

PRESS FOR THE PEACE OF JERUSALEM? Israeli Media Coverage of the Jerusalem Issue

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Abstract

This report analyzes how central issues relating to Jerusalem were covered by the six major Israeli media outlets – the newspapers *Yedioth Ahronoth*, *Ma'ariv* and *Ha'aretz* and the main news broadcasts on Channel 1, Channel 2 and Channel 10. The analysis is based on an investigation of three months of coverage, from October 1, 2007 to December 31, 2007. The Annapolis summit, which took place on November 27, was held near the midpoint of the investigation period. The analysis is based on reading and viewing of *all* the major newspaper editions and television news broadcasts that appeared in this period.

During the examination period there appeared 450 articles and mentions about various aspects of the Jerusalem issue. 336 items appeared in the newspapers and 114 items appeared in TV news broadcasts. Prominent subjects that were featured included:

- Har Homa and E-1: Approximately 60 articles and mentions
- Archeological excavations: Approximately 40 articles and mentions
- Life in Jerusalem: Approximately 40 articles and mentions
- Various options for dividing the city and their implications.

Based on our analysis of all the media coverage of the issue in this period, the following patterns can be said to characterize the Israeli media's treatment of the issue of Jerusalem in the days before and after the Annapolis summit:

- **Discussions of possible solutions for Jerusalem were superficial and dichotomous and did not present information needed for understanding the central issues.** For example, the media made few distinctions between the Arab villages that were annexed after 1967 (with a current population of more than 250,000), the "Holy Basin" and Jewish neighborhoods built over the green line.
- **Lack of comprehensive and valuable information hindered genuine and profound discussion.** For example, during this period Jewish and Palestinian construction in East Jerusalem and development plans such as Har Homa and E-1 were rarely addressed and were usually relegated to the margins of the coverage. The coverage similarly ignored the activities of extremist Jewish organizations in Palestinian neighborhoods and villages.

- **Absence of coverage of the lives of Palestinians.** Various processes taking place in the city, including excavations in the Old City, serious neglect of East Jerusalem and its residents and the tense relations between Jews and Palestinians in "united" Jerusalem did not receive adequate exposure and the few reports that appeared provided little information.
- **De-contextualization obscured "the big picture".** To properly understand the complex situation in Jerusalem requires broad historical, political, military and geopolitical knowledge. Any media consumer who wants to gain an educated perspective on the issue must understand these contexts. However, discussion of these background factors appeared for the most part in marginal places and was kept separate from the news reports.
- **Assorted bits of information were presented without discussion of their implications.** The media rarely drew connections between various parts of the coverage. Instead of presenting Jerusalem as a single urban area, where different events all affect the future of the city, Jerusalem was portrayed in the media as an area composed of enclaves ostensibly unconnected to one another.
- **Few references to the Palestinian point of view.** Palestinian voices were notably absent from the media coverage. For example, the question of dividing Jerusalem was presented by the media as an internal Israeli-Jewish issue. The fact that Jerusalem is also sacred to Muslims and Christians found no place in the coverage.

Alongside the criticism, the report finds that in contrast with previous years when the issue of Jerusalem topped the public agenda, the current discussion of Jerusalem is characterized by a low level of "patriotic" fervor. The study found very few headlines in the style of "Jerusalem – the eternal capital of Israel," and on the other hand, few threatening headlines about Palestinians were found in the style of "in blood and fire we will redeem you, Al Aqsa." The most prominent headlines were usually topical and matter-of-fact. A possible explanation for this may be the "maturation" of the public discourse as well as a change in the tone used by politicians to express themselves on the subject.