

BBC's Pro-Israeli Bias

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In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

In its near 86 year history, BBC has a long, unbroken and dubious distinction. Today it's little different from its corporate-run counterparts in America, Britain and throughout the world. In fact, on its tailored for a US BBC America audience, what passes for news matches stride for stride what people here see every day – mind-numbing commercialism, shoddy reporting, pseudo-journalism, celebrity and sports features, and other diverting and distracting non-news that should embarrass correspondents and presenters delivering it. It offends viewers and treats them like mushrooms – well-watered, in the dark, and uninformed about the most important world and national issues affecting their lives and welfare.

That's the idea, of course, and has been since BBC's inception. John Reith was its founder and first general manager. Reassuring the powerful, he set the standard adhered to thereafter: "(You) know (you) can trust us not to be really impartial." BBC never was and never is.

Impartiality has no place on BBC nor does its claim about "honesty, integrity, (and being) free from political influence and commercial pressure." How can it? Its Director-General, Executive Board Chairman, BBC Trust Chairman and senior managers are government-appointed and charged with a singular task – to function as a "propaganda system for elite interests." On all vital issues – war and peace, state and corporate corruption, human rights, social justice, or coverage of the Middle East's longest and most intractable conflict, Westminster and the establishment rest easy. They know BBC is "reliable" – pro-government, pro-business and dismissive of the public trust it disdains. Now more than ever.

This article covers one example among many – BBC's distorted, one-sided support for Israel and its antipathy toward Palestinians. In this respect, it's fully in step with its American and European counterparts – Israeli interests matter; Palestinian ones don't; as long as that holds, conflict resolution is impossible. Therein lies the problem. With its reputation, world reach, and influence, BBC's coverage exacerbates it.

Key BBC Terms In Its Israeli – Palestinian Coverage

In October 2006, Electronic Intifada.net listed BBC's "key terms" in its conflict coverage – to "find a balance" that, in fact, tilts strongly toward Israel. For example:

- pre-meditated assassinations are called "killings" or occasionally "targeted killings" if Israeli sources say it;
- the separation or apartheid wall is called a "barrier, separation barrier, West Bank barrier, (or simply) this wall;" sometimes "fence" is used as well; no hint of its real purpose or that

the World Court ruled it illegal; no mention either that it's unrelated to security and simply a land-grab scheme and effort to heighten Palestinian isolation;

— East Jerusalem – BBC recognizes West Jerusalem as part of Israel; East Jerusalem is considered occupied with its status “still to be determined in permanent status negotiations between the parties....We recognize no sovereignty over the city;” The phrase “Arab East Jerusalem” is avoided; so is any mention that Israeli settlements encroach on it and aim to annex it entirely; Palestinians want the city for their capital; it belongs to them; Israel won't allow it; BBC won't explain it;

— Gaza – Israel nominally disengaged in summer 2005; in fact, it never did; it merely redeployed its forces, and maintains rigid control over the Territory's land, coast and airspace; it invades and attacks at will and maintains a brutish mediaeval siege; all movement in and out of Gaza is restricted; so are Gazans' access to food, water, health care, fuel, electricity and other life essentials; the result is a deep humanitarian crisis; BBC ignores it; instead it merely refers to an “end to Israel's permanent military presence,” not an end to its occupation, repression, continued incursions, mass killings, targeted assassinations, and systemic use of torture;

The Green Line – it separates Israel from the West Bank, but BBC reporting blurs it; it doesn't call it a border because that implies internationally recognized status; instead it fudges by calling it “the generally recognised boundary between Israel and the West Bank;”

— Intifada – more fudging when referring to causes; value judgments are avoided; so is truth; don't say Ariel Sharon's September 29, 2000 Haram al-Sharif provocation incited a popular uprising; package his visit with Palestinian frustration over a failed peace process and say it “sparked the (second) intifada (rather than it) led (to it or) started (it);”

— Jewish – distinguish between “Israeli” or “Jewish” to avoid religious or racial connotations; stress political ones instead; ignore how Israelis stress Jewishness by relating to “the promised land,” one “without people for a people without a land,” a Jewish homeland, Israel's biblical connection, and raising the issue of anti-semitism against harsh Israeli critics; when they're Jewish call them self-hating;

— Occupied Territories or Occupation – BBC refers to East Jerusalem and the West Bank, not the Golan Heights; after Israel “disengaged,” Gaza is in political limbo; BBC distinguishes between the “occupied territories” and Palestinian Land or Palestinian Territories; calling Gaza and the West Bank “disputed territories” is preferred; in fact, there's no dispute; they're both Israeli occupied Palestinian land;

