

Australian Broadcasting Corporation doubles down on support for Gaza genocide with filthy “Q+A” program

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Amid reports of substantial anger among staff over its promotion of the Israeli government’s justifications for the war against the Palestinians, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) has doubled down on its backing of the unfolding genocide in Gaza. A “Q+A” panel discussion on Monday night was a foul exercise in justification for war crimes.

For years, the public broadcaster has been ever-more open in its aggressive support for militarism and war, functioning as a propaganda outlet for the US-led confrontation with China in particular. Its active alignment with an ongoing genocide, however, marks a new low and has provoked considerable shock among its audience.

“Q+A’s” pretense of balance has always been a sham, with its panelists generally selected from the two major parties, and audience questions heavily vetted. But in its episode dedicated to Gaza, even the window-dressing of impartiality was done away with.

The panelists included Mark Leibler, one of the main Zionist lobbyists in the country. Leibler’s influence was indicated last month, when he organised a scurrilous pro-Israeli letter signed by all living prime ministers bar Paul Keating. He was joined by Dave Sharma, another ardent Zionist, Australia’s former ambassador to Israel and former Coalition government MP. Tim Watts, assistant minister for foreign affairs, was present, representing a Labor government that has insisted on Israel’s “right to defend itself” as bombs rain down on Gaza.

Francesca Albanese, United Nations Special Rapporteur on human rights in the occupied Palestinian territories, was on the panel, but was ignored and sidelined for almost the entire program, despite, or rather because of her expertise and standing.

That meant that the program acquired the character of a nasty gang-up against Nasser Mashni, president of the Australia Palestine Advocacy Network, led by its host Patricia Karvelas.

A live studio audience, always vetted, but “Q+A’s” only tenuous connection to actual popular opinion, was dispensed with in the interests of “sensitivity” and “safety.” The real reason was to insulate the panel from mass sentiment, which is

firmly against the Israeli onslaught, as expressed in the largest anti-war demonstrations since the 2003 invasion of Iraq. It was also revealed that the ABC studios were guarded by a posse of police outside.

Predictably, the program began with a question opposing a ceasefire, and asserting that proponents of one are indifferent to the fate of Israeli hostages in Gaza. That set the tone for the entire discussion, which only degenerated from there.

Throughout the program, Liebler and Sharma defended Israel unequivocally, and advanced the line of its government. Liebler supported Israeli settlements in the West Bank, although they have been deemed illegal under international law. He insisted that if Israel did not have a strong military, it would be over-run by antisemitic Palestinians. Watts, a colorless nonentity, simply echoed the positions advanced by Liebler and Sharma.

Given the political histories and affiliations of the three, none of that was surprising or even particularly noteworthy.

Of far greater significance were the repeated and aggressive editorial interventions of Karvelas. She did not function in any sense as a compere. Instead, the impression was of a police prosecutor, who had Mashni in the dock. Many of the exchanges between the two were so shocking, one would scarcely believe they had occurred without having watched the program.

In her first question to Mashni, Karvelas effectively denounced the global mass protests against the slaughter in Gaza, asserting that “there’s not a call very often for all of the hostages to be released.” Mashni said that he thought Hamas should release hostages, but that was not enough for Karvelas. She insistently asked Mashni if he could understand why Israel would be “reluctant” to agree to a ceasefire, i.e., to stop its bombardment of Palestinian civilians.

Mashni stated: “Patricia, I think we need to go back to the reality that this is not a 35-day-old conflict. Everything we’re talking about here is framed as October 7 is the start. The reality, Patricia, is I’m an accidental Australian. My father was ethnically cleansed by Jewish terror gangs in the late ‘40s. Israel wasn’t in...” But he was interrupted. In a series of quick-fire exchanges, Karvelas shut down any discussion of the

75-year oppression of the Palestinians.

Mashni said: “Well, what I want to look at is the amount of blood that’s in the streets. Palestinian corpses are being eaten by dogs. If we can’t say 5,000 Palestinian children have died in 35 days and say, first of all, let’s stop killing kids... Let’s stop killing. That can’t be too big an ask of humanity. For 35 days there’s been no food, no water, no gas, no electricity, no medicine, women having...”

