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NOTE TO THE SECRETARY-GENERAL
(through Mr. Mulet)

DPI Weekly Press Review



This week's press review examines coverage of your visit to Israel and Palestine, and today's release of a major report by the Middle East Quartet. It also looks at the latest developments in South Sudan, particularly the rising violence around the town of Wau that led to thousands of civilians seeking shelter at the local United Nations peacekeeping base.

Your trip to the Middle East brought heavy coverage in the region amid mounting anticipation ahead of today's release of the Quartet's report. The coverage divided largely along political and ideological lines, although your key messages about the need for both sides in the conflict to take actions came through.

Turning to South Sudan, there were widespread and generally positive press reports noting that the Organization had taken swift action in Wau to protect those people who had gathered next to the UNMISS base.

At the same time, critical articles continue to appear about the various investigations into the actions of the Mission in Malakal in February, when civilians were massacred, apparently by Government forces.

Meanwhile, the Human Rights Council's announcement yesterday that it decided to appoint an independent expert to monitor levels of violence and discrimination against LGBT people generated a burst of coverage, with the move frequently being described as historic.

Next week the Department of Public Information's multilingual news platforms, and in particular its Chinese-language outlets, will give close coverage to your official visit to China.

Thank you.


Cristina Gallach
1 July 2016



cc: The Deputy Secretary-General / Mr. Feltman / Mr. Khare / Mr. Kim / Mr. Ladsous / Mr. Nabarro / Mr. O'Brien / Mr. Amdur / Mr. Dujarric

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PRESS REVIEW

Friday, 1 July 2016

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THE MIDDLE EAST

Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon's latest visit to the Middle East garnered the usual strong coverage, anchored by his remarks at various stops and his regular media encounters. Away from the content of the visit, a running thread – including in **EFE** (Spain), **Voice of America** and Israel's **i24** TV channel – was that this would likely be Ban's last visit to the region as head of the United Nations. After the Secretary-General's trip ended, the Organization's peace efforts remained in the spotlight as a result of today's release of a major report from the Middle East Quartet.

Ban in Israel

Ban's words to an audience at Tel Aviv University – on the need for greater efforts from Israel and the Palestinians to achieve peace – resonated in the coverage. **AFP** reported that he urged both sides to "stand firm against violence, terror and incitement." The **Times of Israel** stated that the UN chief called on leaders to stop expecting a different result while repeating the same platitudes. The **Latin American Herald Tribune** echoed his call that both sides "take specific steps to restore peace." According to the **Jerusalem Post**, Ban said that he hoped to discuss the way forward with both leaders.

Reporting on a later press conference with Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, the **Times of Israel** quoted Ban as saying that a solution "must be based on direct negotiations." The UK-based **Middle East Eye** said that the Secretary-General urged Netanyahu to take "courageous steps" towards negotiating a two-State solution. According to **Voice of America**, he flagged the importance of recognizing "that both Palestinians and Jews have an undeniable historic and religious connection to this land."

US-based **Jewish Telegraphic Agency** said Netanyahu called on Ban to "highlight Hamas' crimes" and pressure Hamas to repatriate two Israeli citizens and two deceased soldiers. Moscow's **Sputnik News** cited the Palestinian ambassador to Russia, who reportedly said that despite Israel's request for assistance, repatriation was not an issue for Ban to solve. **Kashmir Monitor** (India) reported that another Palestinian politician criticized Ban's visit to "resume negotiations to reach a compromise that serves occupation." Israel's **IMRA** news portal reported that Netanyahu said: "Regrettably, the goal of treating Israel fairly remains unfulfilled across a wide spectrum of UN activities and UN forums." In **Israel Hayom**, Judith Bergman criticized Ban for "peddling the kind of false statements that he did in Gaza," noting that he "bleached out all references to PA-instigated terrorism," while also questioning how an Israeli university, "of all places," bestowed its highest honour on him.

Ban in Palestine

The intense coverage continued while Ban was in Palestine. At a joint press conference with President Mahmoud Abbas, the UN chief garnered headlines for his call to end the Israeli blockade on Gaza. **i24** used the headline "UN Chief urges Israel to lift 'stifling' blockade on Gaza," while **Ha'aretz** opted for "UN chief Ban Ki-Moon calls for Israel to end 'collective punishment' blockade of Gaza." Elsewhere, **Al Jazeera** went with "Ban Ki-moon criticises Israel's Gaza blockade" and US-based **Media Line** website chose "Ban Ki-moon visits Gaza Strip, condemns Israeli 'collective punishment'."

