

‘Disgustingly Biased’ - The Corporate Media On The Gaza Massacre

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Soon after Malaysian Airlines MH17 crashed near Donetsk, Ukraine on July 18, killing 298 people, the BBC website quickly, and rightly, set up a ‘LIVE’ feed with rolling reports and commentary on the disaster. This was clearly an important and dramatic event involving horrific loss of life with serious political implications. The public would, of course, be searching for the latest news.

However, since July 8, ten days prior to the crash, Israeli armed forces had been bombarding the trapped civilian population of Gaza with airstrikes, drone strikes and naval shelling. As the massive Israeli assault ramped up on July 9, the World section of the BBC News website had this as its [headline](#):

‘Israel under renewed Hamas attack’

By July 18, around 300 people had been killed in Gaza, 80% of them civilians. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is a key political issue of our time, one that was clearly developing by the minute after July 8. And yet at no point had the BBC set up a ‘LIVE’ feed with rolling news.

That finally changed on July 20 after so many days in which so many Palestinians had been killed. Why July 20? The answer appears to be found in the fourth entry of the [live feed](#) under the title ‘Breaking News’:

‘Some 13 Israeli soldiers were killed overnight in Gaza, news agencies, quoting Israeli military sources, say. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is expected to address the nation shortly.’

Despite this small number of military deaths compared to the Palestinian toll, it seems clear that the killing of the Israeli troops triggered the BBC live feed. It focused intensely on these deaths, with entries of this kind:

‘Ben White, writer tweets: Israel has lost more soldiers in a 3 day old ground offensive than it did during Cast Lead & Pillar of Defense combined (12).’

And:

‘View to the Mid East, a writer in Ashdod, Israel tweets: One of the soldiers who

was killed in Gaza tonight prays at the same synagogue I go to. Grew up in the same neighbourhood.'

The feed incorporated no less than five photographs from two funerals of the Israeli soldiers but none from the far more numerous Palestinian funerals (one picture showed Palestinian relatives collecting a body from a morgue), with these captions:

'Friends and relatives of Israeli Sergeant Adar Barsano mourn during his funeral at the military cemetery in the northern Israeli city of Nahariya.'

And:

'Sagit Greenberg, the wife of Israeli soldier Maj Amotz Greenberg, mourns during his funeral in the central town of Hod Hasharon.'

Obviously, Israeli suffering also merits compassion, but these military deaths were overshadowed by a far higher loss of Palestinian lives, [most of them](#) civilian men, women and children. The toll currently [stands](#) at 746 Palestinians killed and 4,640 wounded. Israel has [suffered](#) 32 military and two civilian deaths. One foreign worker from Thailand has also been killed.

In the following days (and at time of writing) the live feed was cancelled; a period that has seen hundreds of Palestinian deaths and a handful of Israeli military deaths.

For some time on the morning of July 21, the [sole Gaza content](#) on the BBC News home page was 'Breaking News' of an 'Israeli soldier missing in Gaza'.

Remarkably, on the morning of July 23, when 18 Palestinians were killed, the BBC set up a [live feed](#) for the wrecked Italian cruise liner Costa Concordia, which showed the ship being towed to Genoa. There was no live feed for Gaza.

The BBC has [supplied](#) names, ages, pictures and emotive background stories of the Malaysian air crash victims while, with rare exceptions, Palestinian dead have been presented as nameless figures, briefly mentioned, then forgotten.

The level of BBC bias was emphasised by an [article](#) headline that placed inverted commas around the siege in Gaza, as if it were a matter for debate: "Palestinian PM says lift Gaza 'siege' as part of ceasefire". The BBC subsequently changed the title, but a [tweet](#) promoting the article with the original wording remains.

The BBC has also [implied](#) that 'Rockets fired from Gaza' are comparable to 'Gaza targets hit by Israel'. Readers are to understand that *attempted* attacks by unguided, low-tech rockets are comparable to *actual* bombings by state of the art bombs, missiles and shells. The BBC's source? 'Israel Defence Forces.'

