline over eight columns:

'Rice denies U.S. refusal to deal with National Unity Government'

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah similarly declared:

'Washington: The Palestinian Government is judged after it is formed'

The newspaper, however, and in another place, reported from anonymous Israeli sources"

'Rice and Olmert upset with Abbas because of Mecca Agreement and appointment of Haniyyeh'

On its front page, Al-Ayyam had a headline that is similar to that of Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah:

'Diplomats: Washington will exert pressure on Fateh and independent figures to refrain from joining the Government'

Newspapers also continued to report American and Israeli positions based on inaccurate media reports, as was the case with Al-Ayyam, which published on 18/2/2007 on its front page, over four columns and in red:

'Olmert and Bush agree to boycott Palestinian Government unless it meets international conditions'

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah also reported the same news item using an almost similar heading. Al-Quds published on 19/2/2007 on its front page and over 8 columns the following headline:

'Rice abstains from identifying her country's position towards Mecca Agreement and denies Olmert's statements'

It also highlighted Olmert's relevant statements:

'Israel and the U.S. will boycott the Palestinian Unity Government'

These were followed by these statements attributed to Rice:

'Tax payers' money will not go to a government that does not recognize the Quartet's Principles.'

Newspapers simply reported from news agencies, Israeli media and even anonymous sources. The question is where is the role of the local journalist? Why don't we read for the correspondents of these newspapers?

Nevertheless, it can be said that the three newspapers kept abreast with the developments of the Israeli and American positions on the Mecca Agreement, which seemed identical, with some variation in expression.

Upon monitoring the Israeli and American positions, an ambiguous and timid political development was evident. Eventually, things became clearer, through selective positions that dictated further conditions on the National Unity Government. Israeli Minister of Defense Amir Peretz was more stringent than his Prime Minister. He said:

'There is no difference between Fateh and Hamas ministers in the Unity Government,' as reported in Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah on 20/2/2007 on the corner of the front page.

Al-Ayyam reported on its front page the following statement by Olmert, ***'We will continue dialogue with Abu Mazen, but will not deal with a government that does not meet conditions.'***

On 21/2/2007, Al-Quds published on its front page over eight columns the following headline, which seemed as further Israeli pressure on the National Unity government:

'We will not meet even with moderate ministers like Salam Fayyad.' (subheading)
Israel will not negotiate final status with Abbas if a partnership agreement with Hamas is implemented.'

The next day, Al-Quds was interested in the statements of Secretary of State Rice, in which she said that Washington would wait until the formation of the National Unity Government to take any decision.

With the hard-line Israeli stand towards Mecca Agreement and the Unity Government, the three newspapers highlighted the other side of the Israeli position towards this agreement, namely the Israeli escalation on the ground, which accelerated after Mecca Agreement. The violent invasion of Nablus, the series of assassinations and destruction, and the accompanying excavations around Al-Aqsa Mosque pushed Palestinians to link them to Israel's rejection of the agreement and its attempt to abort it.

Palestinian newspapers highlighted escalation and linked it to political developments that seemed at the time to have succeeded in overcoming the stage of infighting.

On 1/3/2007, Al-Quds published on its front page the following headline over 8 columns:

'Israeli army invades Nablus again; 20 citizens and 3 soldiers wounded' (subheading)
'Three Al-Quds Brigades leaders, including Ashraf Sa'adi, assassinated in Jenin Refugee Camp'

Another heading linked the Israeli escalation to Mecca Agreement on p. 12:

'Hani Al-Hasan: Israeli violations in Nablus and Jenin are an expression of the Israeli concern over Mecca Agreement'

In the end, it can be said that the three newspapers kept abreast of the American and Israeli positions towards the Mecca Agreement and the Unity Government until they became identical in dealing with half the Government, and refusing to deal with the other half that Hamas represents, an unusual position in international relations.