That prompted the following exchange:

Karvelas: But should there be the release of the hostages in exchange for a ceasefire?

Mashni: Patricia, Palestinian children matter, too.

Karvelas: But that’s not the question I asked, Nasser...

As if aping Joseph McCarthy, Karvelas demanded to know, repeatedly, whether Mashni was a sympathiser of Hamas, even after he said he was not. As Karvelas would have known, Mashni’s activism is modeled on that of his father, who was for decades one of the most prominent Australian supporters of the secular Fatah movement, which has always opposed Hamas. The questioning, and the incredulous responses to Mashni’s answers, were simply not in good faith.

Mashni noted the massive civilian death toll in Gaza, of more than 11,000 people killed in a month. Karvelas replied, blandly: “Yeah. They are warning about a potential genocide,” before cynically deflecting, “In the Hamas manifesto, a genocide is called for of Israelis, of Jewish people, right?”

Later, Mashni again sought to refocus the discussion on the actual situation in Gaza. He explained: “Gaza is apocalyptic. Today, a cousin of mine, she was bombed in her house. She’s sitting in her home with her 10-year-old dead daughter. She can’t get her daughter out. They can’t leave the house. She’s decomposing with her daughter in the house, Patricia. That’s not humane. If we can’t call for a ceasefire, what are we doing?”

Karvelas did not acknowledge Mashni’s comments, let alone offer condolences. With an icy expression, she simply moved to an unrelated question. The exchange summed up the complete indifference to the mass murder that is unfolding, and a refusal to even discuss it.

Two other aspects of the program should be noted.

Firstly, Mashni was subjected to what can only be described as character assassination. A video link questioner asked him about a hit-piece in the *Australian*, asserting without a shred of evidence that charity donations Mashni has been associated with have been funnelled to Palestinian resistance fighters. Mashni said this was entirely false and it was now a matter for his lawyers.

Karvelas asked five follow-up questions, including: “Are you sure none of that money is going to Hamas or to terror?” “But

can you be sure?” “But you are investigating it?” “But are you launching your own [investigation] to find out?”

Even accepting the broadest definition, that questioning was not anywhere near the bounds of legitimate journalism. It was an interrogation whose only conceivable purpose was to undermine Mashni’s credibility. So too was Karvelas’ decision to ask Mashni about a criminal conviction recorded against him 35 years ago, when he was a 19 year old. That episode had no relevance whatsoever to the discussion, or the conflict in the Middle East.

The second point of note was a brief comment Karvelas made, which has not been scrutinised. In the course of another belligerent round of questioning targeting Mashni, she stated: “Some Palestinians are absolutely indigenous to the land...”

Karvelas did not elaborate on this very strange remark. If only some Palestinians are indigenous to Palestine, where does she think the rest are from? The assertion that Palestinians are actually Jordanians, or some other Arab peoples, sent by their rulers to cause problems for Israel, is a well-known trope of extreme right-wing Zionist propaganda, used to justify ethnic cleansing. Karvelas should be compelled to clarify her remark.

Of course, in a discussion on Gaza, there were numerous references to the dangers of vilification and racism. Such terms have been weaponised by governments and the media, including to slander the peaceful mass demonstrations against the genocide. But can anyone claim that Mashni was treated by the ABC as an equal of the other panelists, and with respect? And if he was not, what terms would best describe such conduct?

Two events the next day underscored the rottenness of the ABC, and the entire official media.

On Tuesday morning, Karvelas on the ABC’s Radio National gave a friendly interview to a *Haaretz* journalist whose reporting was more in line with being an Israeli Defence Force spokesperson. They justified the illegal bombing of hospitals without any pushback.

In the afternoon, UN rapporteur Albanese spoke at the National Press Club. She noted that the Australian media was as bad as that of her native Italy, which was saying something, and aptly compared the treatment of Mashni on Q+A to being “in front of an execution squad.”

Albanese then dispatched one journalist after another, as they lined up to justify Israel’s slaughter of the Palestinians in Gaza.

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