On July 21, BBC News at Ten presenter Huw Edwards asked a colleague live on air:

'...the Israelis saying they'll carry on as long as necessary to stop the Hamas rocket attacks. Do you detect any signs at all that there's a hope of a coming

together in the next few days or weeks, or not?’

In other words, BBC News presented Hamas rocket attacks as the stumbling block to peace, exactly conforming to Israeli state propaganda.

In a report on the same edition of News at Ten, the BBC’s world affairs editor, John Fidler-Simpson CBE, asserted that ‘one reason why casualties on the two sides are so out of proportion’ is because ‘Israel has developed the world’s most effective anti-missile defence’.

This suggested a more or less equal fight with Israeli simply better able to protect itself. Fidler-Simpson added:

‘The Iron Dome system’s ability to knock Hamas missiles out of the sky has been a remarkable achievement for Israel during this crisis. The success rate is quite phenomenal.’

Back in the real world, weapons experts Ted Postol of MIT and Richard Lloyd of Tesla Laboratory, [argue](#) that claims for Iron Dome are wildly exaggerated, estimating a success rate of less than 5 per cent. Peter Coy of BloombergBusinessweek [comments](#):

‘Lloyd e-mailed me a copy of a 28-page analysis that’s the most detailed critique yet of the holes in the Iron Dome system – holes so big that, if he’s right, would justify calling it Iron Sieve.’

BBC bias has also been typified by its downplaying, or complete blanking, of large-scale demonstrations in several UK cities protesting BBC coverage. As activist Jonathon Shafi [noted](#) of the BBC’s lack of interest:

‘It is misinformation of the worst, and it is an insult to journalism.’

After the four Palestinian Bakr boys, aged between 9 and 11, were killed by an Israeli shell, the New York Times [headline](#) on July 16 read:

‘Boys Drawn to Gaza Beach, and Into Center of Mideast Strife’

This worked well to obscure the truth that the boys had been killed while playing football on a beach. Artist Amir Schiby produced a wonderful, moving [tribute to the Bakr boys](#).

Even indisputable evidence [here](#) and [here](#) that Israel had fired on hospitals in Gaza, major war crimes, brought little outrage from politicians and media. Jonathan Whittall, Head of Humanitarian Analysis at Médecins Sans Frontières/Doctors Without Borders (MSF), [reminded](#) the world:

‘Our role is to provide medical care to war casualties and sick detainees, not to repeatedly treat the same patients between torture sessions.’

Despite the unequal battle and high civilian death toll, no high-profile advocates of the West's '[responsibility to protect](#)' ('R2P') civilians in Iraq, Libya and Syria have been calling for 'intervention'.

We asked passionate 'R2Pers' like [David Aaronovitch](#), [Jonathan Freedland](#) and [Menzies Campbell](#) if they felt 'we must do something'. They did not reply. Freedland [commented](#) in a BBC interview that the death toll was 'very lopsided' – a polite euphemism for a massacre that, [according](#) to Unicef, has claimed 10 children per day. E-International Relations website [reports](#):

'While the conflict has generated near blanket international media coverage it has been strangely ignored by the three most prominent and vociferous organisations established to promote the idea of "The Responsibility to Protect", namely The International Coalition for the Responsibility to Protect (ICRtoP), the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (GCR2P) and the Asia Pacific Centre for the Responsibility to Protect (APCR2P)...

'Since the operation began these groups have published myriad tweets, posts and articles – on issues ranging from the rights of women, the treatment of refugees, mass atrocity cries and the provision of medical aid... Yet, coverage of the crisis in Gaza has been negligible.'

Who Starts The 'Cycle Of Violence'?

The term 'cycle of violence' often occurs in corporate reporting of the Israel-Palestine conflict. But who starts the cycle spinning? A study of news performance in 2001 by the Glasgow Media Group [noted](#) that Israelis 'were six times as likely to be presented as "retaliating" or in some way responding than were the Palestinians'.

