

Jordanian Diplomacy Tested by Social Networking ^[1]

Jordanian and Palestinian social network activists were busy this past weekend exchanging videos, pictures, and comments on the clashes following a local match in Amman on Friday evening. The match was between Al-Wehdat and Al-Faisali clubs. The players of the first club are made up, mainly, of Jordanians who are from a Palestinian origin, and the latter represents the originally Jordanian national team. Al-Wehdat won the match, the supporters of Al-Faisali, the losing club, left the stadium first, which is common for the supporters of the losing party and then clashes erupted between the supporters of Al-Wehdat supporters and the police, whose members, according to witnesses attacked the crowd of supporters which caused an accident that left about 250 wounded from Al-Wehdat enthusiasts, most of whom come from the Palestinian Territories.

The social networks, mainly Facebook and YouTube burst with videos, pictures, comments and news shortly after the event. Few hours after the clashes erupted, online news sites like Ammoun, and Rum news had images, news headlines and videos on the event. It was not till the next day that the local public media reported on the clashes. The online news websites and social networks took the lead in informing, analyzing, and making comments and campaigning right after the clashes. This was faced with poor performance from the Jordanian government. Most importantly they fell short of taking the lead in informing the local public opinion and the international public opinion. This made other sources more active and left for speculation, and misinformation. Queen Rania of Jordan is one of the most followed personalities in Twitter; she has about a million and a half followers. Her page on Twitter had no updates or relevant information. The page of the Prime Minister also did not provide, nor did the website of the Jordanian TV and Radio.

An important angle of the event that was discussed in international media was the WikiLeaks and their possible instigation of the clashes. There was a document on a similar match between the two teams last year in which the supporters of Al-Faisali club chanting slogans reported to be offensive to Queen Rania who is of Palestinian origin.

Prince Ali Bin Al-Hussein was the first to make a public statement in his capacity as the Founder and the director of the National Center for Security & Crisis Management and the President of Jordan Football Association, stating that an investigation is on those responsible for the clashes will be held accountable for their actions. The situation could deteriorate if the government does not work actively in forming the public opinion and presenting an evenhanded policy towards the perpetrators. Many commentators and social media activists view these clashes as clashes between the Palestinians and Jordanians in the country. Few extreme voices could grow visible for the vacuum that is created by the lack of active and transparent dissemination of information. If not then this will have its effect on the image of the government and the country for few years to come.