Their follow-up might not have been adequate, but was useful to the audience, as it enabled them to understand the motives behind such positions, and how Israelis and Americans dealt with a government that was supposed to adopt a clear program that met international conditions.

Hence, we found that newspapers followed up on the details of both positions: the American position on dealing with half the government following its formation, and the Israeli position to boycott the whole Government, exclude President Mahmoud Abbas from this boycott, and deal with him over certain issues, which the Israelis themselves described as humanitarian!

On 19/1/2007, Al-Ayyam pointed out the American position on its front page in the following headline over 3 columns:

'Washington: We will not negotiate with the Unity Government and do not rule out communicating with non-Hamas ministers'

In another heading in the same newspaper and same page:

'Dialogue with Abbas will be restricted to living conditions' (subheading)
Olmert's cabinet asserts the boycott of Unity Government and calls upon the international community to continue the Siege'

Al-Quds chose the following headline on its front page over 4 columns:

'American diversion from Israeli boycott of all Government members' (subheading)
Washington intends to contact non-Hamas ministers'

Mecca Agreement: European and International Positions

American and Israeli positions on the Mecca Agreement and the National Unity Government can be described as overlapping, intertwined and even complementary.

The only discrepancy in the positions of both sides on the National Unity Government is that the U.S.A. would deal with half the government, while the Israelis decided to

maintain contact only with President Mahmoud Abbas with no contact with the National Unity Government he had formed.

The American position towards the Mecca Agreement was cautious and conditional, sometimes ambiguous in a manner that explains the American reluctance to deal with the Government, and not to contribute to lifting the political and financial siege of the tenth Government led by Hamas.

These American positions hit the headlines of Palestinian newspapers, as mentioned earlier, as they highlighted many statements of U.S. officials and official declared positions. The media did not analyze these positions but simply published official Palestinian responses.

During that period, almost similar headlines were repeatedly used to express the American position towards the Mecca Agreement and the Unity Government.

International positions, particularly European, were to a large extent independent of those of Israel and the U.S.

The three newspapers highlighted the distinctive positions of European states in their headlines, including the U.K., the major U.S. ally and supporter of Israel, which Palestinians considered at the time a beginning of the fall of the political siege imposed on the Palestinian people.

On 19/2/2007, Al-Quds published on its front page the following headline:

'British foreign minister: The agreement is an important development,' in an indication to the Mecca Agreement.

On p. 2, the same newspaper had the following heading:

'European Union cautiously welcomes Mecca Agreement awaiting a Palestinian government that meets the Quartet's conditions'

On 10/2/2007, the following headline appeared on the front page over 4 columns:

'Paris: Mecca Agreement is a step towards recognizing Israel'

A third heading on the front page was:

'Mecca Agreement: The Quartet adopts a cautious and optimistic position pending the formation of the National Unity Government'

Hence, the headlines varied between cautious welcome and request for slowing down and waiting. The newspapers should have addressed and analyzed them, rather than merely convey them, particularly because separate policies of European states, as well as those of the political framework, the European Union (EU), govern these intertwined positions.

This needs some clarification to the audience who is interested in knowing the positions of these parties.

The newspapers detected the preliminary positions of European states towards the Mecca Agreement and the Unity government, and subsequently followed up on the positions that shifted from cautious welcome to attempts to dictate certain conditions. Some EU members and Quartet members adopted distinctive positions.

On 25/2/2007, Al-Ayyam reported the following statement by Javier Solana, The EU Commissioner-General for External Relations, on its front page:

'Solana: The EU will not meet Hamas ministers in the Unity Government'

Another heading at the corner reported that French Foreign Minister Douste-Blazy said:

'Blazy: We are ready to cooperate with a Palestinian Unity Government based on Mecca Agreement'

On 28/2/2007, Al-Quds published the following headline over 8 columns:

'Laverov: Mash'al pledged to stop violence against Israel and we informed him of Russia's support for the Mecca Agreement and for lifting the siege off the Palestinians'

Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah had on its front page:

***'Doubtful of resuming direct assistance to the PA in the short-Term (subheading)
EU: Unity Government will be evaluated through its deeds'***

Hence, we were facing ambiguous and fluctuating European positions, which the three newspapers did not point out, but merely conveyed, although headlines clearly showed such ambiguity.

