



“The three newspapers’ coverage of the executions carried out in Gaza”

MIFTAH

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On April 15, 2010, the interior ministry of the deposed government in Gaza carried out the first executions issued by the higher military court in the Strip against two people charged with collaboration with the Israeli occupation. Another execution was carried out on the 18th of May against three men convicted of murder.

The executions, which took place without ratification by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas, generated varying reactions from Palestinian factions, especially Fateh and also from human rights organizations working in Gaza.

These two incidents received varying coverage in the three newspapers. The editorial lines were clear for each newspaper towards internal events linked in one way or the other to the internal political split and the ramifications of this split on the local media.

In its coverage of the first execution, Al Ayyam gave it the lead headline (three lines) in its April 16, 2010 edition, appearing as the following:

**Despite the lack of a presidential ratification and opposition from rights organizations
“The deposed government” executes two people on charges of collaboration
with the occupation and being accomplices in the murder of citizens**

على الرغم من عدم مصادقة الرئيس ومعارضة مؤسسات حقوقية

المقالة تُعدم شخصين أداهُما بالتخابر مع الاحتلال والاشتراك في قتل مواطنين

In the subtle, included in the main headline, the newspaper highlighted a key issue related to carrying out the death sentence, which is that the president did not ratify the decision – this makes it illegal and illegitimate. It also linked this to the opposition from rights organizations against the executions, which means it is also illegitimate and in violation of international law from the viewpoint of these institutions.

In terms of the terminology used, we found that Al Ayyam chose the phrase “**The deposed [government] executes two people**” in its lead headline without pointing to the fact that the execution was carried out according to a decision issued by the higher military court. The text itself pointed to written press statements distributed by the president of the deposed military Justice Colonel Ahmad Atallah. The reader of the headline as it appeared in Al Ayyam gets a first impression that the execution was implemented without a trial and without a decision from a higher military court specialized in such serious issues. It seems here that the internal Palestinian division has still left an impact on the local media and the way it handles events in either side of the homeland. This then reflects on the editorial policies of these media outlets and the messages it wants to convey to its readership or to local public opinion. The previous headline could be replaced with an alternative one that reads something like this:

The president didn't ratify it and rights organizations opposed it...

The interior ministry of the deposed government carries out the execution of two people charged with collaboration with the occupation.

In addition to the lead headline in Al Ayyam about these two people's executions, the newspaper also printed a five-column picture of citizens participating in March in Nablus in solidarity with prisoners in Israeli prisons. This was confusing between the main headline and then the picture of the prisoners' families because the newspaper gave precedence to the execution of two people charged with collaboration over popular marches calling for the release of prisoners.



ال庶民 من المواطنين يشاركون في مسيرة جماهيرية في نابلس، أمس، تضامناً مع الأسرى في سجون الاحتلال الإسرائيلي.

Front page as it appeared in the newspaper:

الإيادى

الراى ينضم إلى التحالف ضد إسرائيل

بيان تزويدها جزءاً من المذكرة

على الرغم من عدم حصله على الرؤوس وعازفاته، يُعذّب

الراى تنشر بقية التفاصيل

بيان تزويدها جزءاً من المذكرة

على الرغم من عدم حصله على الرؤوس وعازفاته، يُعذّب

مسيرات جماهيرية تدعوا إلى تحرك فاعل لإنفراج عن الأسرى من سجون الاحتلال

الراى تنشر بقية التفاصيل

أميركا تدعم أمام مجلس الأمن قيام دولة فلسطينية مستقلة على أساس حدود ١٩٦٧

الراى تنشر بقية التفاصيل

أولمرت محتمم الرئاسي في أكبر قضية فساد في تاريخ إسرائيل

الراى تنشر بقية التفاصيل

أوباما أبلغ ساركوزي : سأواصل الضغط على إسرائيل حتى لو دفعت ثمناً سياسياً داخلياً

الراى تنشر بقية التفاصيل

فياض يحذّر مسؤولين دوليين من عواقب الأمر العسكري الإسرائيلي، يجب الزام إسرائيل بالغائه

