



Neutral Citation Number: [2026] EWHC 564 (KB)

Case No: KB-2025-003160

IN THE HIGH COURT OF JUSTICE
KING'S BENCH DIVISION
MEDIA AND COMMUNICATIONS LIST

Royal Courts of Justice
Strand, London, WC2A 2LL

Date: 12/03/2026

Before :

THE HON. MRS JUSTICE STEYN DBE

Between :

RAPHAEL BERG

Claimant

- and -

OWEN JONES

Defendant

John Stables and Beth Grossman (instructed by **Patron Law**) for the **Claimant**
Aidan Eardley KC and Hannah Gilliland (instructed by **Reynolds Porter Chamberlain**
LLP) for the **Defendant**

Hearing dates: 6 March 2026

Approved Judgment

This judgment was handed down remotely at 10.30am on 12 March 2026 by circulation to the parties or their representatives by e-mail and by release to the National Archives.

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THE HON. MRS JUSTICE STEYN DBE

Mrs Justice Steyn :

Introduction

1. This is a libel claim. On 19 January 2026, Master Dagnall ordered the determination of preliminary issues as to meaning and related issues. This judgment follows the short trial of those issues.
2. The claimant is Middle East Editor for online BBC News. The defendant is a journalist and political activist. The claim is brought in respect of an article first published on 19 December 2024, under the headline “*The BBC’s Civil War Over Gaza*”, on the website Drop Site News. The article is incorporated in the appendix to this judgment (with added paragraph lettering/numbering, and side-lining to indicate the words complained of).
3. In accordance with the usual procedure, no defence has yet been filed, but the defendant’s position is that the five paragraph introduction was not written by him but by the founding editor of Drop Site News, Nausicaa Renner. If it were relevant to do so, he may deny responsibility for its publication. In these circumstances, while it is agreed that I must in any event consider the words complained of in the context of the article read as a whole (including the introduction), I was asked to indicate if I took the view that consideration of the article without the introduction would have led to different answers to any of the preliminary issues. Neither party contended that it would make a difference. I agree: it would not do so.
4. In accordance with established practice, I read the article to capture my initial reaction before reading the parties’ submissions and hearing oral argument.

The preliminary issues

5. The order provides for the following matters to be determined as preliminary issues:
 - a) the natural and ordinary meaning of the publication complained of in the claimant’s claim for libel;
 - b) in respect of the publication complained of:
 - (i) whether the meaning found is defamatory of the claimant at common law;
 - (ii) whether the meaning found made a statement of fact or was or included an expression of opinion; and
 - (iii) insofar as the meaning found contained an expression of opinion, whether, in general or specific terms, the basis of the opinion was indicated.
6. The wording of preliminary issues (b)(ii) and (iii) is not quite right. Those issues reflect the first and second conditions for establishing the statutory defence of honest opinion. Section 3 of the Defamation Act 2013 provides, so far as material:

“(2) The first condition is that the statement complained of was a statement of opinion.

(3) The second condition is that the statement complained of indicated, whether in general or specific terms, the basis of the opinion.” (Emphasis added.)

7. It can be seen that the statutory test refers to the “*statement complained of*”, not the meaning of that statement, or the imputation it conveys (*cf* s.2(1) which refers to the “*imputation conveyed by the statement complained of*”): see *Millett v Corbyn* [2021] EWCA Civ 567, [2021] EMLR 19, [17] (Warby LJ). It is common ground that I should address preliminary issues (b)(ii) and (iii) on the basis that the words “*statement complained of*” should be substituted for “*meaning found*”.

The law

8. The court’s task is to determine the natural and ordinary meaning of the words complained of, which is the single meaning the words would convey to the hypothetical ordinary reasonable reader. The legal principles are well-established and uncontroversial.
9. The meaning is to be determined objectively, by reference to the words themselves, in the context of the article read as a whole. No other evidence is admissible. The author’s intention is irrelevant.
10. The governing principle is reasonableness. The hypothetical reader is one who is neither avid for scandal nor naïve. Judges should have regard to the impression the words make upon them, avoiding a too literal approach or over-elaborate analysis.
11. These points, and a fuller account of the principles governing the determination of meaning, are to be found in *Stocker v Stocker* [2019] UKSC 17, [2020] AC 593, *Millett v Corbyn* [2021] EWCA Civ 567, [2021] EMLR 19, *Blake v Fox* [2023] EWCA Civ 1000, [2024] EMLR 2, and Nicklin J’s well-known distillation of the principles in *Koutsogiannis v The Random House Group Ltd* [2019] EWHC 48 (QB), [2020] 4 WLR 25, which I have applied.
12. The article is one in which the defendant repeats the words of a number of third parties, and so the repetition rule applies. The words must be interpreted by reference to the underlying allegations of fact. The repetition rule prevents a court from deciding that simply because it is a report of what someone else said, it carries a lesser meaning than the original allegation. Nevertheless, context remains critical. The context may signal to the reader that the allegation has been adopted and endorsed, or repudiated and discounted. There may be a bald repetition, in which case, as Lord Devlin put it in *Lewis v Daily Telegraph Ltd* [1964] AC 234, 284:

“For the purpose of the law of libel a hearsay statement is the same as a direct statement, and that is all there is to it.”

The meaning to be attached to the repetition of the allegation has to be judged, applying the well established principles to which I have referred, looking at the publication as a whole: see *Brown v Bower* [2017] EWHC 2637 (QB) [2017] 4 WLR 197, [19]-[32] (Nicklin J) and *Koutsogiannis* [15].

13. Bearing in mind that the meaning sets out the proper parameters of the defence of truth, if any is to be advanced, the meaning must focus on the claimant, even if the article also levels allegations against others: *Sharif v Associated Newspapers Ltd* [2021] EWHC 343 (QB), [33] (Nicklin J).
14. A statement is defamatory at common law if it (a) attributes to the claimant behaviour or views that are “*contrary to common shared views of our society*” (such that they would tend to lower the claimant in the estimation of right-thinking people generally), and (b) would tend to have a “*substantially adverse effect*” on the way that people would treat the claimant: see *Millett v Corbyn* [2021] EWCA Civ 567, [2021] EMLR 19, Warby LJ.
15. The principles to be applied when determining whether the words complained of contain allegations of fact or opinion are also well established. As I said in *Ware v Wimborne-Idrissi* [2021] EWHC 2296 (QB) at [16]:

“First, the statement must be recognisable as opinion, as distinct from an imputation of fact. Secondly, opinion is something which is or can reasonably be inferred to be a deduction, inference, conclusion, criticism, remark, observation etc. Thirdly, the test is an objective one and the ultimate determinant is how the words would strike the ordinary reasonable listener or reader. Fourthly, the subject-matter of words and their context may be important indicators of whether they are fact or opinion. Fifthly, not every inference counts as opinion: context is everything. The bare statement of an inference, without reference to the facts on which it is based, may well appear as a statement of fact. Whereas the more clearly a statement indicates that it is based on some extraneous material, the more likely it is to strike the listener or reader as an expression of opinion. See *Koutsogiannis* per Nicklin J at [16], *Triplark Limited v Northwood Hall (Freehold) Limited* [2019] EWHC 3494 (QB) per Warby J at [15]-[17], and *Butt v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2019] EWCA Civ 933, [2019] EMLR 23 at [25]-[39].”

And see *Blake v Fox*, [23]-[25] (Warby LJ).

16. The authorities counsel against the dangers of determining the issues of meaning, whether the statement is fact or opinion, and whether the meaning is defamatory at common law, in too linear or compartmentalised a fashion, as the answers may throw light on each other. What is required is a “*flexible and holistic approach*”: see *Peck v Williams Trade Supplied Ltd* [2020] EWHC 966 (QB), [11] (Nicklin J); *British Chiropractic Association v Singh* [2010] EWCA Civ 350, [2011] 1 WLR 133, [32] (Lord Judge CJ, giving the judgment of the court); and *Sube v News Group Newspapers Ltd* [2018] EWHC 1234 (QB), [33] (Warby J).

The parties’ submissions

17. The claimant’s pleaded meaning is:

“That Mr Berg is a rogue journalist and editor who deliberately disregards and breaches the duties of accuracy and impartiality that he knows are required of him as an Editor for BBC News online, with the purpose of presenting news reports falsely favourable to Israel that are intentionally biased and that deliberately ignore contrary evidence.”

18. The meaning contended for in the defendant’s Notice of Case for the Trial of the Preliminary Issues is:

“In his role as a journalist and BBC News Online Middle East editor, the Claimant is responsible for coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict that appears to show bias in favour of Israel, in breach of the BBC’s own Editorial Guidelines.”