On 5/3/2007, Al-Quds had the following heading on its front page:

***'Recognition of Israel postponed (subheading)
EU states may recognize the Palestinian Unity Government'***

On 10/3/2007, Al-Ayyam published another relevant heading:

'Europe is willing to work with a legitimate Palestinian government whose program reflects the Quartet's principles'

Another heading in the newspaper:

'Paris: We will cooperate with Fayyad and Abu Amro but will notd with Hamas ministers'

On 12/3/2007, Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah addressed the issue from a different perspective, with the following headline on its front page:

'A major blow to Israeli diplomacy (subheading)

'Europe will relinquish the condition of Israel's recognition by Unity Government'

Hence, the three newspapers pointed out European positions as reported by the media, and expressed interest in these positions, reflected in their selection of headings, some of which were reasonable, while others were flashy. Was Europe's waiver of the condition of recognizing Israel a major blow to Israeli diplomacy as Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah declared, and if this was true, how and why didn't the newspaper give the topic sufficient analysis and follow up, and link it to international and regional political developments that might have dictated such positions?

Giving sufficient attention to these positions within the available resources for the newspapers is useful for citizens who are keen on following up on the repercussions of the Mecca Agreement, particularly on their daily life.

Attention to European positions was evident in Al-Hayat Al-Jadidah on 19/3/2007, in the following heading:

'Haniyyeh received Norwegian Foreign Minister:

The Siege Wall is breaking down: Americans and Europeans Agree to wait for government decisions'

On 18/3/2007, Al-Quds highlighted the Norwegian position towards the National Unity Government on p. 2, under the following heading:

'Oslo recognized the new government and cooperates with the Hamas-Fateh coalition'

The Norwegian recognition constituted an important development at the level of international recognition and cooperation with the new government, unlike American and European positions of dealing with half the government, i.e. Fateh ministers and continuing the boycott against Hamas and its ministers. It is worth noting that the three newspapers neither analyzed nor commented on the Norwegian position, although they were supposed to address it thoroughly.

Palestine Television (Palestine Broadcasting Corporation-PBC)

No significant change occurred in the coverage by Palestine Television (PBC) of the daily events and developments and their internal political and security impact on the Palestinian territories, particularly Gaza Strip, during the monitored period.

PBC continued its old approach, mentioned in our previous report entitled 'Palestinian National Unity and Prospects for Peace,' of transmitting bloody images of victims, with one slight difference, that these were not victims of Israeli shooting, but of Fateh and Hamas fighting.

PBC continued to address victims as figures, with the President's news always taking the lead in news bulletins. Celebrations of Fateh Anniversary on 1 January occupied a large

space, through transmission of celebrations and songs that commend it, in addition to programs produced for the occasion.

Infighting

With the aggravation of infighting, PBC dedicated all its resources for live transmission of such infighting, its developments and outcome. The President's news and activities retreated to a second rank of interest, in favor of live transmission, voice reports of PBC Gaza correspondents, or live images of killed and wounded casualties. PBC also gave frequent news flashes about dead or wounded casualties, causing confusion, and further infighting and reactions.

The language and the terminology used in writing reports and news were obviously biased for one party against the other. News bulletins often included hideous footage of infighting or victims. 'The martyr' became a description granted for death casualties of infighting. 'Execution' was alternately used to describe killing of members of the Preventive Security.

Examples:

In the 7:00 p.m. local news bulletin on 14/1/2007, PBC broadcast the following news item:

Two citizens martyred and another two wounded in the continued exchange of fire between Fateh and Hamas'

The same bulletin had the following news item:

'The 'execution' of three Preventive Security members with Executive Force fire'

News flashes poured on that day that witnessed violent clashes between Fateh and Hamas.