The US media watchdog, Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, [observed](#) that the current conflict 'is usually traced back to the kidnapping and killing of three Israeli teenagers on the West Bank. When their bodies were found on June 30, Israel "retaliated" by attacking Gaza. The July 2 killing of a Palestinian teenager, allegedly a revenge murder by Israeli extremists, was reported as further escalating the conflict.'

On the BBC's [News at Ten](#) (July 23), reporter Quentin Sommerville commented (at 14:31):

'The kidnapping and murder of three Israeli teenagers, blamed on Hamas, sparked this conflict.'

The Guardian readers' editor, Chris Elliott – ostensibly the newspaper's watchdog on bias in language and presentation – echoed Israeli propaganda, [describing](#) Israel's current attack as a 'counter-offensive'.

NBC News correspondent Ayman Mohyeldin [supplied](#) a rare example of dissent:

'But even before the kidnapping of three Israeli-Jewish teenagers and killing of the Palestinian teenager last week, two Palestinians were killed back in May and didn't trigger the kind of international outcry and international outrage that the killing of the three Israeli teens have.'

Corporate media have generally not identified these deaths as initiating a 'cycle of violence'.

[According](#) to human rights group B'Tselem, 568 Palestinians had been killed by Israeli security forces from January 2009 till the end of May 2014; 84 of those fatalities were children. Over the same time period, 38 Israelis were killed by Palestinians in Israel and the Occupied Territories.

Many expert commentators [argue](#) that the deeper cause behind the latest violence is in fact Israel's opposition to the Palestinian unity government, including Hamas, formed earlier this year which has been recognised even by the US.

No Ceasefire - 'It's The Siege, Stupid'

If Palestinians are blamed by corporate media for starting the violence, they are also blamed for refusing to end it. A Guardian article [title](#) read:

'Pressure mounts on Hamas to accept ceasefire as Gaza death toll tops 300 - Hamas left isolated by its refusal to accept a truce as death toll rises and UN chief heads for the region to help broker peace'

Jerusalem correspondent Harriet Sherwood commented:

'But with the Palestinian death toll rising over 300, it is the Hamas leadership that has come under increasing pressure from multiple international sources to accept an immediate ceasefire in Gaza.

'"The objective is to convince all the Palestinian factions to accept the ceasefire," one western diplomat told the Guardian.'

But a cessation of the current violence would *not* mean an end to war and suffering for the Palestinians. Ali Abunimah of Electronic Intifada [commented](#):

'[T]he two Palestinian resistance groups Hamas and Islamic Jihad have set forth ten conditions for a ceasefire and ten-year truce with Israel.

'They include an end to all armed hostilities, the end of the siege of Gaza, and the construction of internationally supervised air and seaports.'

Abunimah explained the rationale behind these conditions:

'It's the siege, stupid. Talk to virtually anyone in Gaza and they will tell you the same. The siege is living death, slowly crushing the life out of Gaza. It has to end.

'This is a main reason why Hamas did not accede to the attempt by Israel, through its ally the Egyptian dictatorship, to impose a unilateral "ceasefire" about which Hamas says it was never even consulted, hearing about the initiative only through the media.'

Jerusalem-based journalist Mya Guarnieri [described](#) what a return to the status quo actually means:

'Israel strikes Gaza from time to time and kills Palestinian civilians there and in the West Bank without garnering much scrutiny from the international media and, by extension, the international community.'

In February 2013, Ben White [commented](#):

'Three months have passed since the ceasefire that brought an end to Israel's eight-day attack on the Gaza Strip known as Operation "Pillar of Defence"... Since late November, Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip have averaged over one a day, every day. These include shootings by troops positioned along the border fence, attacks on fishermen working off the Gaza coast, and incursions by the Israeli army.'

These attacks are mentioned in passing, or ignored, by a corporate media system that is so clearly indifferent to the loss of Palestinian life. Israel-based journalist Jonathan Cook [observed](#) of the latest conflict:

'It's depressingly predictable that the corporate media have swallowed the line of Israel accepting the "ceasefire proposal" and Hamas rejecting it. What Hamas did was reject a US-Israeli diktat to sign away the rights of the people of Gaza to end a siege that cuts them off from the rest of the world.'

