

The BBC on Gaza: bias in support of British imperialism

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The Centre for Media Monitoring (CfMM) has provided damning evidence of systematic bias against the Palestinians in the BBC's coverage of the US-Israeli war on Gaza.

Britain's publicly funded state broadcaster, whose Board is stacked with government appointees, acts to silence and censor dissenting views in line with government support for the US-Israeli war on the Palestinians. Keir Starmer's Labour government has continued to supply the Zionist state with weaponry and intelligence to carry out its attacks as part of its Washington ally's broader plans to assert control of the resource-rich and geostrategically vital region.

The BBC's role of as mouthpiece for British imperialism has global significance because of the broadcaster's worldwide reach, making London a centre for the lobbying and media-management activities of corporations and nation states.

A clear picture emerged from the analysis of the BBC's output: the broadcaster marginalised the suffering of the Palestinians while amplifying the Israeli narratives. Time and again, the BBC failed to report Israel's assault on Gaza impartially. For example, the study shows that the BBC gave Israeli deaths 33 times more coverage per fatality and significantly more emotive language than Palestinian deaths, even though in the first 12 months of Israel's offensive, 42,010 Palestinians compared with the 1,246 Israelis were killed, a ratio of 34:1.

The CfMM's report, *The BBC on Gaza-Israel: One story, double standards, 2023-24*, building on its previous study *Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24*, examined the BBC's language, the disproportionate number of casualties, Palestinian and Israeli voices, Israeli hostages versus the 10,000+ Palestinians detained without charge (many of them children), the systematic

destruction of Gaza's civilian infrastructure and targeted attacks on medical personnel and journalists.

It analysed 3,873 articles and 32,092 pieces of TV/radio broadcasts over the first 12 months of the war, along with nearly 8,000 of the BBC's articles on the Ukraine conflict for comparative purposes. It found that Palestinian deaths were less newsworthy than Israeli deaths, while the language used was less emotive. The BBC did not give independent or Palestinian interviewees the same treatment as Israeli or pro-Israel interviewees. It provided no context to the long running conflict prior to 7 October 2023; it suppressed or minimised allegations of genocide and war crimes, shutting down guests' genocide claims in over 100 instances; and represented illegally detained Israelis and Palestinians differently.

The report comes after the BBC shelved the documentary *Gaza: Doctors Under Attack*, saying the film "risked creating a perception of partiality". The film has now been shown on Channel 4 and is being screened at cinemas.

The BBC justified the repeated delays by claiming it was waiting until a report into the making of another documentary, *Gaza: How to Survive a Warzone*, had been completed. It pulled the film from its iPlayer platform earlier this year after it emerged that its 13-year-old narrator was the son of a Hamas-affiliated official, Dr. Ayman Alyazouri. The film was smeared as Hamas "propaganda," even though it includes Palestinians expressing criticism of Hamas and offers no political advocacy.

Ben de Pear, the producer of the medics film and a former Channel 4 News editor, accused the BBC of attempting to stop him talking about the "painful journey" behind taking the film to the screen by demanding he sign legal gagging clauses. Writing on

LinkedIn, he said, “I rejected and refused to sign the double gagging clause the BBC bosses tried multiple times to get me to sign. Not only could we have been sued for saying the BBC refused to air the film (palpably and provably true) but also if any other company had said it, the BBC could sue us.”

He criticised the BBC’s Director General, Tim Davie, at a conference in Sheffield over the decision to pull the film: “He is just a PR person. Tim Davie is taking editorial decisions which, frankly, he is not capable of making.” Davie’s decision to pull the film provoked more than 110 BBC journalists to sign a letter expressing their “concerns over opaque editorial decisions and censorship at the BBC on the reporting of Israel/Palestine.”

In contrast, the National Union of Journalists (NUJ) and all the other unions that purport to represent their members at the BBC have remained conspicuously silent. There is not a word of criticism of the BBC’s coverage of Israel’s wars to be found on the NUJ’s website.

The BBC journalists were among more than 400 stars and media figures, including Miriam Margolyes, Alexei Sayle and Juliet Stevenson, who signed a letter last week saying that the decision to drop the film “demonstrates, once again, that the BBC is not reporting ‘without fear or favour’ when it comes to Israel”. Stating that the “inconsistent manner in which guidance is applied draws into focus the role of [Sir Robbie] Gibb on the BBC Board and BBC’s editorial standards committee,” it called for Gibb to be removed because of a conflict of interest regarding the Middle East.

Gibb, a journalist, political advisor and director of the charitable trust that owns the rabidly pro-Israel *Jewish Chronicle* (JC), was appointed by Boris Johnson’s Conservative government in 2020. Last year, the JC was exposed as Netanyahu’s mouthpiece after publishing fake news by a fake journalist aimed at massaging the news in his favour. Gibb sits on the key committee looking at editorial standards at the BBC, whose coverage of Israel/Palestine he lambasts as “biased” against Israel. He has refused to stand down.

Last week, Alan Rusbridger, editor of *Prospect Magazine* and a former editor of the *Guardian*, wrote that the BBC had told him Gibb had not recused himself from any discussions “about the BBC’s

coverage of the Israel-Gaza conflict”.

Gibb’s appointment to the BBC’s Board confirms the “revolving door” between the media, Westminster and the lobbying world.

The BBC’s Director General and Chair of the Board’s response to the outrage of the supporters of the Gaza genocide over its failure to cut a Glastonbury livestream that showed Bobby Vylan leading chants of “Death, Death to the IDF [Israel Defence Forces]”, was swift. They made grovelling apologies, stood down some of the staff involved in the broadcast and forced the head of music to resign. Within five hours, the BBC pulled the footage.

Declassified UK analysed the BBC’s online reporting (excluding videos) for 13-26 June, during the US-Israeli war on Iran, supposedly to prevent Iran developing a nuclear weapons capability. It found 103 articles and a further 821 short pieces in the BBC’s live written reporting tagged with either Iran or Israel. Only six of those 103 articles mentioned the possibility that Israel might possess nuclear weapons even though it is widely acknowledged that it is a nuclear power, with Swedish research institute SIPRI estimating it has at least 90 nuclear warheads.

The BBC’s systematic bias in favour of Israel reflects the growing chasm between Britain’s ruling elite that enables and supports Israel’s war of annihilation on Gaza, and the broader public that have turned out in their millions in Britain and throughout the world to oppose the war. The government is fully aware that its support for Israel’s genocidal war against the Palestinians, like its support for the criminal US invasion of Iraq in 2003, is based upon a pack of lies and contradictions. It knows that truthful reporting could ignite a mass anti-war, anti-capitalist and socialist movement.



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