PBC broadcast the following news item at 7:50:

The 'martyrdom' of Colonel Mohammad Gharib after the Executive Force surrounded him and targeted him with an RPG shell.

Then PBC started to broadcast the last words that 'martyr' Mohammad Gharib said live a while before he was killed. PBC repeated those words more than once.

It was odd, though, that PBC broadcast the following news flash at 9:00 pm the same evening:

'Conflicting news about the martyrdom of Colonel Mohammad Gharib, while his two daughters were martyred and his wife seriously wounded'

It is very important to slow down and verify news before transmission. It is also important that hasty transmission of such news does not cause further agitation, reprisal

and killings. Mohammad Gharib was not an ordinary citizen, but a senior official, and his murder caused a violent wave of reactions. The period between the first dispatch of news, retreating and speaking about conflicting news on his murder was a very important and serious period that could have caused the death of more victims.

At another level, such coverage was obviously biased to one party rather than the other. There was an obvious bias in favor of Fateh and the security services, transmitting their point of view and excluding the other. The following news item was broadcast on 4/1/2007 at 9:00 p.m.

'Fateh parliamentarian bloc holds Hamas responsible for the series of disorder that led to the death of three Preventive Security members'

Why didn't PBC provide Hamas' point of view of on-going events? Why was their story excluded?

During that period, PBC coverage of Israeli measures and violations receded, and focused on infighting, not only in news bulletins, but also in political programs and interviews to which PBC allocated wide space.

The other side of the conflict was obviously excluded from programs and interviews. We failed to explain such an exclusion, although some attributed it to the rejection of Hamas officials to cooperate with PBC staff and news programs. Example: 'Liqa Khas' (Special Encounter) talk show, by Ra'fat Al-Qidreh, was entitled 'the regretful events between Fateh and Hamas and their repercussions on the Palestinian situation and the National Unity Government.' It hosted Kamal Sharafi, the President's advisor on human rights affairs, member of the National and Islamic Forces Monitoring Committee in Gaza; Rabah Mhanna, DFLP Political Bureau member and member of the Monitoring Committee, and Abdul Hakim Awad, Fateh spokesperson –Monitoring Committee member as well. The program did not host a representative of Hamas, the other side of the equation. Why was the latter excluded?

Furthermore, in the same evening, and in a program called 'Al-Mawqif Assiyasi' (the political position), broadcast at 9:42 p.m., the deteriorating security conditions and violations of the Executive Force in Gaza were discussed, and the following was concluded:

- This force has become illegal.
- It pointed its arms at Palestinians and used them for killing and assassination.
- They are under the command of Minister of Interior Sa'id Siyam and are described as the 'hard club' that Hamas uses to rule.

On 18/1/2007, PBC broadcast a special program entitled 'the Executive Force: Conflict and Infighting,' which included reactions on the previous decision of President Abbas to merge this force into the security services.

During that period, news bulletins were biased, and included incitement against Hamas, held responsible for all on-going events.

In its 7:00 p.m. local news bulletin on 9/1/2007, the following news item took the lead:

'Fateh asserted its total rejection of the peculiar concept of national unity that Hamas adopts, and which led to the failure of the Unity Government'

In the meantime, PBC was frequently broadcasting songs that commend Fateh and President Mahmoud Abbas, and allocated larger space for programs about the launching of Fateh. It often broadcast the following songs: 'ya habib asha'b' (the beloved of the people), written for President Mahmoud Abbas, and 'Ala Darbak ya Abu Ammar' (in your footsteps Abu Ammar).

PBC did not cover the activities of the tenth Hamas Government led by Haniyyeh, and gave a lot of space for Fateh officials and spokespersons. News bulletins also highlighted results of poll surveys that concluded that Fateh was advancing ahead of Hamas.