— settlements and outposts – BBC distinguishes between them when, in fact, they vary only in size; BBC avoids calling them illegal; they're all illegal but adjectives aren't used unless they're vital to a story; in all reports, BBC is one-sided; it stresses that Israel disputes international law; anti-Israeli value judgments aren't made; the rule of law is dismissed; Palestinian rights are ignored; the growing number of Israeli settlers is fudged, downplayed and generally not mentioned;

— Palestine – BBC acknowledges that no independent state exists but the “peace process” aims to create one; unmentioned is that negotiations are fake and their reports try to hide it; so do deceptive words to appease pro-Israel critics; BBC obliges them;

- “relative calm” or “quiet” periods – it refers to quiescent Palestinian resistance, no Israeli deaths, but not ongoing Israeli attacks and killings;
- right of return – BBC ignores international law and UN Resolution 194; it promotes the Israeli position instead; and
- “terrorists” – a loaded term applying only to Palestinians; never Israelis; most often other words are used like “bomber, attacker, gunman, kidnapper, insurgent (or) militant;” Palestinian self-defense is never called resistance, and Israeli incursions aren’t ever called aggression.

Media “Rules of Engagement” in Covering the Middle East

In June 2002, Robin Miller listed “The Media’s Middle East Rules of Engagement.” BBC’s Israeli-Palestinian coverage adheres to them rigidly:

Rule 1 – “View the Middle East (ME) through Israeli eyes;” Palestinians are terrorists and aggressors; Israelis are victims who retaliate; self-defense is their motive; so is avoiding the truth;

Rule 2 – “Treat American and Israeli governmental statements as (truthful) hard news;” avoid any information that contradicts them;

Rule 3 – “Ignore the historical context;” avoid mentioning six decades of dispossession, occupation, and hundreds of preceding years during which Palestine was the Palestinian homeland; also suppress the idea that a Jewish homeland first originated with Zionism’s late 19th century’s founding and didn’t exist prior to that;

Rule 4 – “Avoid the fundamental legal and moral issues posed by the Israeli occupation;” say nothing about Geneva, UN Resolution 194, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the UN International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and all other recognized international human rights laws;

Rule 5 – “Suppress or minimize news unfavorable to the Israelis;” this rule is ironclad and unforgiving; open debate isn’t tolerated; facts are suppressed; aggressors are called victims; self-defense is called terrorism; news is carefully “filtered,” minds manipulated, and truth conspicuously absent; BBC excels at it and lets Israel get away with murder;

Rule 6 – “Muddy the waters when necessary;” major US media do it; so do human rights organizations like Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch; they tread lightly on Israeli-Palestinian issues and slant their views accordingly; so does BBC;

Rule 7 – “Credit all Israeli claims (as fact), even if wholly unfounded;” if Israelis say it, it’s true; BBC approves;

Rule 8 – “Doubt all Palestinian assertions, no matter how self-evident;” if Palestinians say it, it’s false or at best an unsubstantiated claim; most often ignore, downplay or fudge it;

Rule 9 – “Condemn only Palestinian violence;” treat it as a crime against innocent Israeli victims; ignore any reference to self-defense against Israeli aggression and rule of law violations; and

Rule 10 – “Disparage the international consensus supporting Palestinian

rights;" better still – ignore it or condemn it as biased or anti-semitic.

Add one more rule for good measure. Repeat any lie often enough and most people will believe it. It's foolproof and works every time.

Independent Analysis of BBC's Israel – Palestine Coverage

In 2005, the BBC commissioned a study to review the impartiality of its Israeli – Palestinian coverage. It consisted of an independent panel, the Communications Research Centre at Loughborough University, and British – Israeli international lawyer Noam Lubell. Their published April 2006 findings weren't what the broadcaster wished. Highlights from them showed BBC coverage:

- rarely covered daily Palestinian hardships and repression under occupation;
- was incomplete, misleading, and failed to consistently provide a full and fair account of the conflict;
- overlooked important themes; in the study period it most notably ignored Israeli annexation of land in and around East Jerusalem;
- omitted a substantial amount of important news vital to Palestinian concerns;
- failed to convey the disparity in the Israeli and Palestinian experience; specifically that one side is dominant and the other under occupation and forced to endure dependence indignities and hard line repression;
- seldom used the term occupation; mentioned military occupation only once during the study period;
- reported nothing about nearly four decades of occupation and repression;
- misportrayed Israel's Gaza disengagement as a positive step; failed to clarify it as a ruse and that Gaza remains occupied, invaded and attacked at will;
- failed to report Israeli assertions that relocating Gaza settlers would strengthen Israel's control of the West Bank and East Jerusalem;
- never clarified that Gaza settlements were illegal; that Gazans face ongoing hardships and stressed instead the "controversy" of withdrawing among Israelis;
- misused or misportrayed the term "terrorism" and only applied it to Palestinians;
- omitted any reference to historical background and failed to put stories in proper context;
- provided inadequate analysis and interpretation of key events and issues;
- failed to explain the meaning of Zionism;
- failed to provide background of the 1967 and 1973 wars;
- consistently misportrayed Hamas; described it as formally committed to Israel's

destruction; ignored Hamas' acceptance of the Arab peace proposal and its willingness to recognize Israel in return for an end to the occupation;