19. The claimant contends that the statement complained of was a statement of fact whereas the defendant submits that, insofar as it was defamatory (as reflected in the underlined words in the defendant’s proposed meaning), it was a statement of opinion.
20. The defendant concedes that his meaning is defamatory. The answer to issue (b)(i) inevitably depends on the meaning found by the court but it was not an issue on which there was any argument.
21. On behalf of the claimant, Mr Stables particularly emphasised that the governing principle is reasonableness. He acknowledged that the word “*rogue*” is not directly derived from the article but he submits it is the natural meaning to be inferred by the hypothetical reader. It is an apt distillation, reflecting that the claimant is singled out as unethical, unprofessional and rotten in the way he goes about his journalism with regard to the Israel-Palestine conflict. Mr Stables contends that the meaning should, in some way, reflect that the claimant is being accused of being a bent journalist who actively, deliberately and intentionally distorts and sabotages the news with the objective of ensuring the output favours Israel. The allegations made against the claimant by others who are quoted in the article are adopted by the defendant: in the article, he does not criticise or knock down anything said by those third parties. So there is nothing to lessen the gravity of their allegations.
22. Mr Stables contends that it is immediately clear, and made evident throughout the article, that it is the outcome of an investigation. While there is criticism of the claimant’s own work as a journalist, the article is principally about the claimant’s work as an editor, based on information provided by insiders within the BBC which the reader is not in a position to critique. It is obviously a statement of fact, he contends, based on a behind the scenes fact-finding investigation.
23. On behalf of the defendant, Mr Eardley KC stressed that although the article is predominantly critical of the claimant, there is a significant amount of material from the BBC, expressing a contrary view, which would not be lost on the reader. He submits that such material is indicative that this is a statement of opinion, but if I were to conclude otherwise then the balancing material should be reflected by reducing the gravity of the meaning to *Chase* level two. This term comes from *Chase v News Group Newspapers Ltd* [2002] EWCA Civ 1772, [2003] EMLR 11, in which Brooke LJ identified at [45] three levels of gravity, broadly, (1) the claimant is guilty of the act,

(2) reasonable grounds to suspect that the claimant is guilty of the act; and (3) grounds to investigate whether the claimant has committed the act. *Chase* levels are a helpful shorthand, but should not be treated as a straitjacket forcing the court to select one of the three prescribed levels of meaning.

24. Mr Eardley contends that on its face the article is a response to material the claimant has himself publicised (whether as a journalist or editor), and the fact that it is a response to a “*corpus of published work*”, on a subject-matter which the reader would understand is inherently contestable, which naturally invites a response, would incline the reader towards interpreting the article as a statement of opinion: *Keays v Guardian Newspapers Ltd* [2003] EWHC 1565 (QB), [48] (Eady J); *Butt v Secretary of State for the Home Department* [2019] EWCA Civ 933, [2019] EMLR 23, [29] (Sharp LJ).
25. Mr Eardley acknowledges that the article accuses the claimant of bias but submits that, while it is possible to point to a sentence here and there which is suggestive of intentional bias, the overwhelming impression given by the article read as a whole is that it is neutral as to whether the claimant’s bias is conscious or unconscious. If, however, I were to take a contrary view, then he relies on Eady J’s observation in *Keays* at [49] that where “*a journalist draws such an inference about a state of mind which she cannot, in the nature of things, verify, then it will generally be clear to any reasonable reader that it does not purport to be an objective statement of fact capable of verification*”.
26. Mr Stables rejected the contention that anything in the article reduces it below *Chase* level one. He contends there is no “*antidote*”. References to the BBC’s response are immediately undermined (e.g. at paragraphs 21 and 105). He distinguished *Keays* on the basis that the bulk of what the claimant is accused of is watering down and interfering with the work of others; his own journalism is merely offered up as further evidence of bias in his editing, which is the central allegation. As regards state of mind, Mr Stables relied on *Gatley on Libel and Slander* (13th ed., 2022), 13-009, where the authors cite Warby J’s observation in *Yeo v Times Newspapers Ltd* [2014] EWHC 2853 (QB), [2015] 1 WLR 971 at [115]:

“It is not the law that an imputation of a state of mind amounts in all circumstances to a comment. It depends on the context.”

Decision

27. The article is a long piece, as the reader is advised at the outset, addressing a serious topic of evident political and public importance. It would be read on a website, with the reader scrolling through the article. The reader is given to understand that the author has investigated the matter, speaking to a significant number of journalists and former journalists at the BBC. I would infer from the nature of the article an intelligent readership, but the hypothetical reader would not be expert in absorbing and digesting such a quantity of material: they would take away key points that are reinforced and an overall impression.
28. The reader of an article of this nature would know, and it is stressed early on in the headline alluding to “*civil war*” within the BBC, in the reference to the views expressed by “*the UK’s own Conservative leaders*” (paragraph 2), and in the text of the email from the CEO of BBC News & Current Affairs which is reproduced in full (paragraph

- 8), that the Israel-Palestine conflict is a subject on which differing, often polarised, views have been expressed.
29. While the reasonable reader would understand that the claimant is accused of taking a central, active role in editing the BBC's output regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict in a way that is biased and imbalanced, the overall impression would not be that he is accused of distorting the coverage in a way that he *knows* is biased, imbalanced and in breach of the BBC's editorial standards. I agree that on analysis a few sentences can be picked out that support the claimant's submission, but that is not the impression I gained on first reading the article or that, in my view, an ordinary reasonable reader who is not unduly suspicious would take from reading the article once. The emphasis on the claimant's history, friendships and associations; comparison with the views of leaders of the Conservative party; indications of credulousness, blindness and deference; rejection of the allegations by the leadership of the BBC; focus on editorial standards; and references to exceptions where the claimant's writing and editing has resulted in work which is critical of Israel, all convey the general impression to the reader that the claimant's alleged lack of objectivity may be subconscious. That is not a matter on which the article takes a position.
30. In my judgment, the central allegation that the claimant's work on the Israel-Palestine conflict is biased, and fails to meet editorial standards would strike the reasonable reader as a statement of opinion. The article makes clear to the reader on numerous occasions that the assessment of pro-Israel bias is based on the product of the claimant's editing and writing work. Many examples are given, enabling the reader to form a view. The fact that the edits made by the claimant would not be apparent from the published reporting does not detract from the impression that the allegation of bias is based on the body of work he has edited and written regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict. The fact that the allegation is so clearly based on a body of extraneous material, that it is published reporting which by its nature invites comment, and that it concerns a notoriously polarising topic, would all lead the reasonable reader to appreciate that the allegation is a statement of the defendant's opinion.
31. Beyond the general allegation of bias, key examples are prominent and would remain with the reader. In particular, the allegations of promoting Israeli narratives and of failing to humanise Palestinian victims. However, these too would strike the reasonable reader as subjective assessments of the prominence and emphasis given to Israeli responses to news stories and of the way in which such stories are framed, reflecting the defendant's opinion.
32. I find that the meaning of the words complained of is:
- “The claimant, in his senior editorial role and as a writer, has consistently failed to meet the BBC's editorial standards of impartiality and fairness by shaping coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict so as to favour Israel, including by editing the BBC's coverage in ways that (i) promote the government of Israel's narratives; and (ii) fail to humanise Palestinians killed or injured in the conflict, thereby producing biased and imbalanced journalism.”

33. For the reasons I have given, I conclude that it is a statement of opinion. It clearly meets the test of being defamatory at common law.
34. Finally, it is plain that the statement complained of sufficiently indicated in general terms (as well as, on occasion, giving specific examples) the basis of the opinion, namely the BBC's coverage of the Israel-Palestine conflict and the claimant's own reporting.

Appendix

The BBC's Civil War Over Gaza



- A. *Today Drop Site News is publishing a landmark investigation about the BBC's coverage of Israel's unrelenting assault on Gaza by British journalist Owen Jones. His report is based on interviews with 13 journalists and other BBC staffers who offer remarkable insights into how senior figures within the BBC's news operation skewed stories in favor of Israel's narratives and repeatedly dismissed objections registered by scores of staffers who, throughout the past 14 months, demanded that the network uphold its commitment to impartiality and fairness. Jones's investigation of the BBC has three main components: a deeply reported look into the internal complaints from BBC journalists, a quantitative assessment of how the BBC characterizes the year-long siege on Gaza, and a review of the histories of the people behind the coverage—and, in particular, one editor, Raffi Berg.*
- B. *Appropriately, when Jones began this reporting as an independent journalist and reached out to Berg for comment, Berg at first hired the famous defamation lawyer Mark Lewis, who is also former Director of UK Lawyers for Israel. Jones is a Guardian columnist and hosts his own searing independent news coverage on YouTube. Many thanks to those who donated [directly to Owen](#) to help pay for his legal fees.*
- C. *We are living in an era where many people expect the news to be delivered in 280 characters or less. But investigative journalism often necessitates a careful peeling back of layers, an examination of background and context, and incorporating the insights of many sources. This is a long read, and may take you a couple of sittings to get through, but it's well worth our attention given the global influence of the BBC, which hails itself as "the world's most trusted international news provider." As Jones notes, the BBC website is the most-visited news site on the internet. In May alone, [it had 1.1 billion visits](#).*
- D. *At Drop Site News, we believe in holding powerful people and institutions accountable, particularly when their actions—or what they publish and how—mean life or death. It is in that spirit that we are publishing Jones's investigation.*
- E. *Please subscribe (our journalism is all free) and consider upgrading to a paid subscription to support our work:*

<input type="text" value="Type your email..."/>	<input type="button" value="Subscribe"/>
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—Nausicaa Renner, founding editor

[Photograph of the BBC, with the word “Drop”, omitted.]