During the period of infighting between Fateh and Hamas, PBC news bulletins pointed out security disorder events related to assaults against local and Arab media institutions, such as the assault against Al-Arabiya offices. The 7:00 p.m. local news bulletin on 21/1/2007 broadcast the following news item:

'The Union of Palestinian Journalists held an emergency meeting tonight at its Gaza headquarters to discuss recent developments in light of the assault a criminal rogue group perpetrated against Al-Arabiya channel office in Gaza City' etc.

Obviously, the accusations were against Hamas and its members, with no mention of the security investigations and their outcome.

This assault constituted rich material for the exchange of accusations. PBC broadcast in the same evening 'Al-Mawqif Assiyasi' (the political position) talk show, hosting Saleh Ra'fat, PLO Executive Committee member, and by phone Nabil Amro, political advisor to President Abu Mazen, while it did not host any official from Hamas Government.

The anchor interrupted one of his guests, pointing accusations at a specific party:
'Consequently there is a trend that does not want the truth to come out clearly.'

This comment by the anchor is an unjustified intervention in the dialogue, and an attempt to divert the guests' responses in a certain direction, i.e. accusations against Hamas.

Moreover, the footage of the Ba'alousha children constituted daily material for PBC. These hideous pictures constituted clips for national songs, together with the voices of women extending condolences to the mother and demanding punishment.

The use of the pictures of victims, particularly children, in this way possibly exceeded the limits of emotions, and transformed sorrow and anger over their murder into sentiments of revenge and reprisal during a period that warned of more victims.

During that period of infighting, PBC constituted an important source of news and reports, and had a large audience, at least in the Gaza Strip, the main battlefield that witnessed these bitter and cruel events. It did not change the approach of its field coverage, despite its importance and the role it could have played. The severity, violence and bloodiness of infighting and the civilian casualties require special attention towards the victims and their families. Broadcasting bloody images gravely hurts feelings, and seriously agitates sentiments of anguish that often transform into reprisal.

Chronicle of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict:

As infighting receded, PBC increased space allocated for **the Palestinian-Israeli conflict**, particularly the Israeli incursions of cities, villages, towns and refugee camps, and the accompanying assassinations and arrests.

PBC also resumed broadcasting some social and educational programs, such as 'Iftah li Qalbak' (Open Your Heart), a program that addresses a variety of social and economic issues.

While PBC was interested in Israeli excavations in Al-Magharbah Hill adjacent to Al-Aqsa Mosque, several programs and talk shows criticized the Government severely, which was unusual towards previous governments in which Hamas did not participate.

Furthermore, with the Israeli escalation, that was simultaneous with Mecca dialogue, and the formation of the National Unity Government, interest in infighting decreased, a similar trend observed in the press.

During that period, PBC did not change its means to address the conflict with Israel, through its news, footage or reports. Harsh and bloody scenes continued to characterize PBC.

On 3/1/2007, PBC broadcast at 10:47 an interesting report about Rafah City entitled 'The Impact of Occupation and Siege on Rafah City and How it is Transformed into a Ghost City.'

The report broadcast images of economic, human and social destruction, in addition to images of shelling, destruction of houses and shops and armed Palestinians.

The most striking image was that of children playing with plastic guns with the following comment in the background:

'Children are waiting for their turn to hold real arms.'

We do not know what message this report intended to convey. Despite the importance of the images of massive destruction the Israeli Army inflicted on the lives of people who lost their homes, was it necessary or beneficial to have the above-mentioned text about children waiting in turn to hold real guns?

The text may be interpreted as incitement, as why would a child dream of a gun and his other dreams be excluded? It may support Israeli claims that Palestinians only raise their children to become combatants.

This does not mean that PBC did not have other programs of an educational nature. It is worth noting that PBC lacks programs that give attention to children, women, and other social groups, who try to practice normal life despite the difficult and bitter reality.