- mischaracterized the Oslo Accords as positive; ignored its deficiencies and betrayal;
- mentioned the Intifada with no explanation of cause or justification;
- failed to cite international law and UN resolutions; their call for an end to Israel's occupation; and the fact that Israel ignores international rulings contrary to its interests;
- ignored Palestinians' legal right to return or restitution if they choose not to;
- ignored humanitarian and human rights laws;
- failed to explain extrajudicial executions are illegal;
- mischaracterized the Separation Wall that the World Court ruled illegal;
- misrepresented the status of Jerusalem;
- gave unequal access to Israeli officials and spokespersons; stations none of its correspondents in Occupied Palestine; has them all inside Israel; results in a huge disparity in reports favoring Israel while disparaging Palestinians;
- misportrayed Israelis as peace-seeking and Palestinians, Arabs and Muslims as aggressors;
- stressed Israeli victimhood, the importance of Israeli deaths and injuries, and relative unimportance of a disproportionate number of Palestinian ones;
- responded to criticism defensively; continued to repeat past errors cited; showed deference to Israeli issues and the pro-Israeli Lobby;
- ignored its own established editorial standards, including on terminology; as a result, consistently showed bias, a lack of clarity and precision and did little to improve comprehension and understanding;
- overall - BBC falls far short of fair and impartial reporting and has done little to redress pointed out deficiencies; one positive note - the analysis found no evidence linking anti-Semitic behavior to BBC reports; it also found none dispelling it.

Glasgow University Media Group Study of Middle East News Coverage - It's "Bad News from Israel" and BBC

Researchers Greg Philo and Mike Berry conducted the study between 2000 and 2002, and their above quoted 2004 book title discusses it. Little has changed from then to now, BBC's reporting highlights it, and it's "bad news" for kept-in-the-dark viewers of major UK news and current affairs coverage.

Former BBC Middle East correspondent Tim Llewellyn agrees and explained in his unsparing comments about his former employer. He called it "dishonest - in concept, approach and execution....(it) favours the occupying soldiers over the occupied Arabs, depicting the latter, essentially, as alien tribes threatening the survival of Israel, rather than vice versa." It

depicts the Israeli-Palestinian conflict “as a battle of two (equal) forces (with equally) right and wrong responsibility. It is the tyranny of spurious equivalence.” As the UK and world’s leading broadcaster, BBC is justifiably blamed.

“Bad News from Israel” explains how – by consistently showing pro-Israel bias in virtually all its reporting and at times in the extreme. Beyond the book’s timeline, correspondent Chris Morris’ January 2004 “Lost hope in Mid-East conflict” report is a case in point. It’s about an expectant Palestinian woman confronted at a checkpoint. Prevented from passing, she gives birth and miscarries.

Morris is sympathetic but sides with the soldiers. “You can’t blame (them, he says) for being jumpy at checkpoints....because there are Israeli victims too, children among them, killed by snipers and suicide bombers from the West Bank. What would you have done? Would you have taken the risk? Or would you have played it safe, fearful of a trap? And so it goes on – another week in the Middle East.”

Even worse, the greater issue is ignored – an instance reflecting daily life in Occupied Palestine plus regular killings and abuse. Morris turns a blind eye. He highlights suicide bombings instead – “A Palestinian mother in her early 20s blows herself to bits and takes the lives of four young Israelis, after tricking them into believing she was ill.” He continues – “A Jewish settler is killed on the West Bank, leaving five children without a father, including triplets just three months old.” Reports like his are commonplace on BBC. Israeli lives matter. Palestinian ones don’t. Philo and Berry document the evidence.

