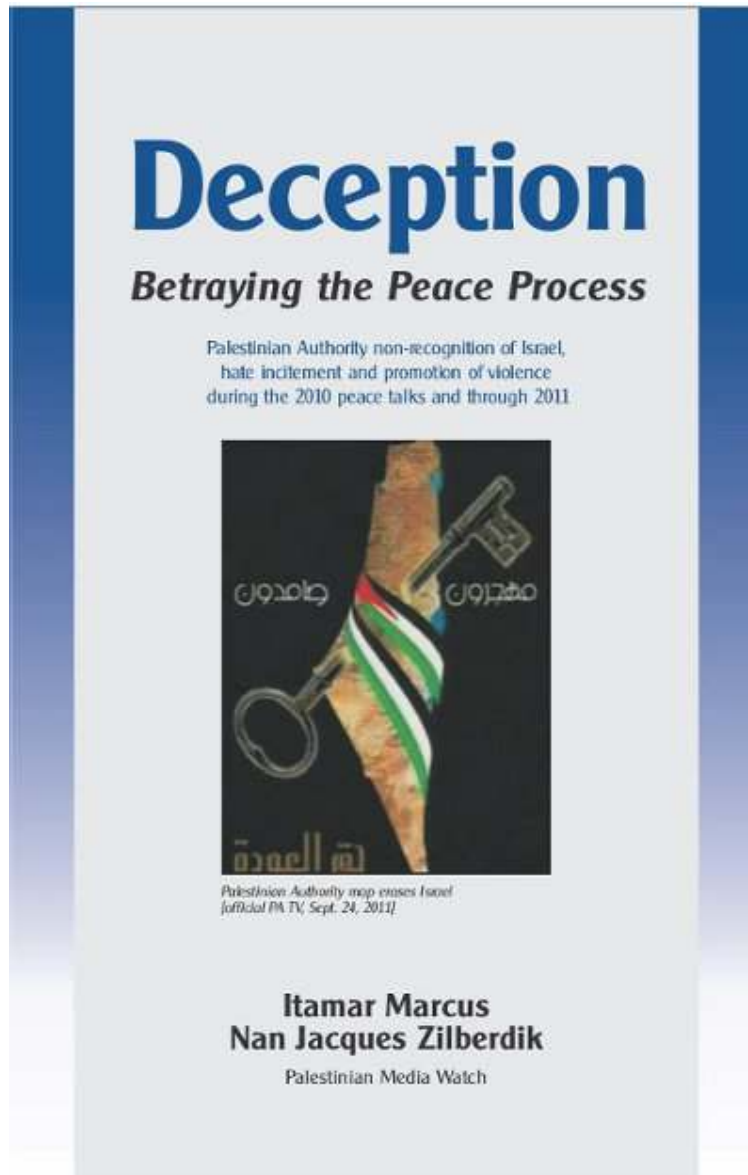


Palestinian Authority control over the official media

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Palestinian Authority control over the official media

Palestinian Authority TV, part of the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation (PBC), was established in 1994 by then-PA Chairman Yasser Arafat. PA TV and radio are the official PA government media, under the direct control of the Palestinian Authority. In May 2005, the PBC was put under the control of the PA Ministry of Information. However, immediately after the Hamas election victory in 2006, but before the new Hamas-based government was formed, the PA moved the media back under the control of the office of the Chairman, Mahmoud Abbas, to prevent the media from coming under the control of Hamas.

PBC has a website with a PA government website address, <http://www.pbc.gov.ps>, but most of the site is inactive, including the link to its English version.

Wafa Palestine News and Information Agency, the official Palestinian news service, was established in 1972 by the PLO and is under the control of the PLO Executive Committee, headed by Mahmoud Abbas. The newspaper *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* is the PA's official daily newspaper.