الراى تنشر بقية التفاصيل

أموريسم : البرازيل والهند وجنوب إفريقيا يمكنها مساعدة الرياعية على الخروج من المسار

الراى تنشر بقية التفاصيل

تظاهرات ضد اطلاق اسم بن غوريون على ساحة في باريس

الراى تنشر بقية التفاصيل

ساركوزي لسيسي : الدولة الفلسطينية ضحى لأن إسرائيل

الراى تنشر بقية التفاصيل

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However, in its May 19, 2010 edition Al Ayyam stood apart from Al Quds and Al Hayat Al Jadida in its coverage of the second executions of three citizens convicted of murder in that it published a three-column report on the left-hand side of its front page by its Gaza correspondent where the headline corresponded with the text. In its sub-headline, just like it had done in the coverage of the first executions, it also highlighted that the president had not ratified the decision. It even went further this time by linking the opposition of rights groups to the executions with the lack of presidential ratification only:

Rights groups oppose the lack of a presidential ratification
The deposed government carries out executions by firing squad against three criminal prisoners

The newspaper also chose to highlight the method of execution, which was “**the firing squad**” without indicating to the charges against those who were executed, sufficing with a description of them as “**criminal prisoners**.”

A simple comparison between the two headlines of the newspapers concerning the first and second executions shows a discrepancy from the newspapers’ editors in dealing with events like this in particular. We saw how in the first incident, the editor used the phrase “**executed**” while indicating to the conviction of collaboration with the occupation and participation in the murder of citizens. In the second incident, it used the phrase “**carries out the execution sentence**” without pointing to the charges they were convicted for. The newspaper sufficed to say that they were “**three criminal prisoners**.”

Hence, we found that it would have been more appropriate if the newspaper used an alternative title such as this:

The President did not ratify it...
The deposed government carries out the execution of three people convicted of murder

In covering the second executions and following up on the reactions to it, the newspaper expanded on its coverage, especially in terms of the rights organizations. The newspaper’s correspondent kept to the organization’s statements verbatim in terms of phrases used about the executioners and in their portrayal of the positions of other parties related to the case such as the interior ministry of the deposed government and the statements from deputy PLC speaker Ahmad Bahar, who defended the legitimacy of carrying out the executions. He also defended the legality of the judicial procedures and the legal standards that were followed at every stage. He detailed these procedures starting from the men’s arrests, through the trials and verdict up until the executions, according to the reportage in Al Ayyam.

However, what is noticeable this time is that Al Ayyam did not include any reactions from Palestinian factions or forces, not even from the president or government about the carrying out of the executions. This begs the question of whether there were such reactions and why the newspaper did not use them. And if such reactions were not published, why didn’t the newspaper’s correspondents follow up on this and try to get these reactions on their own.

Front page after re-editing



Al Hayat Al Jadida on the other hand, chose completely different headlines from Al Ayyam in its coverage of the first executions. This is apparent in the headline of its report on the left-hand side of its front page over three columns, which also clearly reflected the impact of the internal divisions, appearing as follows:

**Fateh considers executions as extrajudicial
Hamas executes citizens and rights organizations
Denounce and consider it a violation of the Basic Law**

**فتح وصفت التنفيذ بالجريمة الخارجة عن القانون
حماس تعدم مواطنين ومنظمات حقوقية
تدین وتعتبره انتهاكا للقانون الأساسي**

In the abovementioned headline, the newspaper first and foremost cared to highlight Fateh's position on the execution, which it described as extrajudicial. Hence, it gave exclusivity to Fateh's position over the other positions including reactions from rights organizations.