The BBC's Civil War Over Gaza

Story by Owen Jones

1. The BBC is facing an internal revolt over its reporting on Israel's war on Gaza.
2. Their primary battlefield has become the online news operation. Drop Site News spoke to 13 current and former staffers who mapped out the extensive bias in the BBC's coverage and how their demands for change have been largely met with silence from management. At times, these journalists point out, the coverage has been more credulous about Israeli claims than the UK's own Conservative leaders and the Israeli media, while devaluing Palestinian life, ignoring atrocities, and creating a false equivalence in an entirely unbalanced conflict.
3. The BBC journalists who spoke to Drop Site News believe the imbalance is structural, and has been enforced by the top brass for many years; all of them requested anonymity for fear of professional retribution. The journalists also overwhelmingly point to the role of one person in particular: Raffi Berg, BBC News online's Middle East editor. Berg sets the tone for the BBC's digital output on Israel and Palestine, they say. They also allege that internal complaints about how the BBC covers Gaza have been repeatedly brushed aside. "This guy's entire job is to water down everything that's too critical of Israel," one former BBC journalist said.
4. In November, the journalists' outrage at the Corporation's overall coverage spilled out into the open after more than 100 BBC employees signed a [letter](#) accusing the organization, along with other broadcasters, of failing to adhere to its own editorial standards. The BBC lacked "consistently fair and accurate evidence-based journalism in its coverage of Gaza" across its platforms, they wrote. The employees also requested that the BBC make a series of specific changes:
 5. reiterating that Israel does not give external journalists access to Gaza, making it clear when there is insufficient evidence to back up Israeli claims, highlighting the extent to which Israeli sources are reliable, making clear where Israel is the perpetrator in article headlines, providing proportionate representation of experts in war crimes and crimes against humanity, including regular historical context predating October 2023, use of consistent language when discussing both Israeli and Palestinian deaths, and robustly challenging Israeli government and military representatives in all interviews.
6. One BBC journalist told me that the letter was "a last resort after several tried to engage using the usual channels with management and were just ignored." Another journalist tells me they hadn't signed the letter because they weren't aware of it, stating the strength of feeling went "way beyond" the signatories.
7. BBC management has rejected claims that such dissent has been ignored. In the reply sent by Deborah Turness, CEO of BBC News, which Drop Site News obtained, Turness told them to "please note we would not normally reply to unsigned, anonymous

correspondence,” adding that “BBC News is proud of its journalism and always open to discussion about it, but this is made more difficult when parties are not willing to do so openly and transparently.” She claimed the BBC engaged with internal BBC staff and “external stakeholders” on coverage of Israel and Palestine, and argued “the BBC does not and cannot reflect any single world view, and reports without fear of [sic] favour.” One BBC journalist told me this reflected the BBC’s desire to “frame this as an identity politics issue, when it’s not. It’s about not blindly accepting the Israeli line.” Another called it “very patronizing.”

8.

DT Deborah Turness 14 November 2024
To: letterforgaza

To the letter signatories,

Thank you for writing to me. As there are no names attached to your letter, I can't reply by name, but I will do my best to address your concerns from my position as CEO of BBC News.

Please note we would not normally reply to unsigned, anonymous correspondence. BBC News is proud of its journalism and always open to discussion about it, but this is made more difficult when parties are not willing to do so openly and transparently.

I think it's important to first point out that we have engaged and continue to engage with internal BBC staff and external stakeholders to listen and reflect on how we cover this war.

I have written transparently about our thoughtful approach and how we have, throughout this war, adapted and evolved our coverage to reflect the conversations and feedback we have received - from all perspectives.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/articles/2023/how-bbc-is-covering-israel-gaza>

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/articles/2024/october-7-one-year-on>

This war is one of the most polarising stories we have ever covered, and we know people feel very strongly about how this is being reported across all media, around the world.

We hold ourselves to very high standards, and we strive to live up to our responsibility to deliver the most trusted and impartial news – weighing and measuring the words we use, verifying facts and seeking a wide range of interviews and expert opinion.

The BBC receives almost equal measure of complaints asserting that we are biased towards Israel, as we do asserting we are biased against it. This does not mean we assume we are doing something right, and we continue to listen to all criticism – from inside and outside the BBC - and reflect on what we can do better. When we make mistakes or have made changes to the way we report we are transparent. We are also very clear with our audiences on the limitations put on our reporting – including the lack of access into Gaza and restricted

assume we are doing something right, and we continue to listen to all criticism – from inside and outside the BBC - and reflect on what we can do better. When we make mistakes or have made changes to the way we report we are transparent. We are also very clear with our audiences on the limitations put on our reporting – including the lack of access into Gaza and restricted access to parts of Lebanon, and our continued efforts to get reporters into those areas.

The BBC does not and cannot reflect any single world view, and reports without fear of favour. This is why our latest audience research on our reporting of the Israel/Gaza war shows that audiences are significantly more likely to turn to BBC News for impartial coverage of this story than to any other news provider.

And we will continue to listen, to adapt, and to challenge ourselves as we strive to get it right.

With kind regards,

Deborah Turness
CEO BBC News & Current Affairs

Email from Deborah Turness

9. The internal critique peaked again in December, after journalists say the BBC failed to highlight Amnesty International’s report concluding that Israel is committing genocide against the Palestinian people in Gaza. Senior correspondents expressed their dismay at the angle chosen for the limited broadcast coverage. In a WhatsApp group of senior Middle East correspondents, editors, and producers—referred to as ‘the big dogs’ by BBC management—one posted the chyron during coverage on the BBC news channel: “Israel rejects ‘fabricated’ claims of genocide.” Another commented: ‘FFS!!—It’s an open goal for those who say we’re frit [afraid] of upsetting the Israelis and keep on couching our stories in an ‘Israel says’ narrative’. As one BBC journalist puts it to me: “These are established senior correspondents—and it’s even bothering them.”
10. In response to this criticism by their own senior journalists, a BBC spokesperson said: “We take feedback on our coverage seriously, but criticism of BBC output based on a single screenshot taken during a few seconds of coverage, or on false assertions that topics ‘haven’t been covered’ when they have is invalid and disingenuous.”

11.



Hamza Yusuf ✓
@Hamza_a96



Look at the BBC News wording when covering Amnesty International's new genocide report.



6:38 AM · Dec 5, 2024 · **221.7K** Views

136

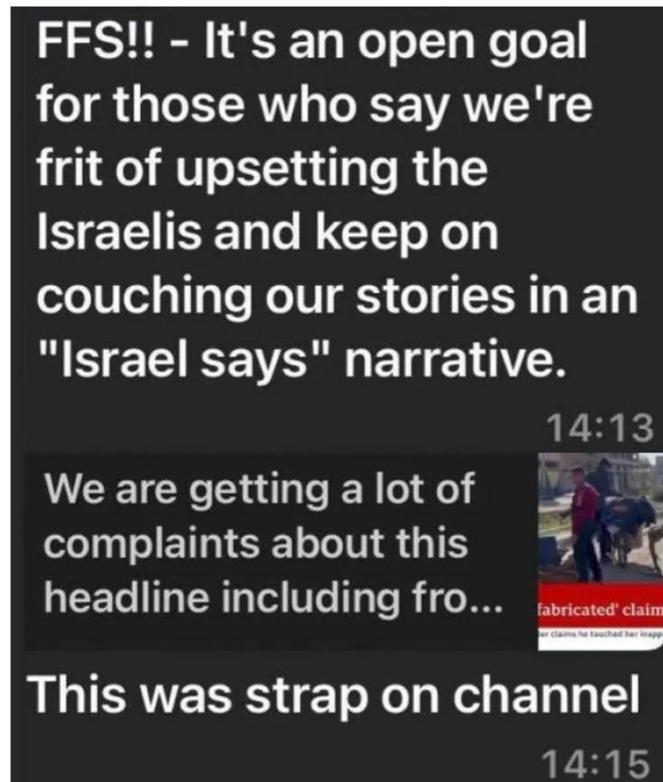
1.2K

2.8K

119



12.



13. Another strapline was also used that day: "Amnesty International accuses Israel of genocide." While it was discussed on BBC radio stations, journalists note that the report was not covered at all on the BBC's flagship news programmes—BBC One's News At One, News At Six or News At Ten or its flagship current affairs programme, BBC Two's Newsnight. According to broadcast regulator Ofcom, [BBC One is the most frequented news source](#) in Britain. On [December 5](#), the day the Amnesty report was released, [3.7 million viewers](#) tuned into the BBC News At Six alone. The News Channel attracts only a small fraction of that audience.
14. The Amnesty International report was also not afforded proper attention by BBC online, the staffers say. It appeared on the BBC front page, but long after the embargo on reporting ended, leading [award-winning TV producer Richard Sanders](#) to ask "Why on earth did it take them 12 hours?" Even then, it appeared as the seventh item in order of importance. And for a week after it was reported, the story about the world's most famous human rights organization concluding that Israel was committing genocide did not appear in the 'Israel-Gaza war' index tab which remains fixed at the top of the BBC news front page. The BBC told Drop Site News that this was a mistake. The Amnesty story was added to the index several days after the report was released, meaning traffic to the story was suppressed.

