



# The Asserson Report

The Israel-Hamas war and the BBC

by Trevor Asserson

with RIME data science

**“The need for impartial and trusted news  
with no agenda has never been greater.”**

BBC Annual Report 2023/24



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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

A short summary of principal findings, together with some of the graphs which describe those findings is available in the Executive Summary in Schedules.

## a) PURPOSE OF THE REPORT

This report (to be referred to as “the Report”) analyses BBC coverage of the war between Harakat Al-Mukawama Al-Islamiya (“the Islamic Resistance Movement”) referred to under the acronym Hamas and the State of Israel, which started as a result of the Hamas invasion of Israel on 7 October 2023.

The Report aims to explore the extent to which the BBC complies with its legal obligations, inter alia:

1. To report accurately;
2. To report with due impartiality; and
3. To avoid the expression of personal views by BBC journalists.

The Report finds that there have been material breaches by the BBC of a number of its legal obligations as set out below.

The Report sets out at Section 15 [Recommendations] some proposals for the BBC to seek to ameliorate or remedy its apparent failings.

## ORIGINS AND FUNDING OF THE REPORT

The Report was produced following a suggestion from a client of Asserson Law Offices that the firm explore whether the BBC is in breach of its duties of accuracy and impartiality in its coverage of the Israel-Hamas War.

The research needed to explore that question was designed and run by Trevor Asserson independently of the direction of any particular client. Most of the work from solicitors within Asserson Law Offices was carried out on a voluntary basis. However one Israeli businessman, based in London, has funded out of pocket expenses, including paying for external lawyers conducting human review and expenses incurred by the data scientists who have contributed to the Report. The majority of the contributors to the Report have personal connections to Israel.



## b) AUTHOR AND PRINCIPAL CONTRIBUTORS

[Trevor Asserson](#) has led the research and written the Report. Trevor is an experienced English litigation solicitor, formerly at Herbert Smith and Bird & Bird, UK based law firms. In 2005 he set up Asserson Law Offices, today Israel's largest international law firm. Asserson is a UK and US law firm based in London, with its principal office in Tel Aviv.

Led by Dr. Haran Shani-Narkiss, a Computational Neuroscientist, RIMe (Research for Impartial Media) has brought together a team of data scientists, analysts and experts of the Arabic language/culture who have contributed extensively to the Report. A comprehensive list of their names can be found in the Acknowledgements page (192.)

## OTHER CONTRIBUTORS

The Report has benefitted from the contribution of a wide number of senior data scientists, senior and junior lawyers within Asserson, and external reviewers. A list of individuals who have contributed to the Report is set out in Schedule 1.

Some external reviewers who hold public appointments and some RIMe contributors have chosen to remain anonymous for various reasons, including security concerns.

## 1. BBC BINDING PRINCIPLES

The BBC is subject to a Royal Charter<sup>1</sup> and accompanying Framework Agreement,<sup>2</sup> Ofcom's Standards and Fairness Codes<sup>3</sup> and its own standards contained in the BBC's Editorial Guidelines (the "BBC Guidelines")<sup>4</sup>, which it claims often go further than the Charter or Ofcom.

The BBC is obligated to ensure that "all content broadcast or published by the BBC whoever creates or makes it and wherever in the world and however it is made or received" conforms to the BBC Guidelines.<sup>5</sup>

The following binding principles are either direct quotations from the BBC Guidelines or a summary derived from the BBC Guidelines. They are not intended to be an exhaustive list of all binding principles contained in the BBC Guidelines.

### A. The Editorial Values Principles

**Editorial Values Principle 1** – the BBC must seek to establish the truth.<sup>6</sup>

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**Editorial Values Principle 2** – the BBC will ensure that no significant strand of thought is under-represented or omitted in BBC output as a whole.<sup>7</sup>

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### B. The Public Interest Principles

**Public Interest Principle 3** – the BBC must provide information that assists people to better comprehend or make decisions on matters of public importance.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Royal Charter for the Continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation, 2016. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/governance/charter>.

<sup>2</sup> An Agreement Between Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport and the British Broadcasting Corporation, December 2016.

<sup>3</sup> The Ofcom Broadcasting Code, Ofcom, 2020. Available at

<https://www.ofcom.org.uk/tv-radio-and-on-demand/broadcast-standards/broadcast-code>.

<sup>4</sup> 'BBC Editorial Guidelines', BBC, 2019. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/>.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid s. 2.1.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid s. 1.2.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Ibid s. 1.3.



**Public Interest Principle 4** – the BBC must seek to prevent people from being misled by the statements of individuals or organisations.<sup>9</sup>

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**Public Interest Principle 5** – the BBC should seek to expose corruption.<sup>10</sup>

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## C. The Accuracy Principles

**Accuracy Principle 6** – BBC output must achieve due accuracy.<sup>11</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 7** – BBC output must be well sourced, based on sound evidence, and corroborated.<sup>12</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 8** – the BBC must be honest and open about what it does not know and avoid unfounded speculation.<sup>13</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 9** – the BBC must not knowingly and materially mislead its audiences. It should not distort known facts, present invented material as fact or otherwise undermine the audiences' trust in its content.<sup>14</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 10** – the BBC should normally acknowledge serious factual errors and correct them quickly, clearly and appropriately.<sup>15</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 11** – Where appropriate to the output and wherever possible, the BBC should: gather material using first-hand sources and check facts and statistics, identifying important caveats and limitations, and weighing, interpreting and contextualising claims.<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid s. 3.1. 'Due' means that the accuracy of the BBC's output must be "adequate and appropriate to the output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content, the likely audience expectation and any signposting that may influence that expectation."

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid s. 3.3.1.

**Accuracy Principle 12** – in news and current affairs content, the BBC must prioritise achieving due accuracy over speed.<sup>17</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 13** – the BBC should be reluctant to rely on a single source. If it does rely on a single source, it should be credible, and a named, on-the-record source is always preferable.<sup>18</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 14** – the BBC must check and verify information, facts and documents, where required to achieve due accuracy. If it is unable to verify material, it should usually say so and attribute the information.<sup>19</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 15** – Material supplied by third parties, including news providers, must be treated by the BBC with appropriate caution, taking account of the reputation of the source.<sup>20</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 16** – the BBC should only use other material supplied by third parties if it is credible and reliable.<sup>21</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 17** – the BBC should only broadcast material from third parties who may have a personal or professional interest in its subject matter if there is an editorial justification.<sup>22</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 18** – the BBC should be reluctant to use video and audio or other similar material from third parties.<sup>23</sup>

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**Accuracy Principle 19** – the BBC should normally identify on-air and online sources of information and significant contributors and provide their credentials, so that its audiences can judge their status.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid s. 3.3.2.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid s. 3.3.4.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid s. 3.3.6.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid s. 3.3.13.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid s. 3.3.14.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid s. 3.3.17.