Corporate Filtering – 'A Top-Down Intimidation Campaign'

The bias in failing to report the brutalisation of a trapped, impoverished people under occupation is staggering. Many might wonder why journalists fail to speak out. But several journalists who *have* exposed Israeli actions, and media bias favouring Israel, have been punished.

Ayman Mohyeldin, the NBC News correspondent who witnessed the killing of the four Bakr boys, and whose reporting of the tragedy moved many readers around the world, was subsequently '[told](#) by NBC executives to leave Gaza immediately'. Glenn Greenwald reports that NBC executives claimed the decision was motivated by 'security concerns' as Israel prepared a ground invasion. But NBC then sent another correspondent, Richard Engel, into Gaza with an American producer.

After a storm of protest on social media, NBC announced it had 'reversed its decision'. The broadcaster [dissembled](#):

'As with any news team in conflict zones, deployments are constantly reassessed. We've carefully considered our deployment decisions and we will be sending Mohyeldin back to Gaza over the weekend.'

The day after Mohyeldin was pulled out, CNN correspondent Diana Magnay was removed from covering the conflict after she reported Israelis [cheering](#) the bombing of Gaza from a hillside overlooking the border. When the people cheering allegedly threatened to destroy

Magnay's car 'if I say a word wrong', she [described](#) them on Twitter as 'scum'.

On July 21, journalist and MSNBC contributor Rula Jebreal [said](#) in an interview on MSNBC of MSNBC:

'We're ridiculous. We are disgustingly biased when it comes to this issue. Look how many [sic] air time Netanyahu and his folks have on air on a daily basis, Andrea Mitchell and others. I never see one Palestinian being interviewed on these same issues.'

The MSNBC interviewer responded: 'We have had Palestinian voices on our show.'

Jebreal replied: 'Maybe for 30 seconds, and then you have 25 minutes for Bibi Netanyahu...'

Max Blumenthal [reported](#) on AlterNet:

'Within hours, all of Jebreal's future bookings were cancelled and the renewal of her contract was off the table.'

Later that day, Jebreal [tweeted](#):

'My forthcoming TV appearances have been cancelled! Is there a link between my expose and the cancellation?'

Jebreal [commented](#):

'I couldn't stay silent after seeing the amount of airtime given to Israeli politicians versus Palestinians. They say we are balanced but their idea of balance is 90 percent Israeli guests and 10 percent Palestinians. This kind of media is what leads to the failing policies that we see in Gaza.'

Jebreal said that in her two years as an MSNBC contributor, she had told her producers: "'we have a serious issue here". But everybody's intimidated by this pressure and if it's not direct then it becomes self-censorship'.

Blumenthal [reported](#) than an NBC producer, speaking anonymously, had confirmed the reality of 'a top-down intimidation campaign aimed at presenting an Israeli-centric view of the attack on the Gaza Strip'.

Pressure on the executives responsible for disciplining journalists is also intense. Jill Abramson, former executive editor of the New York Times, [has said](#) Washington often 'played the terrorist card' to get stories spiked:

'Sometimes the CIA or the director of national intelligence or the NSA or the White House will call about a story... You hit the brakes, you hear the arguments, and it's always a balancing act: the importance of the information to the public versus the claim of harming national security... Over time, the government too reflexively said to the Times, "you're going to have blood on your hands if you publish X" and because of the frequency of that, the

government lost a little credibility... But you do listen and seriously worry...
Editors are Americans too... We don't want to help terrorists'.

But editors should remember that they are human beings first, Americans second – to behave otherwise risks supporting their *own* government's terrorism and that of its allies.

For in truth, biased US-UK journalism *is* empowering the Israeli government's effort to terrorise the Palestinian people into accepting gradual genocide as their land and resources are stolen. As we have discussed [here](#) (see also Gideon Levy [here](#)), the hidden backstory is that this land grab can *not* be conducted under conditions of peace. It *requires* Perpetual War; a phoney, one-sided 'war' dominated by Israel's perennial trump card: high-tech military power supplied by that eternal 'peace broker', the United States.

DE and DC

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