15. According to data seen by BBC journalists, in the first few days the story received around 120,000 hits. One BBC journalist suggests that—if it had been on the Israel-Gaza index featured on the BBC news front page—it would have attracted far more traffic. They note a story which appeared on the Israel-Gaza index and was just one day older, concerning the recovery of the body of an Israeli hostage from Gaza, garnered around 370,000 hits.
16. In addition to what they see as a collective management failure, journalists expressed concerns over bias in the shaping of the Middle East index of the BBC news website. Several allege that Berg “micromanages” this section, ensuring that it fails to uphold impartiality. “Many of us have raised concerns that Raffi has the power to reframe every story, and we are ignored,” one told me.
17. The BBC journalists also point to Tim Davie, the director general of the BBC, and Deborah Turness, the CEO of BBC’s news division, as standing in the way of change. Both are aware of the outrage against Berg, the journalists said. “Almost every correspondent you know has an issue with him,” one said. “He has been named in multiple meetings, but they just ignore it.”
18. It is difficult to overstate the influence of the BBC’s online operation. According to media watchdog *Press Gazette*, the BBC news website, which includes both news and non-news content, is the most-visited news site on the internet. In May alone, it had 1.1 billion visits, dwarfing second-place finisher msn.com, which had 686 million visits.
19. Berg’s influence has a ripple effect, the journalists say. While BBC broadcasters write and produce their own reports, editors and reporters across the organization frequently draw on web articles such as those edited by Berg to flesh out their stories. “Part of the problem is that the staff on Today [the BBC’s flagship radio current affairs programme] and domestic outlets in general are pretty ignorant about Israel/Gaza,” says one BBC journalist, “as anyone who goes to work there from World Service realizes very quickly.” BBC news broadcasts are centered on coverage by veteran journalists with on-the-ground experience like Jeremy Bowen who are regarded as more balanced.
20. In response to a request for comment, the BBC said it unequivocally stood by Berg’s work and that Drop Site News’s descriptions of Berg “fundamentally misdescribe this person’s role, and misunderstand the way the BBC works.” The organization rejected “any suggestion of a ‘lenient stance’ towards Israel or Palestine, and asserted that the BBC was “the world’s most trusted international news source” and that its “coverage should be judged on its own merits and in its entirety.”
21. “If we make mistakes we correct them,” the BBC said. More on that later.
22. **“This is about editorial standards”**
23. In November 2023, BBC senior management attended a morning meeting with at least 100 staffers to discuss coverage of Gaza. It soon descended into a fiery debate. “We’ve

got to all remember that this all started on 7 October,” Deborah Turness, the CEO of the news division, called out, in an attempt to assert control of the meeting, two attendees told me. Liliane Landour, the former head of the BBC World Service, disagreed, pointing to the decades of Israeli occupation before October 7: “No, I’m going to have to say that’s not the case, and I’m sure that’s not how you meant to phrase it.” People were “livid” about Turness’s remarks, one journalist said. When asked for comment, the BBC pointed to a [blog post Turness authored](#) in October 2023 detailing the organization’s approach to the conflict.

24. Internal tensions over the BBC’s coverage of Gaza had been rising for weeks. On October 24, Rami Ruhayem, a Beirut-based BBC Arabic correspondent, sent an email to Tim Davie, BBC’s director general, laying out the concerns he and his fellow journalists had shared about the organization’s lack of impartiality in its Gaza coverage. While stories “prominently” used words like “massacre,” “slaughter,” and “atrocities” to refer to Hamas, they “hardly, if at all,” used them “in reference to actions by Israel,” he wrote.
25. Ruhayem singled out the use of the word “massacre,” in particular, which the BBC had not used to describe mass slaughters perpetrated by Israeli forces. By contrast, on October 10, 2023, the organization published a [story](#) with the headline “Supernova festival: How massacre unfolded from verified video and social media.”
26. Ruhayem also noted the organization-wide failure to frame reporting and analysis around Israeli statements signifying war crimes and genocidal intent. He pointed out the lack of “historical context,” emphasizing that “apartheid, ethnic cleansing, and settler-colonialism” were “terms used by many experts and highly respected organizations to which the BBC usually defers.”
27. On October 31, 2023, for example, the BBC published a [story](#) with a headline that excised Israel’s role: “Israel Gaza: Father loses 11 family members in one blast.” When the BBC does mention Israel as a perpetrator, including when large numbers of civilians are killed by its missiles, the organization’s headlines use [the caveat](#) “reportedly.” The BBC repeats the Israeli authorities’ use of “evacuate” to describe the forcible transfer of civilians—effectively using a euphemism for a war crime. Instead of describing Israel’s total siege on Gaza for what it is, an all-encompassing blockade on aid was framed in an October 20, 2023 [headline](#) as “Israel aims to cut Gaza ties after war with Hamas.”
28. In November, around the same time as the meeting with Turness, eight BBC journalists sent a 2,300-word [letter](#) to Al Jazeera outlining how their employer had failed to accurately depict the Israel-Palestine story “through omission and lack of critical engagement with Israel’s claims” and a “double standard in how civilians are seen.” In the preceding weeks, the BBC had either buried or failed to report on a number of official statements announcing Israel’s intent to perpetrate war crimes. Defense minister Yoav Gallant’s commitment to impose a “full siege” on Gaza and its “human animals” [received just one mention in BBC online content](#), towards the end of an

article headlined "Israel's military says it fully controls communities on Gaza border." No context about the illegality of the statement was offered. [A statement by Israeli General Ghassan Alian](#) addressed to both Hamas and "the residents of Gaza"—which unambiguously denounced the Palestinians of Gaza as "human beasts" and promised a total blockade on life's essentials and the unleashing of "damage" and "hell"—was not covered at all.

29. By comparison, weeks after the start of the war in Ukraine, the BBC's online coverage clearly identified war crimes committed by Russia, even without official rulings from international courts. "Gruesome evidence points to war crimes on road outside Kyiv," [read one headline](#) 36 days into the invasion. After October 7, war crimes committed by Hamas were treated as objective fact requiring no legal verdict: "[Israeli community frozen as Hamas atrocities continue emerge](#)." When strong evidence similarly shows Israel committing atrocities, the same editorial guidance does not apply.

30.

"They wanted to turn it into a 'Muslim thing,' that 'we're worried about your community.' We said, 'We appreciate your concern about our mental health, but this is about editorial standards.'"

31. In the weeks after October 7, a number of BBC journalists began venting their intense frustrations in forums like WhatsApp groups, where they collected the "bullshit reasons given for not commissioning stories." They singled out Berg, one of whom says plays a key role in a wider BBC culture of "systematic Israeli propaganda." After staffers were told by the BBC's top brass to come forward with any concerns about coverage, in meetings with senior management, journalists have flagged numerous examples of problematic editing by Berg. Again, having been invited to do so by BBC management, journalists have sent large numbers of emails identifying problems with such news stories. Staff members report rarely receiving responses to such emails.
32. Instead, the BBC's approach has been to pathologize the problem. In early November 2023, management convened several roundtables, described as "listening sessions," where, as one attendee told me, it became clear that management sought to recast factual objections and bias concerns raised by staff as emotional struggles. "They said they were concerned about mental health [and] offered the telephone number of the BBC support group," one journalist who attended said.
33. "They wanted to turn it into a 'Muslim thing,' that 'we're worried about your community.' We said, 'We appreciate your concern about our mental health, but this is about editorial standards. It's about being a public service broadcaster and impartiality not being abided by. They realized they'd let the genie out of the bottle. We said: 'What's the next session? We want a progress report, collating the evidence.'" Another attendee said management told staff to "be as frank as possible" and that it sought

“honest thoughts on coverage.” Despite management efforts to pigeonhole the objections to BBC’s coverage, the internal dissent extended far beyond Muslim staff.

34. “It was quite bad, staff were not treated well,” says one BBC journalist. “They were speaking their mind, then being shut down. They were told to be honest, but managers didn’t want that and snapped.” Since the meeting with Turness in November, staffers have asked, on three occasions, for updates on whether there had been any progress on responding to and acting on claims about biased coverage. “Three times there has been nothing back,” one staffer said.
35. In March 2024, the [Centre for Media Monitoring](#), a watchdog group established by the Muslim Council of Britain, released “Media Bias: Gaza 2023-24,” a [150-page document](#) detailing numerous allegations against the BBC’s reporting on Israel and Gaza. That included stripping away context such as Israel’s occupation of Palestine and siege of Gaza, far greater use of emotive language to describe Israeli suffering or deaths than that used when the victims are Palestinians and a pattern that BBC’s position “has often been to push the Israeli line whilst casting doubt on Pro-Palestinian voices.”
36. The BBC journalists said they presented the document to [Richard Burgess](#), the BBC’s director of news content who oversees content across BBC platforms. His response: He did not “recognize the bias.”