**Accuracy Principle 20** – the BBC should normally acknowledge serious factual errors and correct such mistakes quickly, clearly and appropriately.<sup>25</sup>

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## D. The Impartiality Principles

**Impartiality Principle 21** – the BBC’s impartiality incorporates the values of a democratic society.<sup>26</sup>

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**Impartiality Principle 22** – In applying due impartiality to news, the BBC will give due weight to events, opinion and the main strands of argument.<sup>27</sup>

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**Impartiality Principle 23** – When dealing with ‘controversial subjects’, the BBC must ensure a wide range of significant views and perspectives are given due weight and prominence, particularly when the controversy is active. Opinion should be clearly distinguished from fact.<sup>28</sup>

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**Impartiality Principle 24** – the BBC must take particular care to achieve due impartiality on a ‘controversial subject’ when it may be considered to be a ‘major matter’.<sup>29</sup>

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**Impartiality Principle 25** – When dealing with ‘major matters’, or when the issues involved are highly controversial and/or a decisive moment in the controversy is expected, it will normally be necessary for the BBC to ensure that an appropriately wide range of significant views are reflected in a clearly linked ‘series of programmes’, a single programme or web item, or sometimes even a single item in a programme.<sup>30</sup>

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**Impartiality Principle 26** – BBC presenters, reporters and correspondents may not express personal views on matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid s. 3.3.28.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid s. 4.1; ‘Guidance: Impartiality Note’, *BBC Editorial Guidelines*. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/impartiality>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid. ‘Due’ means that the impartiality must be “adequate and appropriate to the output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content, the likely audience expectation and any signposting that may influence that expectation.”

<sup>28</sup> Ibid s. 4.3.6.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid s. 4.3.7.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

on 'controversial subjects' in any other area publicly, including in any BBC-branded output or on personal blogs and social media.<sup>31</sup>

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**Impartiality Principle 27** – Appropriate information about the affiliations, funding and particular viewpoints of contributors from other organisations, should be made available to the audience, when relevant to the context.<sup>32</sup>

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**Impartiality Principle 28** - BBC reporting should not use language and tone which appear to accept consensus or received wisdom as fact or self-evident.<sup>33</sup>

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**Impartiality Principle 29** – Care should be taken by the BBC to treat areas of apparent consensus with proper rigour.<sup>34</sup>

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**Impartiality Principle 30** – BBC staff and regular BBC presenters or reporters associated with news or public policy-related output may offer professional judgements rooted in evidence.<sup>35</sup>

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## E. War, Terror and Emergencies Principles

**War, Terror and Emergencies Principle 31** - First estimates of casualty figures often turn out to be inaccurate. If different sources give different estimates, the BBC should either report the range or go for the source which carries the greatest authority and attribute the estimate accordingly.<sup>36</sup>

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**War, Terror and Emergencies Principle 32** – the BBC should make it clear if its reports are censored or monitored or if it is withholding information under duress, and explain, wherever possible, the conditions under which it is operating.<sup>37</sup>

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**War, Terror and Emergencies Principle 33** – the BBC should not use the term 'terrorist' without attribution.<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>31</sup> Ibid s. 4.3.11.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid s. 4.3.12.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid s. 4.3.15.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid s. 4.3.30.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid s. 11.3.1.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid s. 11.3.5.



***War, Terror and Emergencies Principle 34*** – the BBC should use words which specifically describe the perpetrator such as ‘bomber’, ‘attacker’, ‘gunman’, ‘kidnapper’, ‘insurgent’ and ‘militant’.<sup>39</sup>

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Throughout the Report we will consider the extent to which these binding principles are adhered to or breached by the BBC, as demonstrated by the various experiments conducted.

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<sup>39</sup> Ibid s. 11.3.6.

## 2. THE DATASET AND REPORTING TIMEFRAME – 7 OCTOBER 2023 to 7 FEBRUARY 2024

### A. Guiding Principles

The BBC broadcasts several hours of news for each hour of the day and in several languages. It is not feasible to capture and analyse all of that material. Accordingly, we limited our analysis to the principal news outputs, broadcast over a limited period, in both English and Arabic.

### B. Reporting Timeframe

In our experience, the BBC will frequently reject complaints about a single broadcast by arguing that it cannot cover all aspects of a complex story in a single programme, but that over time its coverage is balanced. Accordingly, we wished to select a sufficient reporting window to meet such an argument, were we to find lack of balance.

The reporting timeframe we selected was from 7 October 2023 until 7 February 2024 (the “**Reporting Timeframe**”) – a total of four months/124 days. During this period, there was very intense coverage of the Israel-Hamas War by the BBC and also by other media sources globally.

We considered that four months – a third of a year – of fairly intense coverage of a single foreign news story was a reasonably representative sample of BBC broadcasts, and provided a sufficiently large dataset to test compliance with the BBC Guidelines in a robust manner.

### C. The Dataset

The BBC broadcasts on television and radio, via podcasts and social media and on its website. It broadcasts news each hour of each day, in several languages, and across a wide range of media, from local, to national to international audiences. More details can be found in Schedule 2.

Notwithstanding this quantity and range of reach, we assumed, and found, that we would see broadly similar stories repeated across the significant range of BBC programmes on any particular day. Thus we concluded that capturing the principal BBC news output would amount to a fair and representative sample of BBC output on any particular story.

The programmes selected for analysis were:

<b>Output</b>	<b>Details</b>	<b>Volume</b>
English Language Web Articles	All articles on the BBC website (including short video pieces and excluding BBC Live page) identified as containing relevant key words collected from 07.10.2023 to 07.02.2024 [see Appendix 1]	1529 items
BBC Podcast – The Conflict Israel-Gaza (Jeremy Bowen & Lyse Doucet)	Collected from 07.10.2023 to 20.12.2023 (the relevant Bowen and Doucet podcast ceased production after that date)	33 episodes (original audio and transcripts <sup>40</sup> )
BBC Radio - Today Programme	Collected from 14.11.2023 to 07.02.2024 (we were unable to get the pre- 14.11.2023 recordings)	73 episodes (original audio and transcripts)
TV – BBC Breakfast	Collected from 07.10.2023 until 07.02.2024	124 episodes (original video and transcripts)
TV – BBC News at Ten	Collected from 07.10.2023 until 07.02.2024	86 episodes (original video and transcripts)
TV – BBC Newsnight	Collected from 07.10.2023 until 07.02.2024	77 episodes (original video and transcripts)
Arabic Web Articles	All articles on BBC Arabic website identified as containing	579 items (original translated into English)

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<sup>40</sup> Transcripts were all produced electronically by BlueSkai, see Appendix 2.

	relevant key words collected from 07.10.2023 to 07.02.2024 [see Appendix 3]	
Website Videos - Arabic	Collected from 07.10.2023 until 07.02.2024	450 Items (original translated into English)

In relation to English Language Web Articles and Arabic Web Articles, we sought to obtain all the relevant items broadcast. To that end, we built a program to capture any article which contained any of the following six key words:

- Israel\* (to cover Israel, Israeli etc.)
- IDF
- Gaza
- Hamas
- Palestin\* (to cover Palestine, Palestinian etc.)
- Antisemi\* (to cover anti-Semitism, anti-Semitic etc.)

The BBC restricts availability of some of its broadcasts to a short period. Because we only commenced collecting material in November 2023, a small number of programmes, which might have contained relevant material, were no longer available and have therefore not been covered by the Report.

Videos, television and radio programmes have been transcribed into text. Arabic has been translated into English by both GPT-4 and Google Translate. We then consulted with native Arabic speakers to advise which version provided the more accurate translation. In the main, this was Google Translate.