Furthermore, the headline points to Hamas as the party that carried out the executions while the party that carried out the verdict was the deposed government's interior ministry in Gaza and not Hamas as a movement or party, even if they rule the government there. Hence, the issue, as it appears from the headlines, looks as if it is about "**Fateh and Hamas**" and not an issue of public opinion and human rights. Just like Al Ayyam, Al Hayat Al Jadida also used the term "**executed**" and did not point to the fact that what happened was the carrying out of a verdict issued by the higher military court in Gaza. Hence, another headline would have been preferable with phrases that better express the reality and which do not underplay the positions of other parties including Fateh and human right organizations. It should also include the part about the President not ratifying the decision, which we put in the alternative headline and which also appeared in Al Ayyam, such as:

**The President didn't ratify it...rights organizations condemned it
Carrying out executions against two Gazans convicted of collaboration with the occupation
and with causing the death of two citizens**

In its April 16, 2010 edition, we find within the text of the article that Al Hayat Al Jadida's report refers again to the Hamas movement – and not the deposed government's interior ministry – as the party that carried out the sentencing. The newspaper began its article by saying, "**The Hamas movement said yesterday that it carried out the executions by firing squad against two Palestinians convicted by a military court in Gaza last year of collaborating with Israel.**" In reality, **Hamas** did not issue any statement in this regard, announcing the executions. This was done by security sources from the deposed government in the Gaza Strip. In spite of this, Al Hayat Al Jadida printed in another spot: "**the Hamas interior ministry – that is, the Hamas movement – said the execution was carried out by firing squad.**"

Anyone examining the wording of the report will find that the newspaper twisted some of the words from statements about the party carrying out the executions. The newspaper began the

report with what happened with Hamas and then offered another misleading phrase when it said the interior ministry of Hamas and not of the deposed government.

What is noticeable is the way the newspaper opened its coverage of this event by highlighting that Hamas is the party that carried out the execution. It made sure to confirm this through highlighting the reactions from rights organizations that condemned the executions, by changing the wording of these organization's statements. They quoted the organizations saying that, **"Hamas violated the law by carrying out the executions without the approval of President Mahmoud Abbas."** Hence, we find that Al Hayat Al Jadida drops any mention of the deposed government and of the executive bodies in control of the Gaza Strip including the military courts, which the newspaper describes as being Hamas-affiliated.

Here, we are including text from the report issued by the Palestinian Independent Commission [for civilian rights] that points to the executions by the deposed government's interior ministry without mentioning Hamas:

"The Interior Ministry of the deposed government carried out two executions over the period covered in the report in the following manner:

- On 15/4/2010 the interior ministry of the deposed government carried out the execution of citizen (N.S.F), 33 years old, from Azbat Abed Rabbo in the northern Gaza district by way of firing squad. According to PICCR information, the higher military court in Gaza City issued a death sentence by firing squad on 22/2/2009 against the convicted man with a charge of treason and accessory to murder.

- On 15/4/2010 the interior ministry of the deposed government carried out the execution of citizen (M.A.S), 37 years old, from Rafah city, by way of firing squad. According to information obtained by PICCR, the higher military court in Gaza City issued a death sentence on 4/11/2009 against the aforementioned by way of hanging after being convicted of collaboration, dealing with enemy parties and accessory to murder". Follow the link for further information:

<http://www.palpeople.org/atemplate.php?id=2700&x=10>

Another noticeable point is that at the start of the report, the newspaper did not indicate to the charges the men were convicted of and for which they were executed. These charges were only mentioned in the last paragraph of the report based on the written statement distributed by the chief military justice in the deposed government.

Front page as it appeared in the newspaper

A composite image of Al-Hayat Al-Jadida newspaper pages. The top page features a large photo of a child in a Palestinian flag headband, a headline about Israel's 'eternal enemy' policy, and various news columns. Below it are several other pages showing different news stories and columns.

Front page after re-editing

A collage of various newspaper front pages from Al-Hayat Al-Jadida, showing headlines related to the Palestinian cause, Israel, and international news.