[37. Photograph of the BBC with the following words below: “The BBC’s headquarters was splashed with red paint by pro-Palestinian activists from Palestine Action on October 14, 2023 in London, United Kingdom. Photo by Mark Kerrison/In Pictures via Getty Images.”]

38. **Without Fear or Favor**

39. Between November 2023 and July 2024, BBC management held five listening sessions on Israel-Gaza. In a group meeting with Davie in May 2024, staffers at the meeting acknowledged the pressure the BBC faced from pro-Israel lobbyists. They also emphasized that their sole objective was to uphold the BBC's values of fairness and impartiality and to produce content "without fear or favor"—principles staffers told me had been cast aside in deference to Israeli narratives. They also noted examples of individual senior journalists who had sent dozens of complaints about coverage of Israel and Gaza, only to be consistently brushed off.
40. The staffers also identified the website, headed by Berg, as the BBC's most egregious violator of editorial standards on impartiality on the Israel-Palestine conflict. Davie, BBC's director-general, was already aware that many BBC journalists had specific concerns about Berg. "He did very little to hide his objective of watering down anything critical of Israel," said a former BBC journalist.
41. Berg wasn't the only senior figure discussed at the meeting in May. The role of another powerful individual raised Robbie Gibb—one of five people who serve on the BBC's editorial guidelines and standards committee along with Director-General Tim Davie, BBC News CEO Deborah Turness, the Chairman of the Arts Council Nicholas Serota, and BBC Chair Samir Shah. In September 2024, when discussing "the Israel-Gaza story," Shah told British parliamentarians that the committee was "part of the process where complaints are discussed, talked about and addressed." He added that the BBC's next "thematic review" should focus on Israel and Palestine.
42. Gibb is charged with helping to define the BBC's commitment to impartiality, and to respond to complaints about the BBC's coverage on Israel and Palestine—but his ultra-partisan record speaks for itself. The brother of a former Conservative minister, he is a veteran of the revolving door between Britain's worlds of media and politics. In his thirties, Gibb was the chief of staff for Conservative MP Francis Maude before becoming deputy political editor of *Newsnight*, the BBC's flagship current affairs show, and, later, editor of BBC politics programs. Between 2017 and 2019, he served as director of communications for Conservative Prime Minister Theresa May, and was knighted by her upon her resignation. In 2020, Gibb also led a consortium to rescue the *Jewish Chronicle* from bankruptcy. In 2021, Gibb returned to the BBC, joining its board as a non-executive director. In 2022, former senior BBC journalist Emily Maitlis described Gibb as an "active agent of the Conservative party" who shaped the broadcaster's coverage by acting "as the arbiter of BBC impartiality." Similarly, Lewis Goodall, her colleague, said editors told him to "be careful: Robbie is watching you."
43. Gibb's deep involvement with the *Jewish Chronicle* continued after he took up his BBC role. In the November 2023 BBC Declaration of Personal Interests, he declared he was the 100% owner of the newspaper, before being replaced by a venture capitalist in August 2024. One former *Jewish Chronicle* journalist declared that, "since the change in ownership, the paper has read more like a propaganda sheet for Benjamin

Netanyahu," and that Gibb regularly appeared in the office "to check up on what stories were topping the news list and offering a view." Since the acquisition, Jake Wallis Simons, its editor since 2021, has focused on zealously supporting Israel's onslaught since October 2023. In one example, he tweeted a video of a 2,000-pound bomb exploding in Gaza City with the caption "Onwards to victory!", before deleting with no apology.

44. In September 2024, four *Jewish Chronicle* columnists resigned in protest after the paper published a story that included fabricated quotes from Israeli officials, with one declaring that "too often the JC reads like a partisan, ideological instrument, its judgements political rather than journalistic." Four Israelis, including an aide to Netanyahu, were subsequently arrested on charges of falsifying and distributing fabricated documents to the *Jewish Chronicle* and Germany's largest newspaper *Bild*.
45. In September, the Muslim Council of Britain wrote a letter expressing concern with Gibb's position on the editorial standards committee, noting his involvement with the *Jewish Chronicle*, its political orientation, the fact that it had been repeatedly reported to the Independent Press Standards Organisation. At that May meeting, BBC journalists had emphasized that Gibbs's agenda was widely understood in British media circles, referring to his links to the *Jewish Chronicle* and noting its right-wing partisan orientation and slavish pro-Israel stance.
46. But it was Berg's key role in shaping online coverage of the Middle East that the staffers emphasized the most at the "listening session" meeting with the BBC director general, Tim Davie, in May. They noted Berg's history and associations as indicative of bias, pointing to instances where journalists' copy had been changed prior to publication. They made specific requests: that stories should, as a rule, emphasize that Israel had not granted the BBC access to Gaza, that the network should end the practice of presenting the official Israeli versions of events as fact, and that the BBC should do more to offer context about Israeli occupation and the fact that Gaza is overwhelmingly populated by descendants of refugees forcibly driven from their homes beginning in 1948. While Davie told staff that management would "look into" staff objections, to date no response ever came back.
47. A crucial part of the BBC news website is its curation department, which selects the stories that are displayed on each section's "front page," as well as the overall BBC news homepage. If a story appears on the front page, it often receives hundreds of thousands or even millions of views, BBC staffers said, adding that stories published on regional index pages tend to attract only a fraction of that number. BBC staffers allege that Berg plays a powerful role in deciding which Middle East stories appear on the BBC News front page. The BBC denies that he has a veto, and claims staffers are assigning "outsize importance" to Berg's influence. Given that only a handful of stories are published to the Middle East index each day, it is relatively easy for a single editor to have an effect while also influencing coverage outside of the index. "If it's Israel/Palestine, it has to go through Raffi before curation even OK it," one journalist

said. "Anyone who writes on Gaza or Israel is asked: 'Has it gone to edpol [editorial policy], lawyers, and has it gone to Raffi?'" another said.

48. In response to BBC management claims that Berg's power is being exaggerated by staff, a former journalist at the BBC World Service says: "I was working for a World Service department, producing content for language services. 'We have to run this past Raffi' was the reflex answer to any producer pitching anything on Israel." The journalist said that other editors were reluctant to sign off content, treating Berg's verdict as "their safety step" in the editorial process. "There was an extreme fear at the BBC, that if you ever wanted to do anything about Israel or Palestine, editors would say: 'If you want to pitch something, you have to go through Raffi and get his signoff.'"
49. This dynamic was corroborated by a third journalist, who said that even if a story which touched on Israel and Palestine appeared on another news index, it would still be flagged for Berg's attention and approval. "How much power he has is wild," said the journalist. "His reach goes beyond just the Middle East index, but to adjacent subject matters."

50. **Raffi Berg on Netanyahu's Bookshelf**

51. Raffi Berg began his career in local radio, later spending nearly a year as a news editor for the U.S. Foreign Broadcast Information Service, an [outlet](#) he later discovered was run by the CIA—a fact he was "absolutely thrilled" to learn.
52. Berg's first job at the BBC was as a reporter. His bylined work included "[Israel's teenage recruits](#)," a story published in 2002 that presented young IDF soldiers as courageous defenders of their country while failing to mention the occupation and settlement of Palestinian land or the widespread allegations of crimes documented by [human rights organizations](#), including [in Israel](#), and even the [U.S. State Department](#). One BBC journalist described the article as an "IDF puff piece."
53. Berg's reported work also included a [three-part series on Israeli settlers](#) in the West Bank and Gaza. The series presented them as victims seeking "a better quality of life" and did not mention the fact that the settlements have been repeatedly deemed illegal. Instead, the series included a boxed sidebar, outside the text of the actual story, to relay that the settlements are "widely regarded by international community as illegal under international law," but Israel maintains that "international conventions do not apply in the West Bank and Gaza because they were not under the legitimate sovereignty of any state in the first place."
54. On January 11, 2009, demonstrators held a rally in London's Trafalgar Square in support of Operation Cast Lead, an Israeli military onslaught against Gaza [in which up to 1,400 Palestinians were killed](#), most of them believed to be civilians. [Demonstrators held Israeli flags](#) and placards emblazoned with the words: "END HAMAS TERROR! PEACE FOR THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL AND GAZA." While the event was billed as supporting "Peace in Israel, Peace in Gaza," speakers at the rally voiced support for

Israel's military offensive. "In this case, I think there is no such thing as disproportion. If you have got a war to fight, then you fight," one speaker said.