The full dataset amounts to nearly 9,000,000 (nine million) words. In excess of 8,000,000 (eight million) words in English and over 624,000 (six hundred and twenty four thousand) words in the English translation of the Arabic. We believe this is an adequately representative sample to draw safe conclusions. We do not believe the omission of a small number of missing programmes is material.

An explanation of the methodology applied to each of our experiments is set out in the Schedules.



Some experiments we conducted were sensitive to the quality of translation or transcription. Where the quality was inadequate to conduct the experiment, we omitted that material from the relevant experiment. Where an experiment focuses solely on one subset of data, or makes comparisons between datasets, this is made explicit.

## D. Key for Reading the Report and Defined Terms

Wherever appropriate throughout the Report:

- Palestinian columns/lines have been coloured green;
- Israeli columns/lines have been coloured blue.

**Arabic Web Articles** means all articles on the BBC Arabic website identified as containing relevant key words during the Reporting Timeframe.

**BBC Arabic** means BBC output in the Arabic language within the Dataset.

**BBC English** means BBC output in the English language within the Dataset.

**Dataset** is described in Section 2 C of this Report.

**English Language Web Articles** means all articles on the BBC website (including short video pieces and excluding BBC Live page) identified as containing relevant key words during the Reporting Timeframe.

**Israel-Hamas War** means the war which commenced with Hamas' invasion of Israel on 7 October 2023, principally fought between Hamas and Israel, but also involving other regional and international parties.

**Quote Affiliation** means the affiliation of an interviewee, either for Palestinians, Israelis, or neither, as derived from their reported words.

**Reporting Timeframe** means 7 October 2023 to 7 February 2024.

**BBC Guidelines** means the BBC Editorial Guidelines 2019.

## E. Conclusions/opinions

Conclusions, opinions, and analysis of relevant texts as set out in the Report are the opinions of Trevor Asserson unless otherwise stated.

### 3. IMPARTIALITY DEFINED

*"The fundamental rationale of the democratic process is that if competing views, opinions and policies are publicly debated and exposed to public scrutiny the good will over time drive out the bad and the true prevail over the false. It must be assumed that, given time, the public will make a sound choice when, in the course of the democratic process, it has the right to choose. But it is highly desirable that the playing field of debate should be so far as practicable level. This is achieved where, in public discussion, differing views are expressed, contradicted, answered and debated. It is the duty of broadcasters to achieve this object in an impartial way by presenting balanced programmes in which all lawful views may be ventilated....The risk is that objects which are essentially political may come to be accepted by the public not because they are shown in public debate to be right but because, by dint of constant repetition, the public has been conditioned to accept them.."*

*R (Animal Defenders International) v. Secretary of State for Media, Culture and Sport [2008] UKHL 15 per Lord Bingham.<sup>41</sup>*

#### A. Defining 'Due Impartiality'

Impartiality in news reporting is fundamental to the proper functioning of a democratic society. In order for the public to make informed decisions regarding "matters of public policy or political or industrial controversy that are of national or international importance"<sup>42</sup> they must be presented with a true picture of local and world events.

The Royal Charter entrusts the BBC with a mission to "act in the public interest, serving all audiences through the provision of impartial, high-quality and distinctive output".<sup>43</sup> The BBC's first Public Purpose is to "provide impartial news and information to help people understand and engage with the world around them".<sup>44</sup> The BBC Guidelines

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<sup>41</sup> At 28.

<sup>42</sup> BBC Guidelines, s. 4.3.7.

<sup>43</sup> Broadcasting: Royal Charter for the Continuance of the British Broadcasting Corporation December 2016, paragraph 5.

<sup>44</sup> 'Missions, values and public purposes', *About the BBC*. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/aboutthebbc/governance/mission>.

“make clear that the BBC’s impartiality is not value free and that it incorporates the values of a democratic society”.<sup>45</sup>

As stated in the BBC’s Impartiality Guidance Note, “In one sense defining impartiality is easy. It means reflecting all sides of arguments and not favouring any side”.<sup>46</sup> Under the BBC Guidelines, the BBC is bound to “achieving due impartiality in all its output”.<sup>47</sup> ‘Due impartiality’ is defined to mean “that the impartiality must be adequate and appropriate to the output, taking account of the subject and nature of the content, the likely audience expectation and any signposting that may influence that expectation”.<sup>48</sup> As explained in the BBC Guidelines, this is “more than a simple matter of ‘balance’ between opposing viewpoints. We must be inclusive, considering the broad perspective and ensuring that the existence of a range of views is appropriately reflected”.<sup>49</sup>

Coverage of controversial and significant matters is likely to be subject to a higher degree of scrutiny by members of the public and its representatives.<sup>50</sup> It will also be of greater importance to BBC audiences. These matters therefore require a higher degree of editorial attention and care in order to achieve due impartiality. The BBC Guidelines direct that:

“When dealing with ‘controversial subjects’,<sup>51</sup> we [the BBC] must ensure a wide range of significant views and perspectives are given due weight and prominence, particularly when the controversy is active. Opinion should be clearly distinguished from fact”.<sup>52</sup>

Due impartiality is a matter of both substance and form. When it comes to controversial and significant matters, the BBC Guidelines recognise that “it will normally be necessary to ensure that an appropriately wide range of significant views are reflected in a clearly

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<sup>45</sup> ‘Guidance: Impartiality Note’, *BBC Editorial Guidelines*. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/editorialguidelines/guidance/impartiality>.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>47</sup> BBC Guidelines, s. 4.1.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> Referred to in s. 4.3.6 of the BBC Guidelines as ‘major matters’. “‘Major matters’ are usually matters of public policy or political or industrial controversy that are of national or international importance, or of a similar significance within a smaller coverage area”.

<sup>51</sup> “A ‘controversial subject’ may be a matter of public policy or political or industrial controversy. It may also be a controversy within religion, science, finance, culture, ethics or any other matter”. BBC Guidelines, s. 4.3.4.

<sup>52</sup> BBC Guidelines, s. 4.3.6.

linked ‘series of programmes’, a single programme or web item, or sometimes even a single item in a programme”.<sup>53</sup>

Within BBC factual output, “the approach and tone of news stories must always reflect our editorial values, including our commitment to impartiality.”

Editors of long-running or continuous output need to ensure that (inter alia):

- *differing views are given due weight and treated fairly, including in terms of prominence, treatment and time of day; and*
- *there is an appropriate timeframe for assessing that due impartiality has been achieved.*

Additionally, the BBC Guidelines are clear that BBC journalists or news and current affairs presenters “may not express personal views on such matters publicly, including in any BBC-branded output or on personal blogs and social media”.<sup>54</sup>

If the BBC Guidelines are being met, the audience “should not be able to tell from BBC output the personal opinions of our journalists or news and current affairs presenters on matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or on ‘controversial subjects’ in any other area”.<sup>55</sup>

Finally, as part of its commitment to due impartiality the BBC undertakes to provide audiences with “appropriate information about the affiliations, funding and particular viewpoints of contributors from other organisations...when relevant to the context”.<sup>56</sup>

As can be seen, when dealing with controversial and significant matters the BBC’s obligation to achieve due impartiality requires the highest level of care and attention to achieve (and be perceived to have achieved) the appropriate balance between differing viewpoints, narratives and accounts.

