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Daesh, The Revolutionary Neoliberal Party and the British Falsehood Corporation

'It's A Distortion That The BBC Wants To Be Fair'

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Lord Hall, the director general of the BBC, is to be questioned by MPs over his refusal to refer to Islamic State using the term 'Daesh' (an Arabic abbreviation that means 'one who crushes something underfoot' and 'one who sows discord') because it is pejorative and therefore biased. Controversial British prime minister David Cameron had sent a request to the BBC supported in a letter signed by 120 MPs from across the spectrum – Labour, Tory and SNP. Independent journalist Jonathan Cook comments:

> 'So let us agree that Cameron can insist on the BBC calling Islamic State "Daesh" when he also insists on the broadcaster referring to the Conservatives as the "Revolutionary Neoliberal Party" [RNP].'

Julian Lewis, RNP chairman of the defence select committee, said he would also be writing to the BBC:

> 'The BBC ought to hang its head in shame – they would never dream of taking this attitude if we were talking about the fascists or the Nazis... We are engaged in a counter propaganda war of ideas – and the British used to be rather good at this during the Cold War.'

Chris Grayling, a member of the RNP British Cabinet and leader of the Commons, apparently detected no self-contradiction when he said the BBC should openly take the side of the UK in international conflicts:

> 'During the Second World War, the BBC was a beacon of fact, it was not expected to be impartial between Britain and Germany.'

Of course, the idea that political parties should pressure media to produce biased information was one of the horrors Britain was said to be fighting from 1939-1945. Also, the notion that the BBC should be guided by emergency measures adopted in a time of total war against a Nazi state genuinely threatening conquest indicates the curious mindset of some on the right. In reality, as Seumas Milne noted in the Guardian:

> 'The BBC is full of Conservatives and former New Labour apparatchiks with almost identical views about politics, business and the world. Executives have

> stuffed their pockets with public money.'

Milne added:

> 'There is no point in romanticising a BBC golden age. The corporation was always an establishment institution, deeply embedded in the security state and subject to direct government control in an emergency.'

Indeed, the BBC was founded in 1922 and immediately used as a propaganda weapon for the Baldwin government during the General Strike, when it became known by workers as the 'British Falsehood Corporation' (BFC). Perhaps the BBC should rebrand *itself*. Actor Ken Stott commented in the Radio Times:

> 'The establishment is a dirty, dangerous beast and the BBC is a mouthpiece for that.' (Radio Times, December 3, 2014)

This helps explain a tweet sent recently by the BBC's high-profile diplomatic editor, Mark Urban:

> 'Anti-Americanism alive & well as shown by "who is biggest threat to world peace?" Survey via @INTLSpectator'

For the embedded BFC, viewing America, very reasonably, as a lethal threat is to be guilty of something called 'Anti-Americanism.'

But for some, too much is not enough. In the Telegraph, Stephen Pollard, editor of the Jewish Chronicle, commented on the BBC chief's limp resistance to imposed thought control:

> 'He appears to believe that impartial reporting means equidistance between a terror group which butchers its victims and the rest of humanity.
>
> 'But equidistance is not the same as impartiality.'

Run that past us again:

> 'Impartiality means accuracy and reliability in news gathering – which ought indeed to be the BBC's governing ethos. It does not mean refusing ever to make any judgments between two sides in a conflict.'

How so?

> 'Because in the real, impartial world, there is no equidistance between Daesh and its victims.'

Whatever 'equidistance is not the same as impartiality' means – arguably, it means nothing – presumably the 'logic' can be applied elsewhere. After all, in 'the real, impartial world,'

there is also no 'equidistance' between Nato and its victims. So perhaps we should demand that the BBC describe Nato as 'The Western Corporate Mercenary Army', or 'The Western State-Corporate Militant Mob', because impartiality is one thing and equidistance quite another. As everyone knows.

Inevitably, the response of David Jordan, the BBC's director of editorial policy and standards, to these state-corporate attacks was less than heroic:

> 'Suggesting that the BBC wants to be fair to the so called "Islamic State" distorts the truth…'

It was 'a distortion', then, to suggest that the BBC aims to be 'fair'. Jordan continued:

> 'Our aim, as always, is to report accurately and report the facts – nothing else.'

Facts are sacred; it's not the BBC's job to make judgements. Except:

> 'The BBC has at its cornerstone a commitment to democracy and its pillars. The BBC is no friend of authoritarian repression anywhere in the world and our history shows it.'

The 'democracy and its pillars' being, of course, 'us'. As for 'authoritarian repression' – well, that's 'them', as labelled by the government for a BBC intent on reporting 'the facts – nothing else'.

Appropriately enough, Sir Christopher Bland, who chaired the BBC between 1996 and 2001, argued this week that the BBC 'is worryingly close to becoming an arm of the Government'. Bland said of Cameron's government:

> 'Rather subtly and unattractively it draws the BBC closer to becoming [sic] an arm of government which is always something that the BBC and government have resisted.'

This recalls former director general Greg Dyke's quickly-buried assertion that BBC bosses and political journalists are determined to protect Britain's elite-favouring status quo because they 'are part of one Westminster conspiracy. They don't want anything to change. It's not in their interests.'

'Those To Whom Evil Is Done, Do Evil In Return'

An interesting example of how the BBC is 'no friend of authoritarian repression' was provided in the summer of 2013, when a spanner clattered into the works of the West's Perpetual War machine.