55. The BBC [coverage](#) of the event proclaimed: "Thousands call for Mid-East peace." Its story opened with several paragraphs that described the rally as showcasing speeches that characterized the Israeli military offensive as pro-peace and repeated without skepticism the claims of the organizers:
56. *Thousands of pro-Israel supporters have gathered in London's Trafalgar Square to call for an end to the violence in the Middle East.*
57. *Organizers said they wanted people in Gaza and Israel to live in peace, but argued that Hamas must accept responsibility for the conflict.*
58. Berg did not write the unbylined piece. But he attended the event "in a personal capacity" prior to becoming the BBC's "Middle East online editor, or indeed acting editor," the BBC said. Yet Berg was still a BBC staffer at the time, working on the website's Middle East desk. In an article in which the BBC omitted key details about the nature of the rally, the organization interviewed Berg, a member of its own staff, as a participant in the pro-Israel protest. Berg even went to the trouble of [writing a letter to Israeli newspaper The Jerusalem Post](#) to take issue with its suggestion that only 5,000 people had attended what he called the "Israel solidarity rally at Trafalgar Square on Sunday." "This is actually well short of the actual number," he wrote. "The organizers, the Board of Deputies, said it was 15,000, and in my opinion (I was there) that is probably accurate."
59. A decade later, [the BBC amended its editorial guidelines](#) to clarify that "people working in news and current affairs and factual journalism... should not participate in public demonstrations or gatherings about controversial issues." By then, the BBC had concluded that the mere act of attending a protest in a personal capacity was a threat to perceptions of impartiality.
60. In 2013, Berg became Middle East editor for BBC news online. It was in this role where he encountered material that would form the basis for his book, "Red Sea Spies: The True Story of Mossad's Fake Diving Resort," an account of the Israeli spy services' efforts to evacuate Jews from Ethiopia between 1979 and 1983. In the book, Berg describes Mossad in glowing terms, calling the agency "much vaunted." Berg received extensive cooperation from Mossad for the book, including "over 100 hours of interviews" of "past and present agents and Navy and Air Force personnel." It was published in 2020. In [an interview](#) to promote the book, Berg said he collaborated on the project with "Dani," a former senior Mossad commander he described as a "legend" who later became "a very close friend."
61. An expert on Mossad who requested anonymity out of fear of reprisal from within their professional circles told Drop Site News that the book failed to present crucial context surrounding Israel's intelligence services, including their record of human rights violations, assassinations, and extraordinary renditions. Berg's close relationship

with Dani “raises the risk of adopting the viewpoints and value judgements of intelligence agencies,” the expert said, raising questions about Berg’s interest in the book’s subject. Books that romanticize the operations of spy agencies are “a powerful legitimizing device for intelligence services,” the expert said. “Authors who don’t even bother to raise tough questions about intelligence services are the best spokesperson these services could have hoped for. At the beginning of February 2020, Ohad Zemet, the spokesperson for the Israeli Embassy in London, attended a launch event for Berg’s book, where he posed for a photo with the author and Mark Regev, then Israel’s ambassador to the UK. Zemet posted the photo in a [tweet](#) in which he called the book “wonderful.” A year later, Berg [retweeted](#) Zemet’s post, with the words: “big honour for me on a very special night.”

62. On August 23, 2020, Berg posted an image of Israel’s Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu taking a phone call at his desk. In his post, Berg has zoomed in on and circled a copy of *Red Sea Spies* visible on a bookshelf behind the prime minister. “First time I’ve been on a prime minister’s bookshelf!” he wrote. “I know I’ve got one of #Israel PM @netanyahu’s books on mine—but wow!” He [tweeted](#) a similar image in January 2021.



Source: Twitter/X

64.



Source: Twitter/X

65. The BBC's editorial guidelines concerning personal views and bias are clear. They state that "views or opinions expressed elsewhere, on social media or in articles or in books, can ... give the impression of bias or prejudice and must also be avoided." BBC journalists far more junior than Berg have been [reprimanded](#) or even [disciplined](#) for social media output seen as biased in favor of the Palestinian cause.
66. BBC journalists emphasize this context when they point to how Berg reshapes everything from headlines, to story text, to images, arguing he repeatedly seeks to foreground the Israeli military perspective while stripping away Palestinian humanity, with one journalist characterizing his approach as "death by a thousand cuts."
67. In response to a request for comment from Berg, Drop Site News was informed that Berg had hired British-Israeli lawyer Mark Lewis, who is described as "the UK's foremost media, libel and privacy lawyer." The former director of UK Lawyers for Israel, Lewis attended the 2018 launch of Likud-Herut UK, a right-wing Zionist organisation, whose national director is his wife, Mandy Blumenthal. At the launch, Lewis [emphasized](#) the importance of "unapologetic Zionism." Citing rising antisemitism, he [announced](#) that he and Blumenthal had immigrated to Israel in December 2018. "Europe in my view is finished," he declared. His [Twitter profile](#) [cites his current location](#) as "Israel (legal work England)."
68. The BBC then informed Drop Site that its responses to our questions covered both Berg and the BBC. The BBC disputed the journalists' characterization of Berg's role and alleged bias, though the network declined to answer specific questions about claims made by current and former staffers.
69. **Muhammed Bhar's "Lonely Death"**
70. In July, the BBC [published a story](#) on its website about Muhammed Bhar, a 24-year-old Palestinian man with Down's syndrome and autism. He lived in Gaza with his family, who provided him with around-the-clock care. Since Israel began its assault on Gaza,

he had been terrified of the shells exploding around him, caused by violence he was unable to understand. On July 3, the Israeli military raided Bhar's home. The family begged for mercy for their disabled son, but the unit's dog savaged him. He begged the dog to stop, using the only language he could access in that moment: "Khalas ya habibi" ("that's enough, my dear"). The soldiers then put the injured man in a separate room, locked the door, and forced the family to leave at gunpoint. A week later, the family returned home to find Bhar's decomposing body.

71. Bhar's story was originally documented by [Middle East Eye](#) on July 12, with the headline: "Gaza: Palestinian with Down syndrome 'left to die' by Israeli soldiers after combat dog attack." British newspaper *The Independent* covered it with the headline: "Gaza man with Down's syndrome mauled by Israeli attack dog and left to die, family says." Four days later after the first reports, the BBC published its own version of the story. Its headline: "The lonely death of Gaza man with Down's syndrome."

72. ***"There has to be a moral line drawn in the sand. And if this story isn't it, then what?"***

73. The headline did not reflect the hideous circumstances of Bhar's death and omitted the specifics of who did what to whom—a recurring theme in complaints made by BBC reporters and presenters to management regarding the Corporation's online coverage. In the original version of the story, it took 500 words to learn that an Israeli army dog had attacked Bhar, and a further 339 to discover how he had died.
74. Berg was the one to hit publish on the story, according to the edit history obtained by Drop Site. Optimo, the BBC's content management system, shows that Berg made a series of pre-publication edits, before publishing the story, meaning that Berg himself must have signed off on its framing and deemed that the headline erasing Israeli responsibility satisfied the BBC's editorial standards.
75. The article about Bhar sparked an outpouring of fury both internally at the BBC and on social media. In a post liked by 14,000 users, Husam Zomlot, Palestine's ambassador to the UK, [tweeted](#): "I don't think there could be a worst murder in human history, still @BBCWorld headlines this as 'death of a Gaza man' to abdicate Israel of responsibility. Abhorrent!" Palestinian-American writer [Tariq Kenney-Shawa](#) mocked the absurdity of the framing. "A 'lonely death,' as if he died after a long battle with cancer or was perhaps swept away by the sea or lost under the rubble of an earthquake," he [tweeted](#).
76. Eventually, the BBC decided to [rewrite the story](#). It changed the headline to "Gaza man with Down's syndrome attacked by IDF dog and left to die, mother tells BBC." It also inserted two new paragraphs at the top of the piece informing readers that the Israeli military had admitted "that a Palestinian man with Down's syndrome who was attacked by an army dog in Gaza was left on his own by soldiers, after his family had been ordered to leave," and that he was "found dead by his family a week later." Even with

the new phrasing, the story implied that the dog had attacked Bhar of its own volition, not that it was under the control of IDF personnel.



Watch

Register

Sign In

77.

The lonely death of Gaza man with Down's syndrome

1 hour ago

By Fergal Keane in Jerusalem, BBC News

Share



78. In its updated post, the BBC did not acknowledge that its previous version of the story omitted or downplayed key facts or explain to readers why it changed the headline. It did add a note at the bottom of the story: "This story was updated on 19 July with an IDF response." The BBC also [tweeted the article](#) under its new headline, writing: "This post replaces an earlier version in order to update a headline that more accurately represents the article."
79. The Bhar story symbolizes what the BBC staffers who spoke to Drop Site News say they want: Stronger assurances that BBC's Israel and Gaza coverage upholds the organization's policies around impartiality. As one BBC journalist told me: "There has to be a moral line drawn in the sand. And if this story isn't it, then what?"
80. The objections over Berg's role extend to his own writing. One BBC staffer highlighted Berg's December 2022 [article](#) "Israel says likely killed Palestinian girl in error," about Jana Zakarneh, a 16-year-old Palestinian girl who was killed by Israeli snipers. The first two paragraphs read:
81. *Israel says its forces appear to have unintentionally killed a 16-year-old Palestinian girl amid a gun battle with militants in the occupied West Bank.*