In its coverage of the second execution in its May 19 edition, Al Hayat Al Jadida ran the story at the bottom of its front page. It merged between the execution and the demolition of tens of citizens' homes in Rafah by the interior ministry of the deposed government. However, it focused on the executions and gave it priority over the demolitions with a clear indication to Hamas as the party that carried out the executions and not the deposed government like it did in its coverage of the first executions. It also cast suspicion over the charges put on the convicted men through pointing to the murder charges against three men between two small parentheses. Meanwhile, it addressed the demolitions carried out in the Gaza Strip under the rule of the deposed government through only focusing on the negative reactions to the demolitions and not to the demolitions themselves, as understood by the title:

**Hamas executes three in Gaza convicted of murder
Displeasure in Rafah over the demolition of dozens of homes**

Here, there must be a reevaluation of the report's title:

The deposed government carries out the execution of three Gazans convicted of murder

It must be noted that the newspaper should have awarded the subject of the demolitions an independent article altogether.

In its coverage of the executions and home demolitions on its front page, Al Hayat Al Jadida depended on foreign press reports from AFP and Reuters. The report on the executions opened with a quote from AFP that said, "The deposed government of the Hamas movement which rules the Gaza Strip, executed three citizens it claims were "convicted of murder."

The aforementioned paragraph points to the "**executions**" carried out by the Hamas government and not to "**the carrying out of an execution verdict**" issued by the military court in Gaza and carried out by the interior ministry of the deposed government. In any case, the newspaper should use editorial tools that give accurate descriptions and phrases of the party responsible for the incident.

In its May 19, 2010 edition, we find that the newspaper allocated a larger space for covering the second executions against the three convicted of murder on the top right corner of Page 10. It also published a report over five columns from its Gaza correspondent and from WAFA, the official Palestinian news agency with the following title:

**Rights organizations denounce the [executions] and consider them a form of torture
"Hamas" carries out executions against three citizens
Despite the absence of the President's ratification**

The title first speaks about Hamas as the implementer of the executions and does not address the deposed government as the responsible party for their implementations whatsoever. At the same time, it indicates to those against whom the executions were carried out as "**citizens**" without clarifying that they were "**convicted**" of murder.

Changing and editing this title requires alternative wording, such as:

Rights organizations denounce

“The deposed government” carries out the execution of three men convicted of murder

In terms of how the newspaper dealt with the reactions from rights and human rights organizations, we find that it points to **Hamas** as the party that carried out the executions and not the deposed government, especially in regards to the statements from the Palestinian Center for Human Rights and the Palestinian Council for Human Rights Organizations and the Independent Commission for Human Rights “*diwan al mathalem*”. For example the following is from the Independent Commission for Human Rights’ statement on 18/5/2010 about the executions, which did not point to Hamas as the executing party but to the deposed government.

“On the execution of three citizens from Gaza”

18/5/2010

7/2010

Statement

The Independent Commission for Human Rights, *Diwan Al Mathalem*, denounces the deposed government’s execution of citizens Amer Jundiyyeh, Matar Shubaki and Rami Juha.

According to information obtained by the Commission, at dawn on Tuesday 18/5/2010 the interior ministry of the deposed government in Gaza carried out death sentences against citizens: Amer Saber Hassan Jundiya, (41) from Gaza City, issued against him on 10/3/2010 by the special military court in Gaza a sentence of death by firing squad for a conviction of murder; citizen Matar Harb Matar Shubaki (35) from Gaza City, who on 20/3/1996 was sentenced to death by the court of first instance in Gaza for accomplice to murder and Rami Seed Mohammed Juha (29) from Gaza City who was sentenced to death on 14/4/2004 by the court of first instance in Gaza on charges of kidnapping, rape and murder.

The Independent Commission for Human Rights, *Diwan Al Mathalem* views the recurrence of the death sentence with the utmost gravity, the latest being the execution of two citizens by the deposed government on 15/4/2010. Hence, the Commission stresses the following:

1. Rejection of the death penalty, which constitutes a violation of the right to life as an inherent right to all human beings as guaranteed by law.
2. The execution sentences are a violation to the standards of a just trial given that some of the sentences were issued according to articles of the PLO revolutionary penal law of 1979, which the Commission considers as unconstitutional and whose articles conflict with relevant international standards. It is a law that is not part of the Palestinian Authority’s system of laws issued by the Legislative Council.
3. It is against the manner in which the executions took place in that they are in contravention of the penal code law No. 3 of 2001, which requires ratification from the President for executions before they are carried out.