In 2010, Yasser Abd Rabbo, Secretary General of the PLO Executive Committee and Inspector General of the PA's official media, announced that Mahmoud Abbas had decided to create a public body to oversee PA TV, making it independent and no longer "official PA media." Abd Rabbo expressed that once the new system would be in place, PA TV would "not be the mouthpiece of the government, with an attempt to dictate to society and to direct it as the government sees fit":

"Yasser Abd Rabbo, Inspector General of the [Palestinian Authority's] **official media**, has revealed that President Mahmoud Abbas, in his role as Chairman of the PLO, recently issued a presidential directive resolving to convert the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation and **Palestinian television from a governmental institution** into an independent public institution... According to the second section of this directive, **a public council will be established, under the name 'The Public Council for Palestinian Broadcasting and TV,' subordinate to the President and enjoying the status of a legal entity and financially and administratively independent, legally capable of carrying out all the actions necessary to fulfill its aims...** [Abd Rabbo:] 'We have started to proceed in the right direction... to achieve a TV and radio broadcasting that will express the will of our Palestinian society in all its shades and contradictions, and [such] that **the TV will not be the mouthpiece of the government, with an attempt to dictate**

to society and to direct it as the government sees f it... In response to a question concerning the dependence of the new TV Council on the President, Abd Rabbo said: 'We find ourselves in circumstances involving political turbulence, and we are unable to hold elections... Therefore, **the only [and] most stable body is the PLO and the Presidency. Therefore, the [TV] Council is subordinate to the PLO Chairman.** Likewise, the PLO enjoys symbolic status, as an all-encompassing national source of authority, and we seek to build a public institution which will be one of the institutions of the future Palestinian state.'" [*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, May 15, 2010]

The new framework was not implemented as promised in 2010. In 2011, Abd Rabbo again promised the end of controlled official PA TV, and anticipated a future in which there would be "journalistic freedoms":

"Abd Rabbo proposed consolidating a document or honorary convention that will define the rules for engaging in the [journalism] profession, guarantee the aspirations of journalists, **and ensure the protection and honoring of all freedoms and the removal of any obstacle that stands in the way of freedom of expression and journalistic freedoms...** Abd Rabbo stated clearly that the trend is that eventually there will be no official Palestinian media, and that the Palestinian Broadcasting Corporation will be transformed, through a Presidential order, into a public and independent national institution, similar to the situation in many advanced countries. Abd Rabbo noted that within the institution [PBC] a battle is going on concerning implementation of the order, which has made the task more difficult... Abd Rabbo emphasized that he will not hesitate to continue this battle with full strength, despite all the difficulties and obstacles, even if he is uncertain of success in this regard."

[*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, Feb. 17, 2011]

These two reports by Rabbo clearly show that the PA and Abbas fully control the PA government media, and that Abbas' declared intention to relinquish control has not yet been implemented.

Contrary to the stated goal of making the government-controlled media independent, Mahmoud Abbas issued an order in 2011 to bring more media under his direct personal control, adding the Palestinian news service Wafa to the PA government-controlled media:

Headline: "President [Abbas] issues order regulating activity of Wafa agency"
"Last night, President Mahmoud Abbas issued a presidential order regulating the activity of the Wafa Palestine News and Information Agency. The order emphasizes that the Palestine News and Information Agency is subordinate

exclusively to the Chairman of the PLO Executive Committee [Mahmoud Abbas].” [*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, May 10, 2011]

One of the political purposes fulfilled by PA TV is to be a mouthpiece for Mahmoud Abbas’ Fatah party. Fatah MP Nabil Amr, former PA Minister of Information, explained after the closing of Al-Falastiniyeh, the Fatah satellite TV station:

“Al-Falastiniyeh TV station announced that it would go off the air... Al-Falastiniyeh was established as a mouthpiece for Fatah and as a counterbalance to Hamas’ Al-Aqsa TV network... Fatah legislator Nabil Amr, a former minister of information in the Palestinian Authority... [explained]: ‘Fatah needs to have its own TV station, but the Fatah leadership has apparently decided to use the Palestinian Authority TV instead.’”

[*Jerusalem Post*, Dec. 18, 2009]

In addition to owning and controlling the official media, the PA exerts indirect control over other media. Bassem Eid, Director General of the Palestinian Human Rights Monitoring Group, complained in a 2009 interview that there was no freedom of expression under the PA or Hamas:

“‘I do not think,’ Eid says, ‘that there is any kind of open media anywhere in the Palestinian territories, neither in Gaza nor the West Bank.’ Journalists continue to be confined in West Bank prisons, and critical media, he says, have been closed down. ‘Mr. [Mahmoud] Abbas,’ says Eid, ‘may talk about free media where he is ruling but in my opinion, as a human rights organization, we are receiving a lot of reports how the right of free expression is being completely violated by the Palestinian Authority in Ramallah and by the Hamas in the Gaza strip.’ Moreover, according to Eid, these government abuses result in self-censorship, since journalists, once imprisoned and sometimes tortured in both the West Bank and Gaza, prefer to avoid a return visit.” [“Palestinians Self-Inflicted Abuse,” *jewishjournal.com*, Nov. 25, 2009]