82. *The body of Jana Zakarneh was found on the roof of her house in Jenin after the firefight on Sunday night.*
83. The story foregrounds the Israeli narrative—that Zakameh had been near gunmen who'd opened fire at Israeli troops, and that the Israeli military had been conducting near nightly raids in the West Bank as part of an operation against militants whose attacks on Israel had left the country "in shock." Only in the third paragraph does the story quote the Palestinian prime minister's accusation that Israel had killed the teenager "in cold blood."
84. Wafa, the Palestine News Agency, [released an image](#) of Zakarneh, which CNN [published](#) with its story on her killing. By contrast, the BBC, in its story on the killing, used a photo depicting three members of Zakarneh's family on the roof of their home.
85. In stories reporting attacks against young Israelis, the BBC often adopts a different approach to photos. A story about Emily Hand, an Israeli child who had been presumed killed on October 7 but was later released, [features her image](#). A story about a 14-year-old Israeli boy who was killed in the West Bank earlier this year [also included a picture of him](#). Late last year, a story about a 19-year-old British-Israeli IDF soldier—not a civilian—who was killed in combat [was accompanied by his photo](#).
86. In other cases, facts unfavorable to Israel have been stripped out of Berg's reports. In a May 2022 [story](#) about an annual march of far-right Israeli extremists through Palestinian areas celebrating the capture and occupation of East Jerusalem, Berg's original copy described the marchers as singing "patriotic songs," which traditionally included inflammatory, racist anti-Arab lyrics that went unmentioned by Berg. Indeed, when the march took place, the BBC initially reported chants of "death to Arabs!" and "may your village burn." A BBC crew came under attack during the march; Israeli forces stopped the attack but took no further action. But these details did not appear in a later version of the story. The headline refers euphemistically to "Israeli nationalists stream through Muslim Quarter." All of this caused a huge [outcry on social media](#) and among some BBC staff. These details were later reinstated, with an update noting they had been restored "to give a fuller picture of events."
87. On one occasion, the BBC was forced to change Berg's copy following external and internal backlash, BBC journalists said. In May 2022, an Israeli sniper killed Palestinian-American Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh. Israel has diligently tried to cover up her murder.
88. Berg's [original text](#) about her funeral read:
89. *Violence broke out at the funeral in East Jerusalem of reporter Shireen Abu Aqla, killed during an Israeli military operation in the occupied West Bank.*
90. *Her coffin was jostled as Israeli police and Palestinians clashed as it left a hospital in East Jerusalem.*

91. The editorial decision not to ascribe responsibility triggered widespread outrage, including from Chris Doyle, the director of the Council for Arab British Understanding and a prominent commentator who has repeatedly appeared on the BBC news channel. He tweeted: "how...Raffi Berg @bbcnews thinks 'violence broke out', 'jostled' and 'clashes' were appropriate terms I cannot fathom." After widespread anger, the BBC updated the text to correctly open with "Israeli police have hit mourners at the funeral of Al Jazeera reporter Shireen Abu Aqila," adding "Her coffin almost fell as police, some using batons, waded into a crowd of Palestinians gathered around it." Nonetheless, the headline still lacked a sense of causality: "Shireen Abu Aqila: Violence at Al Jazeera reporter's funeral in Jerusalem."
92. Despite significant evidence of bias and internal protest, BBC journalists allege that the network has refused to investigate Berg's crucial role in what they see as conduct that imperils the integrity of the BBC. "We have provided a pretty watertight account about what he's said and done," one journalist told me. The response from management has been limited to "Tim Davie saying: 'It's good you've raised this. We'll look into it.'"

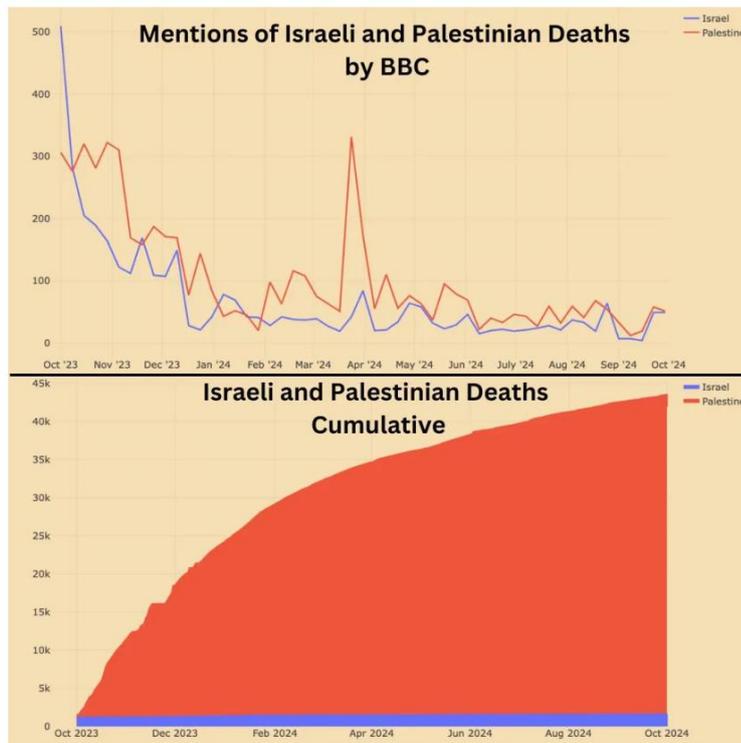
93. **A Systematic Look at Coverage**

94. Despite the grave concerns over bias and manipulation present in its coverage of Israel and Palestine, the fact is that the BBC is a juggernaut in world journalism. It employs a range of skilled journalists who have done principled and groundbreaking work, including on the Gaza war.
95. The site has run articles about [British Palestinians grieving](#) loved ones killed by the Israeli military, [Palestinians killed by the Israeli military](#) in the West Bank, and [Israel being accused of a "possible war crime"](#) in the killing of children in the West Bank. Berg himself has written articles on [South Africa's genocide case at the International Court of Justice](#) and the court's recent ruling, with accurate headlines: "[UN top court says Israeli occupation of Palestinian territories is illegal.](#)" In addition, the BBC's seasoned broadcast journalists have produced [damning stories](#) about Israel. In such cases, Berg is less likely to push for sweeping edits in such cases, some staff have suggested.
96. But an unprecedented analysis of more than 2,900 stories and links on the BBC news website in the year following October 7, 2023 reveals a profound imbalance in how the organization has reported Palestinian and Israeli deaths.
97. The total number of Israelis killed on and since October 7 is around 1,410, while the official Palestinian death toll is conservatively estimated at 45,000 people, a vast undercount. Yet according to new research by data journalists Dana Najjar and Jan Lietava, which builds on [their previous work](#), the BBC is less likely to use humanizing language to refer to Palestinians than to Israelis. Najjar and Lietava also found that the organization refers to Palestinian deaths only slightly more often than Israeli deaths, despite the fact the Palestinian death toll is now the higher of the two by a factor of at least 28.

98. There is one exception to this latter trend. On April 1, Israeli drones targeted a three-car convoy belonging to the NGO World Central Kitchen, which was transferring food to a warehouse in northern Gaza after coordinating its movements with Israeli military authorities. Because six of the seven slain aid workers were westerners, their killings received widespread western media attention. The seventh worker killed in the attack was a Palestinian driver named Saifeddin Abu Taha. In each of the numerous BBC articles about the killing of the group, he is referred to as “their Palestinian colleague” or “the Palestinian driver.”

99. Because of this, mentions of Palestinian deaths surged. “It is the single-largest spike in the whole period in terms of the mentions of the deaths of Palestinians,” Lietava told me. “Even then, Saifeddin Abu Taha is very rarely mentioned directly, often only in association with the Western, majority white, group.”

100.



This analysis is an expansion of [Holly Jackson's work](#) analyzing bias in media coverage of Israel and Palestine. Mentions are grouped by week. Death counts for Gaza are from [Tech for Palestine](#) and likely vastly undercounted. Death counts for Israel are from the IDF official website. See [Github](#) for complete methodology.

101. Najjar and Lietava also looked at causal versus non-causal headlines that mentioned death, dying, killing, suffering, starvation, or hunger—that is, headlines explicitly describing who killed who (e.g. “A was killed by B” or even “B killed A”), compared to

those that did not (e.g. "A was found dead"). In the first nine months after October 7, just 27% of BBC news story headlines about Palestinian deaths explicitly mentioned who killed them. In the case of Israeli deaths, 43% identified the perpetrator. By contrast, when covering the Russian war against Ukraine, the BBC identified the killer in 74% of its reports of Ukrainian deaths.

102. A similar disparity emerged when analyzing the use of humanizing and emotive words to describe the deaths of Palestinians versus those of Israelis as the researchers found they were used proportionately far less for Palestinians. It was also present when examining terms such as "massacre," "assault," "slaughter," "atrocities" and other terms—these were all applied disproportionately to Palestinian actions when compared to those committed by Israel. Only Israeli strikes were described as "retaliatory"—210 times—compared to 0 for Palestinians' use of weapons during the period covered by the report.
103. "Look at the sheer number of stories about October 7 and the hell individuals went through—but not Palestinians, despite the disparity of scale," one BBC journalist said. "It took until babies started starving to death [in Gaza] before we stopped focusing on the hostages." Another is even more damning. "We've never known the racism to be so overt," the journalist said.
104. In response to the overall findings of the study, the BBC said: "The algorithm does not provide insight into the context of the usage of particular words, either in relation to the attacks of 7 October or the Israeli offensive in Gaza. We do not think coverage can be assessed solely by counting particular words used and do not believe this analysis demonstrates bias."
105. In response to the BBC's statement, the researchers told me "We are not ascribing bias based on some perfunctory analysis of word frequency devoid of any other context," emphasizing the abundance of evidence pointing towards the same conclusions. "Every word is a choice," they said, "and words chosen or omitted repeatedly over the course of a full year of coverage are very strong indicators of editorial policy and/or prejudice. Likewise, disproportionately highlighting Israeli suffering and death when Palestinians are dying in far greater numbers tells us a great deal about whose lives matter and whose lives don't."