Reuters and **Xinhua** reported that Ban said "the closure of Gaza suffocates its people, stifles its economy and impede reconstruction effort." India's **IANS** news agency and the UK-based **Middle East**

Monitor said the Secretary-General described it as "collective punishment." Most Lebanese media outlets, including the daily **As-Safir**, ran similar stories. **Al Jazeera** highlighted Ban's comment on the need to speak openly "about the unacceptable hardships faced by the people of Gaza." **EFE** gave prominence to his regret of the "devastating effect" on Palestinians of almost 50 years of Israeli occupation.

Yet the **Washington Post** reported that the Secretary-General called on Palestinian leaders "to act effectively, particularly against incitement." **Reuters** reported that, pushing back, Israel deemed the blockade necessary to bar military-potential materials from Gaza. According to **i24**, Ban's comments came a day after Netanyahu said his country's maritime blockade would remain in place. In the **Jerusalem Post**, Adele Raemer, a teacher living near Gaza, observed that during Ban's last visit, he discussed the need for children on both sides to be able to play safely outside, noting that "despite the promises made on his last visit and pledges of billions in foreign aid to rehabilitate Gaza, almost nothing has happened." In **Israel Today**, David Lazarus ran a scathing analysis, outlining how he believes the UN continually plays favourites against Israel, saying Ban's "hypocrisy insults our intelligence."

A long-awaited report comes out

The report of the Quartet drew extensive coverage, both with its release and in the lead-up. Ahead of the release, UN Special Coordinator Nickolay Mladenov briefed the Security Council and addressed the media. **Reuters** reported that Mladenov told the Council that "the main objective of this report is not about assigning blame." According to the **Times of Israel**, he said the Quartet demanded that Israel take urgent steps to halt settlement expansion. Israeli officials told **Ha'aretz** that Netanyahu had made last-ditch efforts to soften the contents as the report was "expected to harshly criticize Israeli policy in the West Bank." Later, that paper noted that the possibility of Quartet-Council cooperation "sparked fears in Israel," leading to speculation that the report was a prelude to tougher moves on the issue in the Council.

Once released, the report was pounced on, including by the **BBC**, **Russia Today** and Saudi Arabia's **Al Arabiya**. Differences in editorial outlook were common: using the same **AFP** report, Australia's **Channel 7** television headlined its story "Mideast Quartet urges Israel to halt settlement expansion," while Israel's **Arutz Sheva 7** went with "As terror strikes Israel, Quartet set to criticize 'settlements'," with the latter looping in this week's fatal stabbing of a 13-year-old girl by a Palestinian assailant into its coverage. However, the **New York Times** headline – "Faulting both Israelis and Palestinians, report aims to revive peace talks" – reflected the general thrust of much of the coverage. Noting it was "delayed several times as the final language was refined," the **Washington Post** summarized the report as calling on Israel to cease settlement construction and expansion, designating land exclusively for use by Israelis and denying Palestinians permits for development. **France 24** ran a similar story.

Xinhua reported that, in their first response to the report, the Palestinians expressed disappointment, particularly given that they had been criticised in it, and called a meeting for Sunday to discuss whether to implement the findings. **Middle East Eye** reported that the PLO's Saeb Erekat took issue with the attempt to "equalize the responsibilities between a people under occupation and a foreign military occupier." While the **Jerusalem Post** began an article noting that the report said "reuniting the Palestinians under a single, democratic and legitimate Palestinian authority on the basis of the PLO platform and Quartet principles remains a priority," according to **Ha'aretz**, the Quartet flagged that "the current track taken by the Israelis and Palestinians has distanced the possibility of a two-State solution, creating a situation in which a one-State reality has taken root." **i24** underscored that Israel welcomed the findings on Palestinian incitement and rejects the "myth" that settlements are an obstacle to peace. In the **Times of Israel**, Raphael Ahren saw the report's focus on incitement as a victory for Netanyahu.

SOUTH SUDAN

South Sudan returned to the global media spotlight this week as the country's ongoing political discord escalated into worsening violence around the major town of Wau. The United Nations figured prominently in the reporting as UNMISS, the peacekeeping mission, offered assistance to those fleeing the clashes and Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon spoke out against what was taking place on the ground.

Ban's concern, encapsulated in a statement from his spokesperson, received wide and swift pick-up. The headlines included "South Sudan: Ban concerned over escalation of violence" (India's **New Kerala** website), "UN Chief Calls for immediate ceasefire in South Sudan's Wau" (**Africa Review**) and "UN chief concerned about fighting in South Sudan, boosts peacekeeper force" (Moscow's **Sputnik News**). **Reuters** and **CCTV Africa** reported that Ban had urged "all parties to agree to dialogue to resolve their political disputes." The **Swazi Observer**, Israel's **Ynet** website and **Yahoo.com** all carried a wire story reporting that Ban had praised UNMISS peacekeepers for taking proactive steps to protect civilians outside their base in Wau. The **Indian Express** highlighted that "he regrets the reported loss of lives," while **Africa News** flagged his call to "cooperate with humanitarian partners to facilitate the delivery of assistance." The **African Press Organization** carried Ban's statement in its entirety.