Since 2011, it had been clear that the US-UK allies were intent on making Syria the next target for overt 'humanitarian intervention', in addition to its behind-the-scenes support. The endless stream of atrocity claims – civilian massacres, gas and napalm attacks –

sourced from US-UK 'intelligence' and pro-'rebel' Syrian 'activists', was a brazen replay of the 2002-2003 Iraq war media campaign. The effort was again to persuade the public to support a black and white struggle between 'good' – the 'rebels' – and 'evil', the Syrian government.

Alas, then, Syrian 'rebel' commander, Abu Sakkar, was filmed cutting the heart out of a dead Syrian soldier and eating it before a cheering crowd. Sakkar declared to the camera:

> 'We will eat your hearts and your livers you soldiers of [Syrian leader] Bashar the dog.'

This was decidedly off-message. Russian leader Vladimir Putin told a G8 summit news conference:

> 'These are people who don't just kill their enemies, they open up their bodies, and eat their intestines in front of the public and the cameras. Are these the people you want to… supply with weapons?'

Trusty BBC propagandist Paul Wood came to the rescue, commenting of Abu Sakkar that 'meeting him face-to-face, he seems a bit more circumspect': '"I didn't want to do this. I had to," he tells me.' Abu Sakkar was given high-profile space, not just to give his version of events, but to supply mitigating background detail and unchallenged propaganda. Wood wrote:

> 'He joined the demonstrations when they started in the spring of 2011. Then, he says, a woman and child were shot dead at a protest. His brother went to help. He, too, was shot and killed…
>
> 'Along the way, he lost another brother, many relatives, and countless of his men. His parents were arrested and he says the police rang him so he could hear them being beaten…
>
> '"Put yourself in my shoes," he says.'

Imagine the BBC inviting readers to place themselves in the shoes of an Islamic State cannibal. The simple act of interviewing Abu Sakkar humanised him in a way that is unthinkable for Islamic State fighters, or any other official enemy perpetrating a comparable act.

The BBC reinforced Abu Sakkar's efforts to blame his actions on the Syrian government, a constant theme in the BBC piece and other media reports. In stark contrast, when MPs Alex Salmond and George Galloway attempted to argue that UK foreign policy was a major factor behind the '7/7' bombings in London, their comments were dismissed as 'crass' and 'in poor taste' by the BBC journalists interviewing them.

The BBC allowed Abu Sakkar to call for a 'no-fly zone', a key goal of Western warmongers who had used the same strategy in 2011 when Nato terrorist bombers had overthrown Libyan leader Muammar Gaddafi:

> 'If we don't get help, a no-fly zone, heavy weapons, we will do worse [than I did]. You've seen nothing yet.'

The BBC also gave Abu Sakkar scope to downplay his actions: 'I didn't bite into [the heart],' Abu Sakkar says, 'I just held it for show.'

Wood even quoted the poet W H Auden: 'Those to whom evil is done, do evil in return.'

A wonderfully compassionate response, then, to Abu Sakkar's obscene act. Can we imagine any BBC journalist quoting Auden in response to the recent horrific massacre of 38 British and other tourists on a Tunisian beach in Sousse by Seifeddine Rezgui Yacoubi? We can only guess at the level of outrage that would generate.

But, as we saw above, even this level of breath-taking, in fact grotesque, subservience to the needs of government propaganda is insufficient for those on the hard right.

The Telegraph published a piece under the remarkable title: 'Syrian "cannibal" rebel explains his actions.'

In the Independent, propagandist Kim Sengupta was also willing to empathise:

> 'Khalid al-Hamad (Abu Sakkar is his nom de guerre) was not always a bloodthirsty man of violence…
>
> 'The question remains what turned al-Hammad into Abu Sakkar, the man who proudly appears in a video mutilating a corpse… What made someone who had once cautioned against blaming the Alawites – the minority community from which the ruling elite are drawn – for the regime's actions into their virulent hater?'

Understanding was sought, in other words – again, unthinkable for the official enemy. Like Wood, Sengupta referenced a source 'correcting early reports that he ate a piece of heart, pointing out it was lungs'. It wasn't a heart at all and he hadn't eaten it; he had just cut out a bit of lung from a corpse and held it to his mouth.

So who was responsible for the atrocity? Sengupta referenced the view of Haitham Mohammed Nassr, a former 'rebel' fighter, who said the atrocity 'should be put in the context of the crimes being committed by the Shabiha, the Alawite pro-regime militia'. Sengupta concluded:

> 'There is little doubt that brutality with which the regime responded to peaceful protests in Baba Amr and elsewhere in Syria was the catalyst for the armed uprising which followed.'

The 'rebel' view was even allowed to conclude this piece ostensibly focused on 'rebel' crimes:

> 'We all want Basher to go, the longer this goes on the more violent people become.'

Key propaganda messages clearly attempting to transform a PR disaster for Western warmongers into ammunition *justifying* an imminent attack on the Syrian government.

This was a powerful example of the true flexibility of corporate media ethics. Such astonishing apologetics are permissible for an act which, if committed by an official enemy, would be instantly and relentlessly condemned, with any attempt to explore the perpetrator's motives dismissed as outrageous. Thus the verdict of the Express on the Tunisian beach atrocity in Sousse:

> 'The Islamist terrorists are evil and must be defeated.' (Leading article, 'Don't give in to terror,' Daily Mirror, June 30, 2015)

Simple. There is nothing to discuss, nothing to understand, no context, certainly no sense that the West's Perpetual War machine might share some blame.

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