[106. Photograph of a camera lens with the words "BBC" shown across the lens. Accreditation below the photograph: "Photo by Leon Neal/Getty Images".]

108. Since Israel's onslaught against Gaza began in October 2023, BBC online's deference to Israeli narratives has been apparent. BBC journalists pointed to specific examples—beginning with the fate of Nasser hospital in Gaza.
109. In February, the Israeli army laid siege to the hospital. "The evidence at our disposal points to deliberate and repeated attacks by the Israeli forces against Nasser hospital, its patients and its medical staff," reads a [report](#) by NGO Médecins Sans Frontières that detailed the incident. That evidence includes repeated sniper attacks causing multiple deaths and injuries, fatal shell attacks, and the storming of the hospital in February, with the Israeli military detaining an MSF staff member and refusing to offer details on his condition until his release two months later.
110. The original BBC news headline for an article co-authored by Berg had been updated from "[Israel special forces enter besieged Nasser hospital](#)" to "[Nasser hospital in catastrophic condition as Israeli troops raid](#)." The article's framing aligns with Israeli narratives. The first two paragraphs read:
111. *Israel's military claims it has captured "dozens" of terror suspects during a raid on southern Gaza's main hospital, as staff and patients were forced to flee under gunfire.*
112. *Israel said it launched a "precise and limited mission" at Nasser hospital in Khan Younis, adding it had intelligence that Hamas had held hostages there.*
113. No hostages were ever found in Nasser hospital.
114. Deference to Israel also surfaced in the BBC's [first story](#) on the Israeli army massacre of hungry Palestinians waiting for food in February, an article accompanied with the headline "Israel-Gaza war: More than 100 reported killed in crowd near Gaza aid convoy." The next day, the headline for a second story was "[Large number of bullet wounds among those injured in Gaza aid convoy rush—UN](#)." The language is puzzling: as the article notes, there were multiple eyewitness accounts of the massacre, along with "the presence of Israeli tanks." As one BBC journalist said, "Israel accused of firing on civilians' would be more accurate."
115. On March 8, the BBC published a [subsequent piece by Berg](#) with the headline: "Gaza convoy: IDF says it fired at 'suspects' but not at aid trucks." The article foregrounds Israeli denials and claims, noting only fleetingly that a UN team had visited the injured and found "a large number of people with bullet wounds" (as per the BBC's own headline from a few days before). Nowhere in the article is it mentioned that Israeli accounts were contradictory: Mark Regev, now a special advisor to Netanyahu, originally claimed Israeli troops were not involved at all. What makes this even harder to defend on editorial grounds is that BBC Verify—launched in May 2023 as the BBC's fact checking and anti-disinformation department—published a [separate piece](#) on March 1 challenging Israeli claims about the massacre. That work was not woven into Berg's article.

116.



Source: Twitter/X.

117. Two days before the publication of the report, the NGO [Euro-Med Human Rights Monitor](#) had released detailed evidence of Israeli responsibility, including the apparent use of bullets that matched those in Israeli army weapons. [A month later](#), CNN published a detailed piece based on video and eyewitness accounts discrediting Israeli claims, making it clear that the IDF had fired on crowds without warning, as survivors had said from the start.
118. In May 2024, far-right Israeli extremists blocked aid from getting into Gaza, in part by attacking and destroying the aid; the BBC headlined its story on the incident: "Israeli activists battle over Gaza-bound aid convoys." As one BBC journalist said, an accurate headline would have been: "Far-right Israeli activists block aid convoys." "Aid convoy denied entry to northern Gaza, UN says," reads another headline from June 2024, neglecting to mention that Israel had been the responsible party.
119. One staffer believes the BBC has largely sought to align its journalism with the UK government's foreign policy. As far as top brass is concerned, "Israel is treated like Ukraine, Palestinians like Russia," the staffer said. If a journalist tries to challenge the double standards applied to Russia and Ukraine, managers are baffled, treating both Ukraine and Israel as British allies. "Look at headlines on what Russia does in Ukraine.

120. But the headlines around Gaza are generally entirely unclear, and are never clear that Israel has been the perpetrator.”
121. Yet even in cases where the UK government has allowed for dissent, the BBC has largely clung to the Israeli narrative.
122. In January, the ICJ issued provisional orders to Israel to “take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance” to protect Palestinians in Gaza from the risk of genocide.” But not only do the BBC online articles about famine fail to mention this—they also repeatedly fail to detail the actions being taken by Israel to block aid.
123. This is despite the fact that Lord David Cameron, the then-foreign secretary, wrote a letter in March to Alicia Kearns, the chair of the House of Commons foreign affairs committee, outlining multiple ways in which the Israeli state was preventing aid from entering Gaza. Even the emphatically pro-Israel *Jewish Chronicle* ran the damning headline: “David Cameron condemns Israel for arbitrarily blocking Gaza aid.” The BBC website did not report on Cameron’s letter.
124. Earlier that month, the BBC ran an interview with Cameron on the same subject, with the headline, “David Cameron urges Israel to fix Gaza aid shortages.” Some, though not all, of the points Cameron raised in the letter were covered in the interview, but as one journalist pointed out, examples of Israeli obstructions to aid should be cited in every article on the subject. “Articles on famine in Gaza won’t mention the International Court of Justice rulings, or relevant stuff. The full context is lacking,” another journalist said.
125. This is consistent with the BBC news website’s coverage under Berg’s editorship. “Palestinian sources need to be verified, but Israeli sources do not,” one journalist said. “There’s red flags if linked to Hamas, but you can quote the IDF freely.”

126. **The BBC’s Response**

127. In response to this story’s allegations surrounding BBC’s coverage of Israel and Palestine and Berg’s role and background, a spokesperson for the network told Drop Site News: “We reject your attack on an individual member of staff. Like every journalist at the BBC, they must adhere to the BBC’s editorial guidelines which ensure that we report impartially and without fear or favor.” The statement continued:
128. The allegations you’ve made fundamentally misdescribe this person’s role, and misunderstand the way the BBC works.
129. More broadly, we reject any suggestion of a ‘lenient stance’ towards either side in this conflict. The Israel/Gaza conflict is a challenging and polarising subject to cover, but when asked to choose the one provider they would turn to for impartial reporting on this story, three times as many pick the BBC as choose our closest competitor. The BBC remains the world’s most trusted international news source.

130. We have transparently set out our approach to reporting the conflict—for example in [this blog](#) from Deborah Turness—and if we make mistakes we correct them. Our coverage should be judged on its own merits and in its entirety.
131. The BBC’s defenders point to the fact that the organization is criticized from “both sides.” But even Turness dismissed this as a defense in a [blog post](#) titled “How the BBC is covering Israel-Gaza,” published on October 25, 2023. “We cannot afford to simply say that if both sides are criticizing us, we’re getting things right,” she wrote. “That isn’t good enough for the BBC or for our audiences. At the BBC we hold ourselves to a higher standard and rightly challenge ourselves to listen to our critics and consider what changes to make where we think that criticism is fair.”
132. The BBC told Drop Site News that it corrects mistakes in its stories. Yet one BBC journalist has pointed out that the organization has failed to correct claims in published stories about specific atrocities alleged to have been committed on October 7 that have since been proven false.
133. Hamas fighters and other armed Palestinian militants undoubtedly committed grave war crimes in the attacks of October 7. But the BBC website published a number of unverified claims about the attacks, a significant number of which originated from the accounts of the religious emergency response team Zaka; many of these claims have since been proven to be false and [discredited](#), most prominently by Israeli media outlets. Yet BBC news stories still include these disproven claims, including those of [multiple babies](#) being killed or [the bodies of 20 children](#) being tied together and burned. Other media organizations, including the [New York Times](#), have printed articles correcting some of the false claims they made about October 7, though, like the BBC, a staggering number of false reports remain on the websites of many major news organizations.
134. Even if BBC license payers complained about such false claims remaining in published stories, the organization would be unlikely to act on them: Their standard complaints process only deals with items broadcast or published in the last 30 days.
135. After 14 months of witnessing the BBC’s failures up close, these disenchanted journalists are divided between believing it is important to stay and try and make changes and wanting to abandon what feels like an irreparable systemic feature. But all agree that the gap between BBC coverage and the gravity of the atrocities committed is indefensible.
136. As one concludes: “Most people with a conscience here have found that the coverage is frankly despicable and certainly not up to our editorial standards.”



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Owen Jones 

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