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Namely, “matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or on ‘controversial subjects’ in any other area.” BBC Guidelines, s. 4.3.11.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid, s. 4.3.12.



## B. Achieving Due Impartiality

The BBC prides itself on its place as “the UK’s most used and most trusted news service”.<sup>57</sup> In its latest Annual Report, the BBC appears to assert that it has “met its obligation to provide impartial news and information over the last year”.<sup>58</sup>

We have contacted several past and present senior BBC personnel in order to gain an understanding of the systems available to BBC management to enable it to set measurable performance indicators and to test compliance against those performance indicators regarding impartiality.

From those discussions we have established that the BBC does not set KPIs in respect of its impartiality obligations, nor does it have internal systems to record or assess its compliance with its impartiality obligations by reference to its actual output.

The BBC appears to rely on audience research to assess its compliance with these obligations.<sup>59</sup> The results of such research may be relevant to gauging public perceptions of the impartiality and reliability of BBC reporting. However, the research is highly unlikely to yield meaningful results as to the BBC’s substantive compliance with its due impartiality obligations, unless those surveyed have kept a detailed record of BBC output over time and have systematically analysed that output before responding to the pollsters.

We have written to the BBC Director-General to seek details of those surveys and to seek confirmation that the BBC has no systematic method for assessing its output for impartiality. We have not (as at the date of this Report) received a response.<sup>60</sup>

In the absence of an accurate framework to assess compliance with its impartiality obligations by reference to its output, we do not see how the BBC can ensure that it is complying with those obligations. On the basis of the research presented in this Report, we have shown that the BBC is falling short of several of its obligations under the BBC Guidelines, including its duty of due impartiality.

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<sup>57</sup> BBC Group Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24, p. 17.

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid pp. 19, 123.

<sup>60</sup> A letter dated 13 August 2024 was sent by email from Trevor Asserson to Mr Tim Davie, Director-general at the BBC. See Schedule 14.

## C. Measuring the Achievement/Failure of Due Impartiality

We now discuss how we have set about defining and measuring the BBC's achievement of its due impartiality commitments which we derive above.

- i. Omission of significant strands of thought will likely amount to a failure to achieve due impartiality;

In Section 8 (Omissions) we set out different views or perspectives which we consider to be important for a proper understanding of the Israel-Hamas War story and which are almost entirely omitted, or under-represented.

- ii. The expression by journalists/presenters of personal views is likely to represent a failure to achieve due impartiality;

At Section 13 (BBC Reporters) we set out examples of where the BBC allows its journalists freely to express their opinions and make their personal views known, thus jeopardising its impartiality. We particularly look at Jeremy Bowen. He was the BBC's Middle East correspondent based in Jerusalem between 1995 and 2000 and the BBC Middle East editor from 2005 to 2022, before being appointed the International Editor of BBC News in August 2022. He has published books on the Middle East to which he refers. Given Mr Bowen's centrality to the BBC's Middle East reporting, he seems an appropriate person to study.

- iii. The failure to give due weight on a consistent basis to the main strands of argument on an issue is likely to constitute a lack of due impartiality

The BBC Guidelines countenance that due impartiality may sometimes require "the range of perspectives or opinions to be covered in equal proportions either across our [BBC] output as a whole or within a single programme, webpage or item".<sup>61</sup> This will, of course, depend on how 'controversial' and/or 'major' a matter is considered to be and the relevance of particular perspectives on it. The Israel-Hamas War appears to fulfil the requirements for being 'controversial', 'major' and 'of national and international importance.' Accordingly there is a strong argument that broadly comparable treatment of the Palestinian (not Hamas<sup>62</sup>) and the Israeli viewpoint is required of the BBC both in substance and in form.

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<sup>61</sup> BBC Guidelines, s. 4.3.2.

<sup>62</sup> See *R v Secretary of State for the Home Department ex p Brind* [1990] 1 All ER 469 at 488 per McCowan LJ.

Departure from the reasonable prima facie position of giving balanced treatment to these main points of view on a consistent basis should be the exception not the norm when covering matters such as this one and should be the result of carefully reached editorial decision-making.<sup>63</sup>

Throughout the Report we show how the weight given to different perspectives swings quite materially between different forms of BBC output. In particular, BBC Arabic appears to place the 'balance' in a markedly different place to some other BBC output.

- iv. **A persistent failure to inform the audience of the affiliations and viewpoints of contributors when relevant to the context is likely indicative of a lack of impartiality**

We show how the BBC has too often failed to comply with its obligation to inform the audience of relevant affiliations of contributors indicating a further instance of failing to meet the required standard of due impartiality.

### D. Identifying the Existence or Lack of Due Impartiality

We consider it reasonable to infer from the BBC's apparent belief that it has "met its obligation to provide impartial news and information over the last year",<sup>64</sup> that the level of coverage given to and sympathy shown to Israeli and/or Palestinian perspectives in the data we have analysed in this Report represents a reliable indicator of what the BBC considers correct to achieve due impartiality between the main strands of argument on the Israel-Hamas War.

As will be seen in this Report, time and again, the BBC fails to apply broadly similar treatment to the views of Palestinians and Israelis on the Israel-Hamas War. The result is coverage of this controversial subject and major matter, which omits significant strands

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<sup>63</sup> It is instructive that the BBC General Election Guidelines 2024 mandate that "each bulletin, programme or programme strand, as well as online and interactive services must ensure, in covering the elections, that the parties (and, where relevant, independent candidates) are covered proportionately over an appropriate period." See 'General Election Guidelines 2024', *BBC Editorial Guidelines*, 2024.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/editorialguidelines/documents/2024generalelectionguidelines.pdf>, last accessed on 13 August 2024.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*

of thought, does not give due weight to both the Palestinian and Israeli positions and sees BBC journalists and presenters expressing their personal views. Our Report also identifies various other indicia of a failure to achieve due impartiality.

It is reasonable to conclude that at the heart of this imbalance lies the BBC's failure to track and monitor its own output.

We believe that this state of affairs is contrary to the BBC Guidelines and particularly to the duty to achieve due impartiality. To paraphrase and apply the words of Lord Bingham, it seems reasonably likely to us that members of the public may come to accept a partial view of the Israel-Hamas War not because it has been shown in public debate to be right but because, by dint of constant repetition, the public has been conditioned to accept it.



## 4. SYMPATHY ANALYSIS - Introduction

We conducted an extensive sympathy analysis across the Reporting Timeframe of the BBC. To enhance the robustness of our experiments, we chose to carry out both a human sympathy analysis, and an AI based sympathy analysis.

### A. Human Sympathy Analysis

We built a team of six reviewers, all of whom were experienced qualified lawyers. They were tasked with reading/watching/listening to the full Dataset, both in the English Language and in Arabic, using two translation tools for the Arabic. They were given links to all the original content, a template 'grading' document, and extensive oral instructions on the grading process. They had weekly updates with Trevor Asserson who supervised progress, reiterated the instructions, and dealt with queries.

Furthermore, all the English Language content was subject to a second-line review. This was carried out by a different member of the lawyer review team to further ensure consistent gradings and objectivity.