As the Independent Commission for Human Rights renews its call to cancel this harsh punishment and replace it with another punishment that achieves the principle of criminal justice; it also calls for adherence to relevant legal texts and the provision of conditions for a just trial for the convicted in addition to not carrying out executions without the ratification of the President in accordance with the law.

Meanwhile, Al Quds newspaper was more balanced and objective in its coverage of the first executions in that it ran a story the subject in its April 16 edition on the left-hand side of the second page over three columns. It chose a different title than Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida while still highlighting Fateh's position and the rights organizations on the carrying out of the executions:

Fateh and rights organizations consider the procedure a transgression of the President's authorities.

**The deposed government carries out the death sentence
against two people charged with collaborating with Israel**

فتح، ومؤسسات حقوقية اعتبرت الإجراء تعديا على صلاحيات الرئيس

الحكومة المقالة تنفذ حكم الاعدام بحق متهمين اثنين بالتعاون مع إسرائيل

Here we find that Al Quds used terms different from those used in Al Hayat Al Jadida, especially in terms of the party that carried out the executions, that is, the deposed government and not Hamas, which was the term used in Al Hayat Al Jadida. Furthermore, it used the term "carried out the execution sentence" and not the term "executed", while those who the sentence was carried out against were two people "charged" and convicted. This is the correct terminology reflecting the reality of what happened whether by the party that carried out the verdict, which is the deposed government's interior ministry or the party that naturally carried out the action.

However, Al Quds, just like Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida specifically highlighted Fateh's position on the executions, followed by the positions of rights organizations. However, it did not indicate to the reactions of Palestinian factions or other national forces towards the executions. It seems here that the internal Palestinian divisions still play a role between the two major factions, Fateh and Hamas. For this reason, the newspaper could have forfeited its subtitle and sufficed with the main headline, indicating that what happened was an overstepping of the President's authorities.

**Rights organizations consider it an overstepping of the President's authorities
The deposed government carries out the executions
against two people convicted of collaborating with Israel**

Al Quds did the same thing in its coverage of the second executions in its May 19, 2010 edition whereby the lead story talked about the execution without pointing to the party that carried it out or the charges against the men made by the deposed government since it is the party that carried out the executions and not "**Hamas**".

The deposed government carries out executions in Gaza for the second time in a month

However, the article, taken from AFP, pointed to the deposed government, given its affiliation with Hamas: "**The deposed government of Hamas, which rules the Gaza Strip, executed...**"

However, there was a clear difference between the Gaza correspondent piece in Al Quds in its April 16, 2010 edition, which was more accurate in giving the facts and in explaining the party carrying out the execution, and between its report published in the May 19, 2010 edition, taken from foreign press agencies and which was mostly based on certain standards that differ from the standards adopted by the newspaper. This is despite the fact that the editor at Al Quds had to reedit the newspiece in a way that would coincide with the standards of his newspaper in terms of text and phrases.

Conclusions:

First: The continued internal division was clear in the coverage of the three newspapers of events linked in one way or another to this split, whether in terms of the executions or the demolitions that took place during the monitoring.

Second: There was a clear discrepancy between the three newspapers in covering these two incidents including a discrepancy in terms and descriptions used by each paper of the events and the relevant parties in addition to the sources of information each paper relied on. For example, Al Hayat Al Jadida adopted a clear policy in this regard. It maintained descriptions and political jargon that reflected the reality of the division and its impact on the media through focusing on Fateh and Hamas as if they were the only relevant parties in the two incidents.

As for Al Ayyam, it did not stick to one clear editorial line towards the two incidents. It dealt with the first incident differently than it dealt with the second, which was clear from the newspaper headlines – they showed confusion because of the internal split and its impact on the local media.

At the same time, the split did not leave a strong impact on the editorial line of Al Quds, which was exclusive in its own headlines and terms, something that set it apart from both Al Ayyam and Al Hayat Al Jadida. However, the internal division was clear from the newsmen obtained by the newspaper whether from their own correspondents or from foreign press agencies.