

Media Bias Directed against Palestinians

Research Suggests BBC Arabic Coverage Not Objective

By [Global Research](#)

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Ramallah – A researcher at Birzeit University submitted findings Saturday outlining what she found to be un-objective coverage around “the question of Palestine” on BBC Arabic’s broadcast news.

The study, focusing on the daily news program World News This Evening’s broadcasts between 8 November and 8 December 2008, found external political motivations swayed coverage of Palestine only weeks before Israel launched its Operation Cast Lead on 26 December 2008.

Masters student Buthayna Hamdan, who pioneered the study, explained that she measured the objectivity of the reports by BBC’s own standards, and basic precepts of news coverage.

Benchmarks for measurement included: Omission of facts, clear differentiation of facts and opinions, and avoiding prioritization of accounts.

The research found that the news coverage employed Israeli terminology, describing the military as “defense forces” when its actions were offensive, labeling locations with Israeli place names like the illegal settlement Har Homa, built on appropriated land known as Jabal Abu Ghnaim.

Because the settlement and the expropriation of land is illegal under international law, the study argued, the area where the settlement is located should retain its Arabic name.

Not once in the month of broadcasts on BBC Arabic did newscasters say the word “occupation” in relation to Israel or Palestine, the study said. It also noted the use of the term “military arsenal” to describe home made projectiles fired toward Israel by militant factions in Gaza.

During the study period, the research found 25 news events in Palestine, including the death, injury and detention of Palestinians including children, that went unreported by the news program. The same period saw the full coverage of every home made projectile launched from Gaza into Israeli territory, a total of 14.

The report found the coverage of projectile launches “exaggerated,” given all 14 incidents resulted in no deaths or injuries.

Following the analysis, and citing works by British journalist Robert Fisk, the report suggested that BBC Arabic’s news coverage was influenced by an Israeli lobby, and a mass supply of Israeli government-produced news and information. The study cited the

publication of several opinion articles by Israeli consular staff in London, but no corresponding articles from Palestinian sources.

To prove the point, the study compared the suggested bias in reporting on Israel and Palestine to the case of alleged weapons of mass destruction in Iraq. Citing studies on the station's coverage, the study noted research found the station was shown to be independent in its coverage, despite the fact that its government was preparing to go to war in Iraq when the coverage was aired.

The study concluded that the presence of an Israeli lobby, and its absence in the coverage on Iraq, was the single largest factor in the discrepancy of coverage.

To substantiate the argument, the study cited BBC Director-General Mark Thompson's relationship with former Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon, relating the relationship to Thompson's decision not to air an appeal for humanitarian aid to Gaza paid for by several international agencies.

Buthayna Hamdan, a student in International Studies, presented her research to a thesis committee on Saturday. Her committee included Dr Samih Shabib from the Department of Culture, Dr George Jaqaman from the Department of Culture and director of the Muwatin Foundation (Citizen Foundation), and Dr Samir Awad, from the Department of International Relations and director of the university's Center for Development Studies.

The committee passed the research and awarded Hamdan her Master of Arts. In their comments, the committee applauded the research as a "remarkable contribution to the field of media research."

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