The review team was told to grade the content according to whether the item being marked evoked sympathy for Israelis, Palestinians or neither. Marks were awarded as follows:

- English Language Web Articles - 1 grade given for the main body, and 1 grade for every image/piece of video content
- TV/Radio/Podcast - 1 grade given overall for each episode
- Arabic Web Articles - 1 grade given for main body and 1 grade each for every image
- BBC Arabic videos - 1 grade given for each piece of stand-alone video content

More details can be found about the rationale, methodology and data sets below, and in Schedule 4.

## B. ChatGPT 4 Sympathy Analysis

In parallel to our Human Sympathy Analysis, we worked with Dr Shani-Narkiss and the teams at RIME to conduct an extensive sympathy analysis using ChatGPT 4.

ChatGPT 4 was inputted with all the relevant English Language Web Articles, and prompted with three pairs of questions to establish sympathy to Israel and/or Palestine when considering either the article, the headline or the main text.

More details can be found about the rationale, methodology and data sets below, and in Schedule 5, where a complete copy of the experiment report is reproduced.

## C. Use of ChatGPT 4

ChatGPT 4 is an AI chatbot that uses natural language processing to create humanlike conversational dialogue.<sup>65</sup> As a large language model, it can respond to questions and compose dialogue based on user prompts.

Due to its humanlike understanding, the volume of data it holds, and the advanced nature of the fourth generation (i.e. ChatGPT 4), we can draw an analogy between the logic, reason and understanding of ChatGPT 4, and the 'casual' everyday audience for news, being an intelligent reader that is ignorant of context.

## D. Two Experiments in parallel

The two experiments, conducted in parallel, purposefully used the same Dataset, both across English Language and Arabic. Their similarity in design meant that the results could also be interpreted side by side. We note key differences in design which were mainly due to the different techniques required by the users i.e. by ChatGPT 4 compared with human reviewers.

- The ChatGPT Sympathy Analysis had 6 questions in total (3 pairs relating to each side of the Israel-Hamas War) with binary answers (Y/N). This had the effect that each score could reflect sympathy to one side independently to another. i.e. an

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<sup>65</sup> 'What is ChatGPT?' *TechTarget*, July 2024. <https://www.techtarget.com/whatis/definition/ChatGPT>, last accessed 28 August 2024.

article could carry sympathy for both Israelis and Palestinians in different parts of the same article.

- In comparison, the Human Sympathy Analysis had one grading system, whereby each grade represented either pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian or pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli. This had the effect of requiring a single grade for the entire article.
- The ChatGPT 4 Sympathy Analysis focussed primarily on the written articles, whereas the human sympathy analysis put equal weight on grading all the other content, including TV, Radio and Podcast.

## 5. ChatGPT 4 SYMPATHY ANALYSIS

### A. Introduction

As mentioned, in parallel with our Human Sympathy Analysis, RIMe conducted an experiment to measure sympathy using the Large Language Model (LLM), ChatGPT 4. A summary of the rationale for using this LLM is as follows:

- ChatGPT 4 has certain attributes that makes it well-suited for analysing sympathy bias in the media. This particular Large Learning Model (LLM) was chosen for its broad knowledge base, ability to classify sympathy without extensive prior training, and its enhanced understanding of human emotions. It has, for example, recently been shown to have a 92% accuracy for classifying various emotions.<sup>66</sup>
- This ability to identify potential subtle emotions expressed in journalistic content, plus its capacity to process vast amounts of data, means the patterns and trends that it produces should be reliable, enhancing the robustness and accuracy of bias detection.
- Finally, as an AI system, ChatGPT 4 is not subject to inherent human subjective judgement.

The RIMe team conducted extensive research, focusing on both the English Language Web Articles and the Arabic Web Articles, and then compared this to an extensive open-source dataset of other international media outlets, using the largest publicly available dataset called GDELT.<sup>67</sup>

All the Israel-Hamas War-related articles were inputted into ChatGPT 4, one by one, with three pairs of questions, to which it was instructed to answer 'Yes' or 'No':

Pair one –the primary and 'main' prompt of the analysis:

- 1) Does this text create sympathy for Israel?
- 2) Does this text create sympathy for Palestine?

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<sup>66</sup> See 'Are Large Language Models More Empathetic than HReport, which references Schaaff et al., 2023.

<sup>67</sup> 'The GDELT Project' monitors the world's news media from "nearly every corner of every country in print, broadcast, and web formats, in over 100 languages, every moment of every day". <https://www.gdelproject.org/>, last accessed on 28 August 2024.



To enhance the discernment between the various aspects of Israeli and Palestinian entities, two further pairs of 'secondary' prompts were also included:

Pair two – comparing peoples:

- 3) Does this text create sympathy for the Israeli people?
- 4) Does this text create sympathy for the Palestinian people?

Pair three – comparing military entities:

- 5) Does this text create sympathy for the IDF/Israeli military?
- 6) Does this text create sympathy for Hamas?

In order to run the various experiments, a program was written to enable feeding each item at a time into ChatGPT 4. ChatGPT 4 was then asked to answer each of the 6 questions separately in relation to each of the items. The full methodology and report can be found in Schedule 5 and Appendix 4. What follows is a summary of the principal findings.

The Arabic language analysis was applied to 574 Arabic Web Articles, which were translated into English before being analysed.

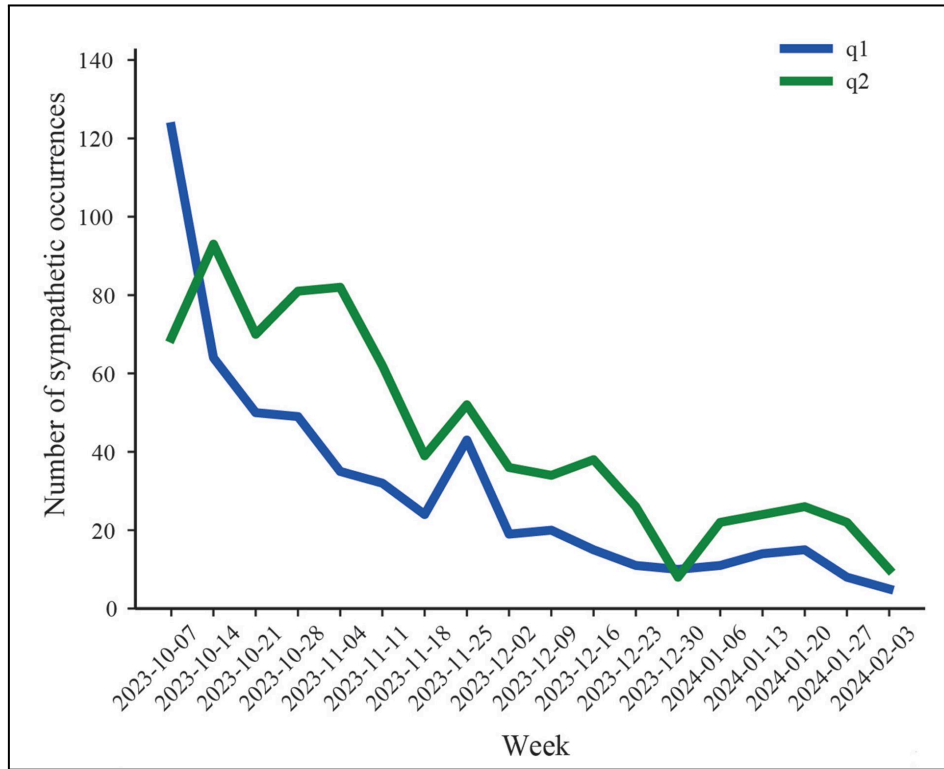
Various controls were used by:

1. Changing the order in which questions were asked (see figure 4 in schedule 5);
2. Running the experiment with different datasets;
3. Comparing ChatGPT 4 with humans (see figures 5 & 6 in schedule 5); and
4. Asking ChatGPT 4 to explain its reasoning (table 1 in schedule 5).

