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The PA and Israel are allies in silencing the truth

I witnessed firsthand the PA's brutality against journalists in Gaza. Its possible return does not bode well for us.



Eman Mohammed

Palestinian-American photojournalist

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A group of Palestinian journalists protest in front of the Palestinian Legislative Council headquarters against the decision of the Palestinian Authority to close Bethlehem-based private TV channel, Al-Roah, in Gaza City on October 17 1999 [File: Mohammad Saber/AFP]

On December 28, 21-year-old journalism student Shatha Al-Sabbagh was assassinated near her home in Jenin. Her family accused snipers from the Palestinian Authority (PA) deployed in the camp of shooting her in the head. Al-Sabbagh had been active on social media, documenting the suffering of Jenin residents during the raids by Israel and the PA.

Just a few days after Al-Sabbagh's assassination, the authorities in Ramallah [banned](#) Al Jazeera from reporting from the occupied West Bank. Three weeks later, PA forces arrested Al Jazeera correspondent Mohamad Atrash.

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These developments come as the Israeli occupation has killed more than 200 media workers in Gaza and arrested dozens across the occupied Palestinian territories. It has also banned Al Jazeera and refused to allow foreign journalists to enter Gaza. The fact that the PA's actions mirror Israel's reveals a shared agenda to suppress independent journalism and control public opinion.

To Palestinian journalists, that is hardly news. The PA has never been our protector. It has always been a complicit partner in our brutalisation. That is true in the West Bank and it was true in Gaza when the PA was in power there. I witnessed it myself.



The Take

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Growing up in Gaza, I watched how my people were oppressed by Israeli forces and by the PA. In 1994, the Israeli occupation formally handed over the Strip to the PA to administer under the provisions of the Oslo Accords. The PA remained in power until 2007. During these 13 years, we saw more collaboration with the Israeli occupation than any meaningful attempt at liberation. For journalists, the PA's presence was not just oppressive, it was life-threatening, as its forces actively stifled voices to maintain its fragile grip on power.

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As a journalism student in Gaza, I experienced this suppression firsthand. I walked the streets, witnessing PA security officers looting shops, their arrogance apparent in the brazen act of theft. One day, when I attempted to document this, a Palestinian officer violently grabbed me, ripped my camera from my hands, and smashed it to the ground. This wasn't just an assault, it was an attack on my right to bear witness. The officer's aggression only ceased when a group of women intervened, forcing him to retreat in a rare moment of restraint.

I knew the risks of being a journalist in Gaza and like other media workers, I learned to navigate them. But the fear I felt near the PA forces' ambush points was unlike anything else. That was because there was never logic to their aggressive actions and no way to anticipate when they might turn on you.

Walking near the PA forces felt like stepping into a minefield. One moment, there was the illusion of safety, and the next, you faced the brutality of those who were supposedly there to protect you. This uncertainty and tension made their presence more terrifying than being on a battlefield.

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Years later, I would cover the training sessions of Qassam Brigades under the constant hum of Israeli drones and the ever-looming threat of air strikes. It was dangerous but predictable – much more so than the actions of the PA.

Under the PA, we learned to speak in code. Journalists self-censored out of fear of retribution. The PA was often referred to as “cousins of Israeli occupation” – a grim acknowledgement of its complicity.

As the PA was fighting to stay in power in Gaza after losing the 2006 elections to Hamas, its brutality escalated. In May 2007, gunmen in presidential guard uniforms killed journalist Suleiman Abdul-Rahim al-Ashi and media worker Mohammad Matar Abdo. It was an execution meant to send a clear message to those who witnessed it.

When Hamas took over, its government also imposed restrictions on press freedoms, but its censorship was inconsistent. Once, while documenting the new policewomen’s division, I was ordered to show my photos to a Hamas officer so he could censor any image he deemed immodest. I often managed to bypass these restrictions by swapping my memory cards preemptively.

The officers weren’t fond of anyone overriding their orders, but instead of outright punishment, they resorted to petty power plays—investigations, revoked access, or unnecessary provocations. Unlike the PA, Hamas did not operate within a system of coordination with Israeli forces to suppress journalism, but the restrictions journalists faced still created an environment of uncertainty and self-censorship. Any violation on their part, however, was met with swift international condemnation—something the PA rarely faced, despite its far more systematic repression.

After losing control of Gaza, the PA shifted its focus to the West Bank, intensifying its campaign of media suppression. Detentions, violent crackdowns, and the silencing of critical voices became commonplace. Their collaboration with Israel was not passive; it was active. From surveillance to campaigns of violence, they play a crucial role in maintaining the status quo, stifling any dissent that challenges their power and the occupation.

In 2016, the PA's collusion became even more apparent when they coordinated with Israeli authorities in the arrest of prominent journalist and press freedom advocate Omar Nazzal, who had criticised Ramallah for how it handled the suspected murder of Palestinian citizen Omar al-Naif at its embassy in Bulgaria.

In 2017, the PA launched a campaign of intimidation, arresting five journalists from different outlets.

In 2019, the Palestinian Authority blocked the website of Quds News Network, a youth-led media outlet that has gained immense popularity. This was part of a [wider ban](#) imposed by the Ramallah Magistrate's Court that blocked access to 24 other news websites and social media pages.

In 2021, after the violent death of activist Nizar Banat in the PA's custody sparked protests, its forces sought to [crack down on](#) journalists and media outlets covering them.

In this context, the prospect of the PA returning to Gaza following the ceasefire agreement raises serious concerns for journalists who have already endured the horrors of genocide. For those who survived, this could mean a new chapter of repression that reflects the PA's history of censorship, arrests and stifling of press freedoms.

Despite the grave threats that Palestinian journalists face from Israel and from those who pretend to represent the Palestinian people, they persevere. Their work transcends borders, reflecting a shared struggle against tyranny. Their resilience speaks not only to the Palestinian cause but to the broader fight for liberation, justice and dignity.

The views expressed in this article are the author's own and do not necessarily reflect Al Jazeera's editorial stance.



Eman Mohammed

Palestinian-American photojournalist

Eman Mohammed is an award-winning Palestinian-American photojournalist and Senior TED fellow currently based in Washington, DC.

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