Their study covers what media should report, a content analysis of their coverage, and how focus group interviews show how viewers are ill-served and left uninformed. Below are some results that apply to today:

- little or no historical context was provided; origins of the conflict were omitted; in the 2000 timeframe covered, BBC (and ITN) devoted 3500 lines of text to the Intifada, but a scant 17 to context or history;
- reporting consistently was pro-Israel and justified the most extreme actions and lawlessness; at the same time, Palestinian resistance was highlighted and condemned as terrorism;
- in the authors’ words: “There (was) no evidence from our analysis to suggest that Palestinian views were given preferential treatment on the BBC. The opposite (was) in reality the case;”
- BBC justified Israeli violence as “response” or “retaliation;” in contrast, Palestinian resistance was called “horrific,” an “atrocious,” “terrorism,” or even “mass murder;”
- some BBC reports were rife with errors whether intentionally or from ignorance;
- reports focused on Israeli security and right to exist; comparable Palestinian rights got little mention; nor did their impoverishment, deplorable daily existence, or a brutish four-decade military occupation;
- Israeli deaths were highlighted; Palestinian ones played down or ignored; regular Israeli incursions got little mention or weren’t reported;

— as a result, only 4% of focus group respondents knew Palestinians were driven from their homeland; only 10% that Israel occupied Palestine; some believed Palestinians were the occupiers; some viewed the conflict as a border dispute; 80% didn't know the origin of Palestinian refugees or that they were dispossessed; two-thirds didn't know Palestinian casualties exceeded Israeli ones; more knowledgeable respondents had access to books and other material that dispel BBC bias and inaccuracies;

— senior BBC journalists interviewed told researchers that they were instructed not to give explanations; to dumb-down the news for easy listening and do it in "20-second attention span" segments; researchers believe BBC has it backwards; this type reporting alienates viewers; accuracy and more context enhances viewership; under heavy Israeli Lobby pressure, BBC and other major media report propaganda; truth is the first casualty, and viewers remain uninformed; today it's worse than ever.

BBC's Coverage of Gaza Under Siege

BBC reports little about Gaza under siege and the humanitarian crisis it caused. Instead, accounts like its January 2008 one are common. It's headlined "Gaza's rocket threat to Israel" and highlights homemade Qassams "fired by Hamas and other Palestinian militants at Israeli population centres near the Gaza Strip." They've "killed 13 people inside Israel, including three children. In some months, more than 100 launches have been recorded by the Israelis."

No mention is made of Israeli incursions, their frequency, the use of F-16 air-to-surface missiles, their accuracy and destructive power, high-tech battle tanks in civilian neighborhoods, and other sophisticated weapons freely used, including illegal ones. Nor is there mention of hundreds of Palestinian deaths, injuries, inflicted Israeli destruction, and use of Palestinians as human shields. Instead, the Israeli town of Sderot is highlighted because it's "the only large Israeli population centre within the original Qassam's range." BBC describes them in detail to over-hype their destructive potential. In fact, they're crude, inaccurate and limited in range. They hardly compare to Israel's high-tech weapons that when unleashed against a civilian population are devastating.

Later in BBC's report, it admits "Qassams are very primitive missiles and their main effect on Israelis in the area is psychological torment (and that) Israeli casualties have been relatively light." In contrast, Israeli attacks on Palestinians kill and injure many hundreds and inflict immense psychological terror against a civilian population. It's gone on for six decades, shows no signs of ebbing, but BBC won't explain it.

Nor does it report on Gaza under siege, the collective punishment of its people, the humanitarian crisis it caused, and Israel's lawless act that BBC should expose and denounce. Instead it features reports like a May 10 one about a "Gaza mortar attack kill(ing an) Israeli." Israeli air strikes followed, five Hamas members were killed and four others injured. BBC featured an Israeli government spokesperson saying "We hold (Hamas) accountable for today's attack and the murder of civilians." No Palestinian response was aired, and BBC merely ended saying that "The Gaza Strip has been controlled by Hamas since last June when they ousted their rivals from the Fatah movement." No context, no background, no fair and impartial reporting, no truth, and no possible way for viewers to understand.

BBC suggests that Palestinians are responsible for their own condition, that a humanitarian

catastrophe is their fault, and that Israel has every right to terrorize and starve them to submission for its own security and self-interest. By BBC's standards, Israel may rightfully lock down 1.5 million people, collectively punish them, continue a repressive occupation, and refuse to negotiate in good faith, or at all. BBC is dismissive. Palestinian suffering is inconsequential, yet consider its outrage from a single Israeli death. It's also contemptuous of Hamas, ignored its months-long unilateral ceasefire, and refuses to report its willingness to recognize Israel in return for a Palestinian state inside pre-1967 borders.

BBC views the conflict from an Israeli perspective. It features government officials to explain it, and reports whatever they say as fact. This turns reality on its head, makes lawless actions justifiable, results in double standard journalism, and lets Palestinians suffer the consequences. Why not and who cares. They're just Arab Muslims in the land of Israel where Jews alone matter and not a hint of even-handed reporting exists. Now more than ever in the conflict's seventh decade, and BBC's reporting exacerbates it.

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