The principal controls are set out in Schedule 5. None of these changes produced a material variation in the primary results, which are set out here.

## B. Sympathy Emphasis in favour of Palestinians in BBC English Language Articles

The English language analysis was applied first to 1,481 English Language Web Articles and then across the remainder of the Dataset (including English and Arabic).<sup>68</sup>



Except for the first week immediately after the Hamas attack on 7 October, there was a marked excess of sympathy in favour of Palestinians as compared with sentiment for Israelis. This was true throughout the Reporting Timeframe, with only one exception in the last week of December 2023.

The number of articles evoking sympathy either way decreased over time as the intensity of reporting of the Israel-Hamas War decreased.

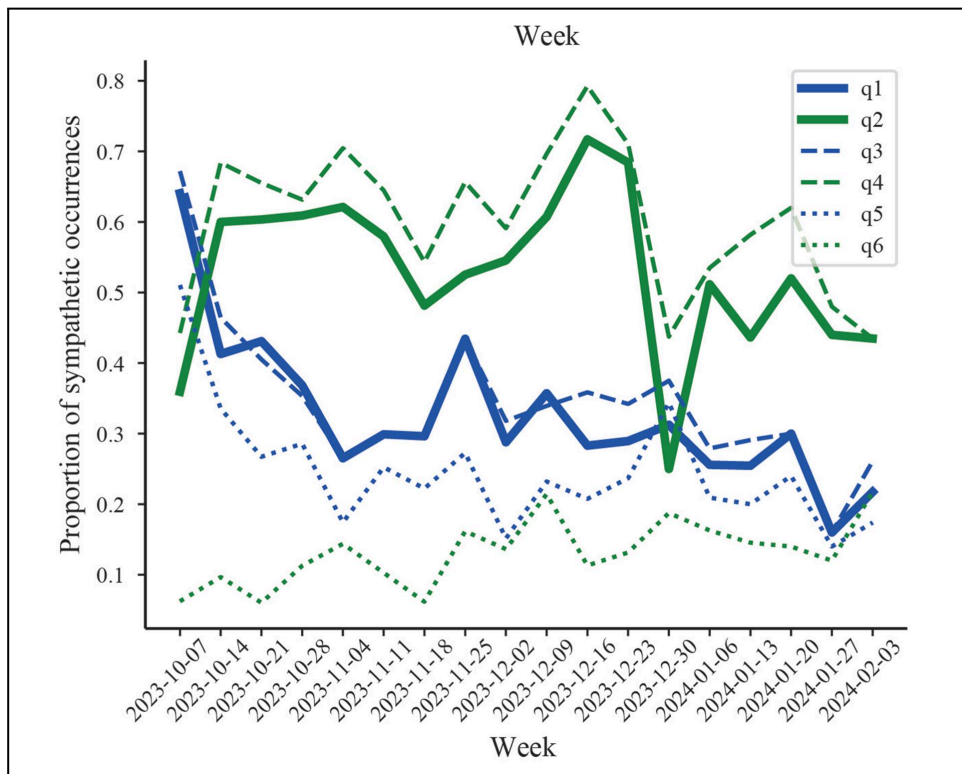
<sup>68</sup> 40 of the 48 missing items did not include any content as they were videos and, in 8 instances (0.5%) ChatGPT 4 failed to return an answer in the required format.

It may be argued that some imbalance favouring the Palestinian narrative is to be expected due to the scale of the death and destruction in Gaza as compared to Israel. We question whether balance of reporting should be based upon a single vector such as civilian deaths. We also comment:

- a) For reasons we explain in section 3 [Impartiality Defined], we argue that the prima facie way to achieve impartiality is to ensure broadly comparable treatment of the Palestinian and the Israeli viewpoints.
- b) We accept editorial discretion to depart from this prima facie position. Insofar as this discretion is exercised, this should not come at the cost of giving due weight to the wider context and differing viewpoints.

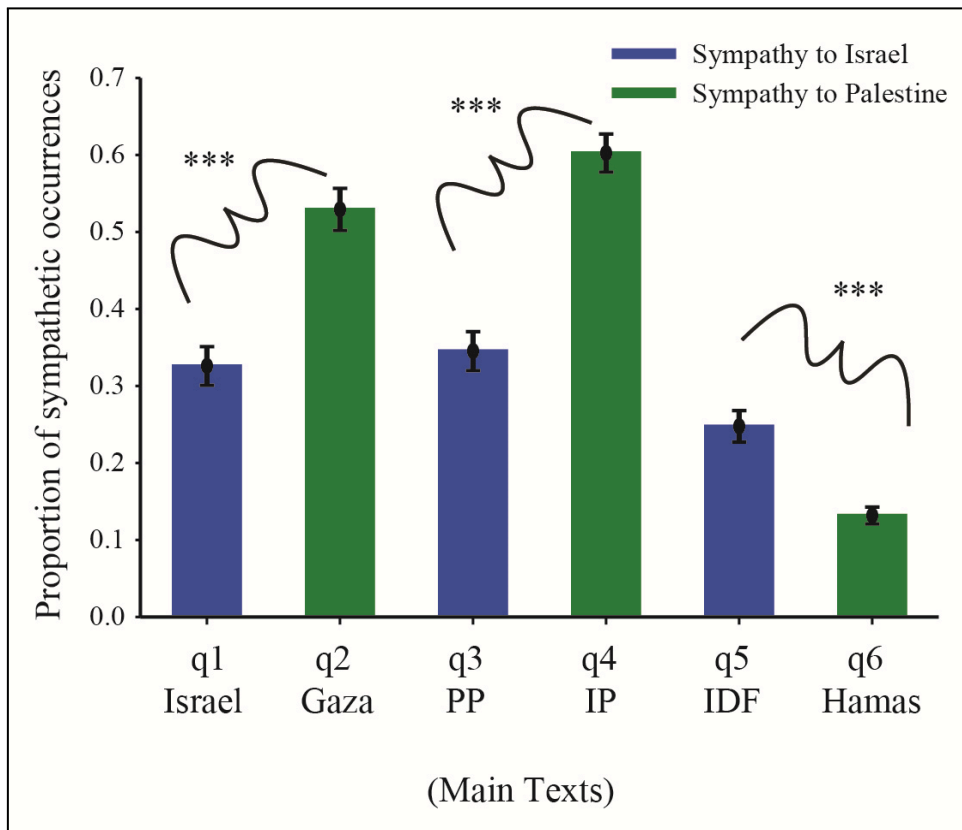
### C. The Sympathy Emphasis over six Questions

The fact that the lines in the graph above descend over time may merely reflect the gradual reduction of the number of articles published. However, looking at the proportion of pro-Palestinian/pro-Israeli articles over time eliminates the effect of the reduction in the total articles published.