One example of censorship by PA TV administration was reported in a London-based Arabic daily:

“Viewers of the Palestinian [TV] comedy *Homeland on a String* waited for last Thursday’s episode... but the episode was not broadcast.... [The series’ creator and star Imad] Farajin publicized on his Facebook page... ‘Palestinian TV prohibited the episode on [Libya’s] Gaddafi’ ... Responses to this statement [on Facebook] came one after another. Some spoke of the policy of suppression adopted by **PA TV, about the range of freedoms which is being diminished instead of broadened**, and some demanded [of Imad Farajin] to seek alternative satellite channels and to broadcast the episode on

Facebook and YouTube. Some of the angry responses on the [program's Facebook] page even read, '**The people want to bring down PA TV and the**

PA TV administration.' In an interview with *Al-Hayat* (i.e., the London-based Arabic language paper)... Farajin expressed fury over the ban on broadcasting the episode, especially **since it had been filmed after the script had been shown to the PA TV administration and approved by the Chairman of the Board of Directors of the PBC, Yasser Abd Rabbo. ...**

Farajin revealed that the PA TV administration had used the interests of Palestinians in Libya as an excuse for banning the broadcast of the program. He said, 'I am amazed at this illogical excuse. I told them that there are more than a million and a half Egyptians there, and yet the Egyptian channels are broadcasting satirical programs against Gaddafi i. Likewise other Arab channels.' He added: 'An episode of a Palestinian satire on the subject of Gaddafi and the Libyan revolution will not cause the Libyan leader to lose any sleep, but the **PA TV inspectors insisted on banning it.'** He said that a decision had been taken 'to execute [the program]' following the episode that dealt with the resignation of former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak, for political reasons, but he did not mention the source of the decision...

'[The program] is greater than all of them [the political establishment] and it is impossible that we should agree to directives from anyone. Watch it on other satellite channels that do not contradict themselves, talking about giving broader freedom while at the same time they are the first to limit it.'

[*Al-Hayat* (London), March 5, 2011]

Following a report in 2011 by the US-based Human Rights Watch, the PA security services responded to accusations that they abused journalists:

"Official spokesman of the security services, Adnan Al-Damiri, emphasized: 'The security establishment is ready to investigate any personal violation and to adopt all legal measures against those who are committing violations, if there are any.'

Damiri's words came in response to the report published yesterday by Human Rights Watch, accusing the Palestinian security services of violations against journalists... The security services spokesman denied that arrests are made on the basis of politics or profession, and said that the instances in which arrests [of journalists] are made arise from harm to security or crimes... He rejected the comparison between the functioning of the security establishment in the West Bank, which has undergone great development, and what Hamas is doing in Gaza." [*Al-Hayat Al-Jadida*, April 7, 2011]

To summarize, PA TV, PA radio, the newspaper *Al-Hayat Al-Jadida* and the Wafa news service are official PA media, which the PA actively uses to transmit messages to its people. The political, religious and ideological messages expressed by PA and



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Fatah leaders are repeated throughout Palestinian society, and conveyed through a wide range of activities including cultural expression, sporting events, religious

teachings, music videos, and political events. These messages reflect the beliefs, opinions and goals of the Palestinian Authority, and their continual transmission t

through the PA-controlled media and other structures indicates an intentional pattern rather than coincidence.

Accordingly, while the PA media's influence on Palestinians varies depending on the number of viewers and readers at different times, the official media remain reliable indicators of the ideology that the Palestinian Authority's leaders wish to convey.

While the official PA media are the primary sources in this book, other sources are quoted, including official PA websites. Private media sources are cited when they report on activities and statements by PA leaders or the ministries and administrations under the PA's control.

This book, which includes hundreds of examples, documents not the exceptional or atypical comments, but the prevalent ideology that is persistently and consistently repeated by the PA and Fatah leaders themselves through the structures they control. The government-controlled media are indeed the voice of the Palestinian Authority and the window to its views and convictions.

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