It is worth noting that PBC widely covered Jerusalem events and excavations in Al-Aqsa Mosque, monitoring events and conveying reactions. It also allocated several programs and seminars to highlight the importance of Jerusalem, using several national songs such as 'Al-Aqsa Yunadeek'(Al-Aqsa calls on you), "Al-Quds" (Jerusalem), "Baladi Sajeen' (My country is imprisoned) and 'Shiddi Ya Ard Al-Izza' (Stand up the land of pride).

It is noted that PBC used songs to serve the current event, while it used to broadcast only songs that glorified the President (ya habib asha'b: Beloved of the people) and Fateh.

There is a need to observe some religious programs, such as 'Deen wa Akhlaq' (Religion and Ethics), which despite their importance, adopt a discourse that may be considered incitement and a call for Jihad, which has currently become a synonym for targeting civilians. This was particularly noted in the episode of 10/2/2007, broadcast at 7:20.

The speaker said, 'We must not commit the same mistake that Bani Israel (Israelites) committed, since God gave them Jerusalem but they did not attend to it.' He added, 'It is Jeopardizing to abandon Jihad for the sake of God, and this Palestinian jeopardy of today is the result of abandoning God's orders.'

PBC also allocated large space of its live coverage to reactions on Israeli excavations, though broadcasting images footage of these excavations and their gravity, such as 'Kalam Masmouh' (permitted talk), 'Sarkhat Al-Aqsa' (Al-Aqsa appeal) and 'Yawm Al-Quds' (the day of Jerusalem).

Mecca Agreement and the National Unity Government

PBC covered the consultations preceding the Mecca Agreement and the subsequent dialogue that resulted in the formation of the National Unity Government, the way it covered infighting and conflict with the Israelis.

The language and terminology used in the PBC news bulletins changed in light of these developments. The live programs, open interviews and seminars adopted a calmer and less inciting discourse, which was normal and predictable in light of the improvement in internal relations.

PBC, however, and just like the press, linked in its news coverage the Israeli escalation to the declaration of the Mecca Agreement and the formation of the National Unity Government. Palestinian reports focused on reactions that considered the Israeli escalation an attempt to abort internal Palestinian reconciliation.

With the internal calm, PBC broadcast some targeted political and social programs, which broke the routine of its programs that were usually restricted to political issues, including the news reports that focused on disorder, Mecca consultations and the Unity Government.

Broadcasting political programs such as 'Masirat Thawra' (The march of a revolution), which consisted of many long episodes that focused on the PLO and its historical role was not mere coincidence. It was broadcast at a very important timing, amid heated discussions of the representation of the PLO, the need to include Hamas and Islamic Jihad, and also amid doubts regarding such representation and calls for activating, restructuring and reformulating PLO. This came in the wake of the sudden and massive accession of Hamas to authority, the deterioration of PLO factions and their concern over the domination of the Palestinian political system by this fundamental movement and its increasing impact on the lives of people. This program was intended to assert the existence and prominence of the PLO in the long history of struggle in a manner that cannot be overlooked.

PBC also witnessed a variety in its programs, and an openness towards the other, Hamas, as it hosted for the first time the Prime Minister of the tenth Palestinian Government Ismail Haniyyeh in 'Khat Ahmar' (Red Line) on 10/3/2007 at 7:37 pm. This constituted a shift in the PBC policy, which previously used to cover anti-government activities, particularly the strike of employees in the public sector.

With the improvement, namely the formation of the Unity Government, and after this interview, PBC started to cover the news and activities of the Prime Minister and his Government, which ranked second after the President's news.

On 14/2/2007, PBC even went further as it hosted Khaled Mash'al, the head of Hamas Political Bureau, at 'Khat Ahmar' (Red Line) at 7:45 pm, an unusual step towards a controversial figure such as Mash'al, particularly within the ranks of Fateh and the Presidency, who perceived him as an obstacle to any internal agreement between Fateh and Hamas.