To account for this reduction in coverage, the results are hereafter presented as proportions. In focussing on the proportional empathy, we note that the first two pairs of questions show similar material pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli emphasis. However in relation to the IDF/Hamas, questions 5 and 6, the IDF receives more positive sentiment than Hamas.

The bar chart below shows the same results averaged throughout the Reporting Timeframe. It can be seen that sympathy evoked for Palestinians is close to twice as high as for Israelis. But Hamas is less favourably treated than the IDF.



#### D. Headline Analysis across BBC English Language Web Articles

Where time is at a premium and grabbing a reader's attention is highly competitive, headlines offer a quick and efficient way to grasp the essence of a news story. To encourage click-throughs, they are often designed to excite, intrigue, question, shock or

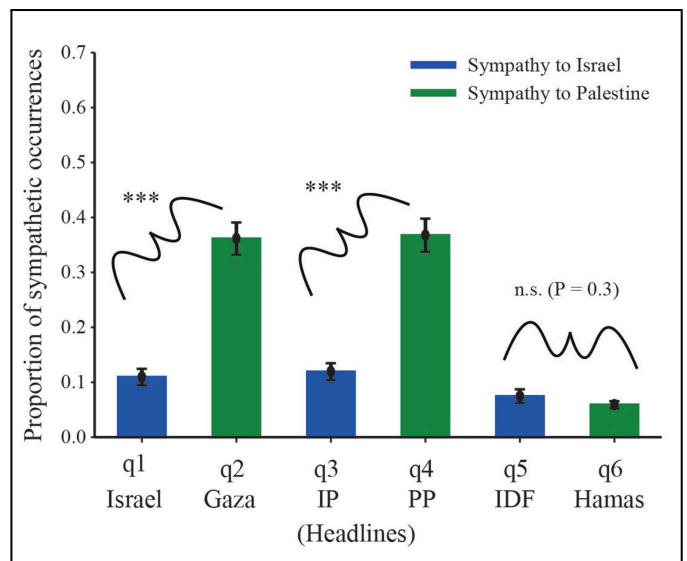
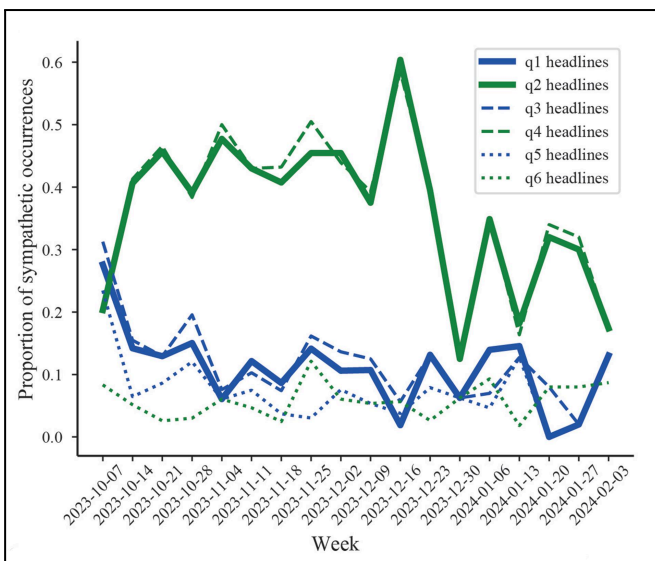
provoke. In doing this, they can reflect bias in a more binary manner i.e. for one side or the other, resulting in a ‘them or us’ mentality.

Recognising this phenomenon, the above experiment was therefore repeated in the same manner and using the same procedure, but for headlines only.

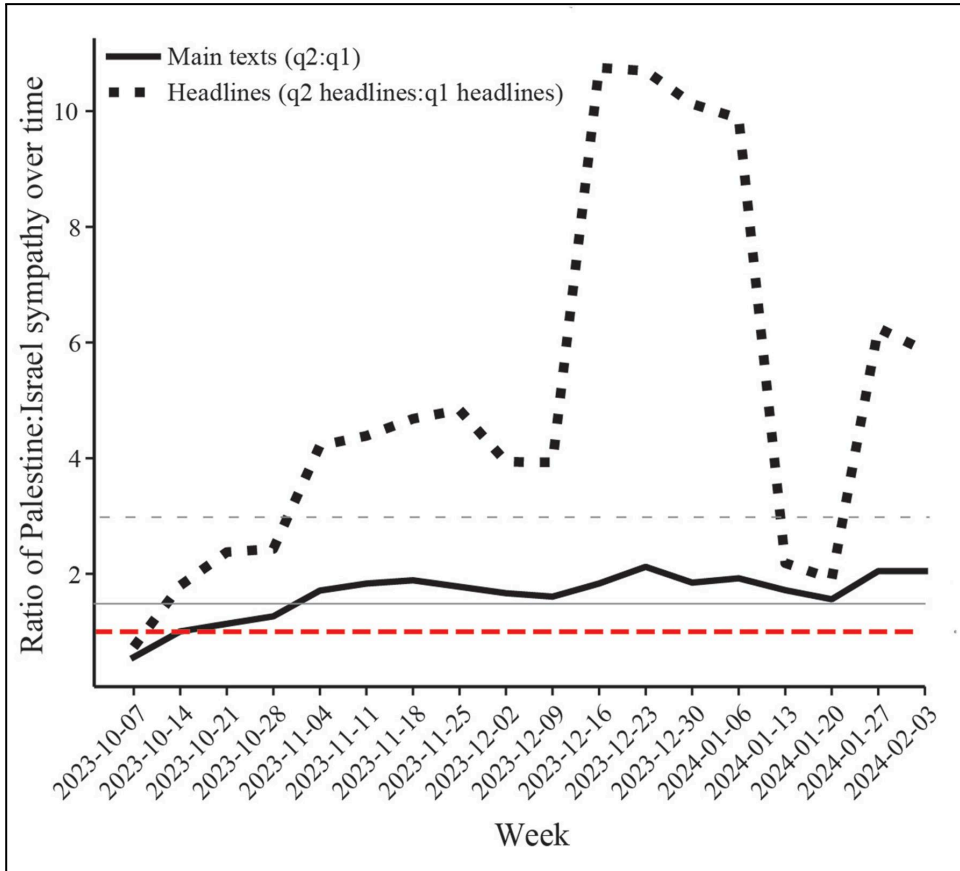
When headlines alone are analysed, there is a pronounced increase in evoking pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli sentiment. This exaggerates the imbalance in sympathy for the first two pairs of questions. It also has the effect of producing new results in relation to questions 5 and 6. Whereas articles seemed to favour the IDF over Hamas, the headline analysis represents the IDF and Hamas with similar levels of positive sentiment.

The disparity between sympathy in the body of articles and that shown in their headlines is hard to explain, other than as indication of a failure of impartial selection/drafting of headlines.

Note the equal treatment of Hamas – a proscribed terrorist organisation – with the IDF – an army subject to scrutiny by an external legal service and subject to other external checks and balances, including a free press.