UNMISS steps up

The Organization's actions to protect civilians garnered its own strand of coverage, although there was confusion among the press about exactly what was happening. Juba's **Eye Radio** stated that "there were reports from civilians that UNMISS closed its gates to those who wanted to seek refuge at its compound," adding a Mission spokesperson's explanation that "opening the gate is only on an exceptional measure and it's on a last resort." **Sudan Tribune** and **Voice of America** said UNMISS had opened the entrance to its Wau base. **Africa News** reported that UNMISS said it was providing protection and shelter in Wau "adjacent its base," while later in the same story it said the Mission "stressed that it opened its gates because all means of protection have been exhausted." South African-based **CAJ News** noted that UN bases were more secure than regular refugee centres.

AFP reported that "UNMISS opened the gates to their base in Wau to shelter over 10,000 civilians, cramped inside the protection of the razor-wire fence." The **Boston Review** reported the "gates had been opened by UN personnel to fleeing civilians as killers pursued them... turning the compound into an international safe haven." A Mission statement clarifying that it "created a security cordon around an area adjacent to the UN base" was carried by **Xinhua**, among others – along with further amplification that UNMISS "opening its gates [is] not a first line of response in the protection of civilians." The number of people being sheltered by the UN also varied in the reports. **Reuters**, the **New York Times** and **Africa Report** cited a UN source in reporting that about 12,000 people had sought refuge in a cordoned-off area. However, according to **AFP** and **Al Jazeera**, South Sudan's Minister of Information had asserted the correct figure was closer to 10,000.

UN agencies offer support

The humanitarian dimension of the coverage extended beyond the Mission. **Sudan Tribune** reported that the speaker of South Sudan's legislative assembly appealed to UN humanitarian agencies "to intervene because... families which fled their homes with young children need medical treatment for malaria and other diseases." South Sudan's **Gurtong Trust** website reported that the World Food Programme joined other aid partners in registering thousands of people sheltering opposite the UNMISS base in Wau. **AFP** and **Africa News** cited UN records indicating that more than 160,000 civilians were currently living in UN-guarded camps across the country.

Away from Wau, some outlets focused on a joint UN update on the broader food security situation. **Gurtong Trust** reported that WFP, the Food and Agriculture Organization and UNICEF warned of a

catastrophe amid unprecedented levels of food insecurity that would affect 4.8 million South Sudanese. **Bloomberg** and the **Sudan Tribune** noted that that figure did not include an estimated 350,000 others in UN protection sites or camps for the displaced. According to Nigeria's **TVC News** channel, the UN had said many South Sudanese face starvation as the nation runs the risk of a full-blown famine. Many news outlets – including **IPS**, Germany's **Tagesschau** TV channel, **Vatican Radio** and Pakistan's **The News** – featured comments by UNICEF's representative in South Sudan in which he expressed his concern, noting that "malnutrition among children levels continue to be truly alarming." **Xinhua** reported that WFP said it required \$74 million for the next six months to meet the needs of South Sudanese refugees in neighbouring countries.

Malakal: the aftermath

A week after Médecins Sans Frontières released a report criticizing the UN response to a massacre of Shilluk and Nuer people in Malakal in February, there were further rumbles in the press coverage. **Radio Tamazuj**, which covers Sudan and South Sudan, reported it had obtained a set of confidential UN documents that showed Juba's involvement in the killings and the apparent inability of UNMISS to protect citizens. The story cited sources as saying that DPKO had so far "refused" to give the full report to the Security Council.

According to Nigeria's **Today**, a DPKO spokesperson said the UN had accepted responsibility for the flaws in its response. On **CNN**, analyst Matt Wells argued that in response to the Malakal incident, the UN had established both a special investigation and a board of inquiry to look into what happened. Wells charged that the problems included a disjointed chain of command, a slow response as the violence unfolded and a reluctance to use force to protect civilians, adding that civilians within the area "understandably worried about whether UNMISS will provide protection if armed actors once again target them." US-based news website **Humanosphere** reported that USG Hervé Ladsous announced that the troops involved were being sent home, but also concluded there was doubt about whether UNMISS was better prepared to deal with another incident like Malakal.