This new approach adopted by the PBC constituted a turning point towards an objective coverage of events. PBC, however, continued to grant wider coverage of Fateh and the Presidency.

Regarding talk shows on internal political topics, PBC repetitively hosted the same persons, such as Qays Abu Layla, Hani Al-Masri, Nabil Amro and Azzam Al-Ahmad, particularly on the program 'Ma Wara' Al-Hadath' (Beyond the event).

Coverage during that period lacked a monitoring of American, Israeli and European positions towards the Mecca Agreement and the Unity Government, neither in news bulletins nor in political talk shows.

The lack of interest in the position of the other side and its reaction towards Mecca Agreement and the Unity Government was obvious.

The PBC news bulletins included only one statement by Olmert on 14/2/2007 in which he declared, *'The unity agreement has a major impact on the future of the Middle East.'*

We could not find in the PBC new bulletins the many statements we read in the press.

On 15/3/2007, we read the following statement by the Israeli Foreign Minister on the news strip regarding the Israeli position towards the Unity Government:
'Israeli Foreign Ministry announced that Israel will not deal with the new Palestinian Government.'

We found only Palestinian reactions to the Israeli positions, most prominently that of the PLO Executive Committee, broadcast on the evening of 19/3/2007, and which expressed its rejection of the Israeli position towards the new Unity Government and called upon the international community to end the political and economic siege.

The only detailed reference to the Israeli and American position towards the Mecca Agreement and the Unity Government in PBC was on 20/3/2007, at 8:15, where guest Nabil Amro explained the American, Israeli and European positions and how the new Government must address the World.

Strangely enough, the PBC did not present the Israeli analysis of the official position in Israel towards the internal Palestinian developments.

Finally, in addition to the PBC songs that glorify the President, Fateh, National Unity, Jerusalem and Al-Aqsa, they added a song that commended the kingdom of Saudi Arabia for its role in the Mecca Agreement. It was entitled 'Saudia' and was added to several other songs named 'Min Falasteen Alf Tahiya' (from Palestine a thousand greetings), 'Alli Al-kaffieh' (Raise the Kaffieh 'traditional head cover' high) and 'Wihdetna Alfalastiniyeh' (Our Palestinian Unity). PBC broadcast these songs two or three times within a short period of transmission.

It seemed that these songs served a political purpose. The songs were mixed with the usual TV footage on Israel, infighting and also Mecca Agreement and the National Unity Government.

Findings

- ✓ The three newspapers allocated a lot of coverage to events related to the security disorder, the consultations that preceded the Mecca Agreement, and subsequent developments, particularly the National Unity Government. They highlighted these topics in the main headlines and internal pages, relying on field correspondents as well as local and foreign news agencies. Nevertheless, their coverage constituted mere conveyance of events rather than an in-depth address of their repercussions and consequences.
- ✓ The three newspapers adopted an editing policy that was clearly biased in favor of one party against the other, which undermined their professionalism, particularly in field events, where the story of one party dominated the counter story.
- ✓ The three newspapers dealt with victims of security disorder as mere figures, continuously pointing out the numbers of daily casualties of infighting, or confrontation with Israel. They adopted a certain policy towards the organizational and political identity of victims, as they did not mention the identity of one group, but focused on victims belonging to the security services and Fateh. The newspapers adopted a different policy towards the victims of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict; as resistance-fighters, they pointed out their identity regardless of whether they belonged to Fateh or to Hamas.
- ✓ Specialized reports on local social, cultural and economic issues were absent. Reports of a human nature about the infighting or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict were also absent. Alternately, the newspapers merely covered political events. Nevertheless, very few reports of this type were published.
- ✓ During the peak of infighting, the three newspapers were transformed into media battlefields for politicians and media persons from both disputant parties. It should be noted that Fateh spokespersons and political leaders were given double the space allocated to their counterparts from Hamas. The three newspapers were particularly keen on highlighting the positions and activities of the Presidency, a policy they had adopted for years, and not only during those three months.
- ✓ Cartoons gained a special status in the three newspapers. They succeeded in portraying an important and grave phase, and expressing it in a more comprehensive, objective and credible manner than news and reports. The performance of the newspapers was much better in cartoons, as these expressed the real public mood.
- ✓ Electronic media, particularly news websites constituted main sources of news and reports published in the newspapers during that period, in addition to foreign media, from which the newspapers took reports and subjects. The role of local journalism in following up on events and developments receded. This may be attributed to several reasons, such as the absence of financial incentives to

- correspondents and reporters, the easy access to information on the web, or in satellite channels that broadcast live. This affected the role, performance and even neutrality of journalists. Moreover, the then prevalent security and political conditions were threatening to journalism.
- ✓ The three newspapers contributed indirectly to stirring up emotions and creating a situation of internal agitation following the disorder that spread in Gaza Strip, through their scale of coverage, their headlines and even their discourse. Cartoons were unique in adopting a milder approach than the exchange of statements the newspapers reported.
 - ✓ The three newspapers positively granted wide and comprehensive coverage of the Mecca Agreement and the National Unity Government, following up on details of the Israeli, American and European positions towards these political developments.
 - ✓ The bloody events in Gaza Strip received the widest coverage in programs and in the field reports of PBC, which uniquely followed up events through a network of reporters in the Strip.
 - ✓ During that period of coverage, the PBC presented many news flashes that were extremely inaccurate and lacked objectivity. Its media discourse was replete with agitation, particularly as it broadcast images of victims, infighting, shooting, and the targeting of individuals and institutions.
 - ✓ Cruel scenes of victims recurred, occupying significant time of PBC transmission, particularly those of the Ba'alousha children, exploiting them in agitation and causing further incitement and infighting.
 - ✓ PBC programs constituted mostly of open political shows that were event-oriented. Hence, these programs covered the security disorder, then covered Mecca Agreement and the Unity Government, which was a good approach. These programs, however, hosted the same figures, were detail oriented and witnessed continuous interventions by the anchor or the interlocutor who adopted an approach that may be described as biased.
 - ✓ PBC did not follow up on the American, European and Israeli positions towards the field and political developments in Gaza Strip, particularly the disorder, Mecca Agreement and the Unity Government.
 - ✓ PBC did not indicate these positions in its news bulletins or programs, a major shortcoming we could not explain.
 - ✓ PBC lacked reports of a humanitarian nature, touching on the social and economic suffering of citizens, except for a few important programs, such as 'Aqdam Aliya' (High Feet) and other cultural and educational programs, in addition to religious programs. We assert our previous observation that PBC programs were event oriented.
 - ✓ Some PBC scenes, reports and programs include insinuations that may be interpreted as incitement or a call for targeting civilians.

Recommendations

- ✓ To develop the professional performance and build the competence and capacity of the staff in the press and visual media (the three newspapers and PBC).
- ✓ To urge the editors-in-chief and policy makers of the three newspapers and PBC to be objective in their news coverage, avoid agitating and inciting headlines, grant wider space for the other opposing opinion, and publish stories that are more balanced.
- ✓ Call upon newspapers to grant more space for cartoons, which proved to be representative of the reality of public mood and opinion. The editor or the editor-in-chief must not censure cartoons or ban publishing.
- ✓ PBC must stop broadcasting cruel and hideous images of victims of the infighting and of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. It should also stop using those images, particularly of children, for political purposes, or use them as clips for songs.
- ✓ PBC and the press must allocate wider space for humanitarian and social reports. PBC must broadcast new programs of a different quality, and the press must allocate pages to address the issues and problems of citizens, and promote a culture of reconciliation and civil peace.
- ✓ Stop addressing victims as mere figures and dehumanizing them. Each victim is a whole life per se.
- ✓ Provide financial incentives and job tenure in the media. This contributes to motivating staff to excel in their work and provides them with a mechanism for legal protection.