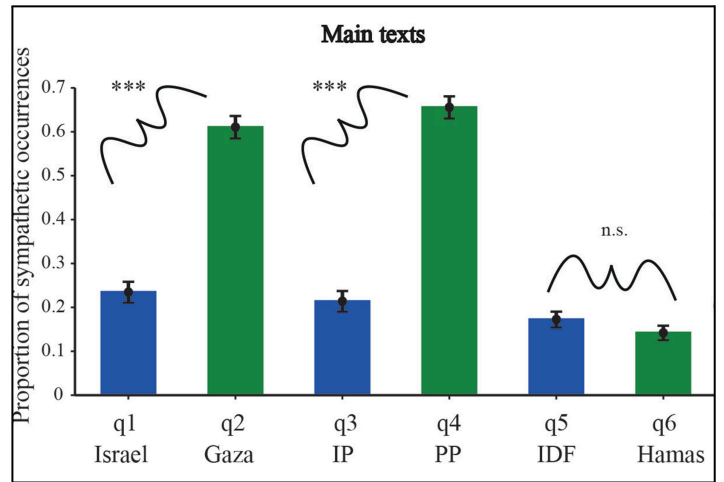
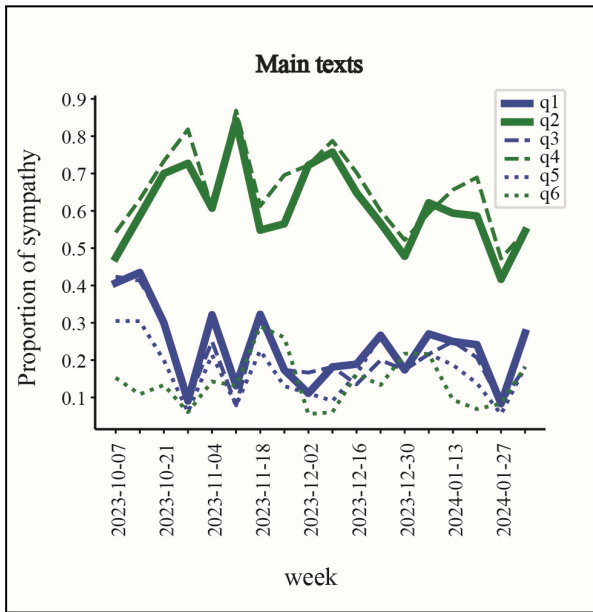
The full extent of the disparity between sympathy in articles (solid line), and sympathy in headlines (dotted line) is more clearly seen in the below graph.





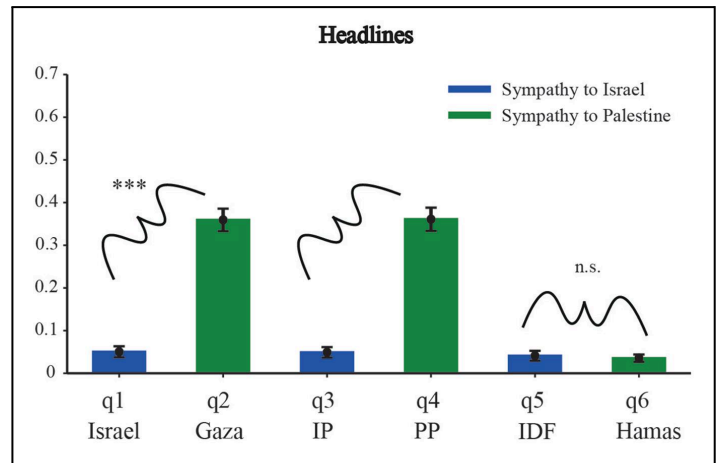
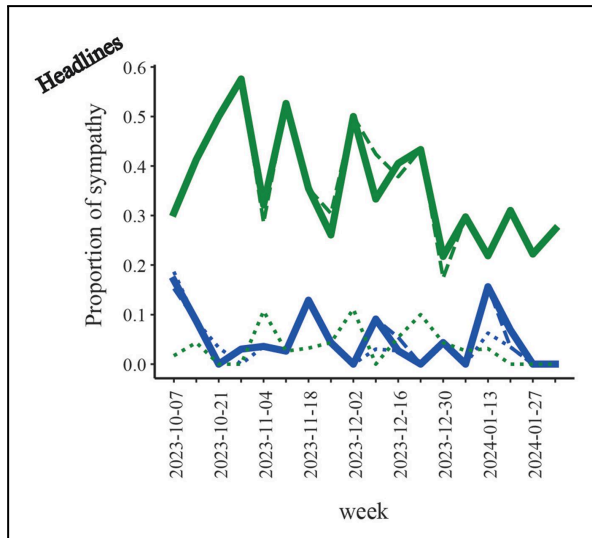
### E. BBC Arabic Web Articles

A similar experiment with the six questions was conducted with the 574 relevant articles identified in BBC Arabic, over the Reporting Timeframe. The results for questions 1 and 2 and for 3 and 4 are similar to those for English Language Web Articles, but the results are more pronounced. Remarkably, at no point in time does the level of sympathy evoked for Israelis exceed the level of sympathy evoked for Palestinians, even in the week immediately after the 7 October Hamas attack.



### F. BBC Arabic Web Articles – Headlines

The imbalance of pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli sympathy which was seen across BBC Arabic articles was further emphasised amongst BBC Arabic headlines, as shown by the below two graphs.



Hamas and all Israeli entities, including Israeli people, appear to enjoy equal levels of sympathy in Arabic Web Articles.

It is noteworthy that:

- a. the Arabic Web Articles display a materially increased average sympathy towards Palestinians, as compared with English Language Web Articles; and
- b. the Arabic Web Article headlines express even greater sympathy for Palestinians, than the English Language Web Article headlines.

In an impartial treatment of material, we would expect the balance of pro-Palestinian/pro-Israeli English language articles to be reflected in similar proportions:

- a. In English Language Web Article articles;
- b. In English Language Web Article headlines;
- c. In Arabic Web Articles; and
- d. In Arabic Web Article headlines.

The fact that there is a discrepancy between these various ratios of emphasis strongly suggests bias in the choice of English Language Web Article headlines; greater bias across all Arabic Web Articles, and the highest level of bias in the drafting of Arabic Web Article headlines.

### G. Extensive Comparison of Sympathetic Coverage between the BBC and Other News Outlets

RIME used an external data set to provide other reference points. The GDELT is an extensive open source dataset that monitors global news media published around the world in the English language.

RIME filtered the dataset to extract only items from the Reporting Timeframe, which also contained one or more of the same six words used for filtering the BBC data. This yielded approximately 630,000 headlines from 1,500 news outlets. News outlets with fewer than 100 relevant articles published over the Reporting Timeframe were excluded to ensure robustness. The full results are depicted in Supplementary Figure 1. For visualisation only, in the figure below, we took out every non Jewish/non Muslim news outlet with less than 400 articles.

The team focused on quantifying the ratios of the first pair of questions (comparison of countries) across headlines from various news outlets. These ratios were averaged over time throughout the whole analysis, to provide a single number that represents the sympathy ratio for each relevant news outlet which could be displayed in a single graph.

The team asked ChatGPT 4 to then select those news outlets associated with Judaism and those associated with Islam and marked them in blue and green, respectively. Additionally, regions with outlets that exhibit extreme imbalance (defined as sympathy ratio greater than 2 towards either side), were also painted in blue (pro Israeli) and green (pro Palestinian).

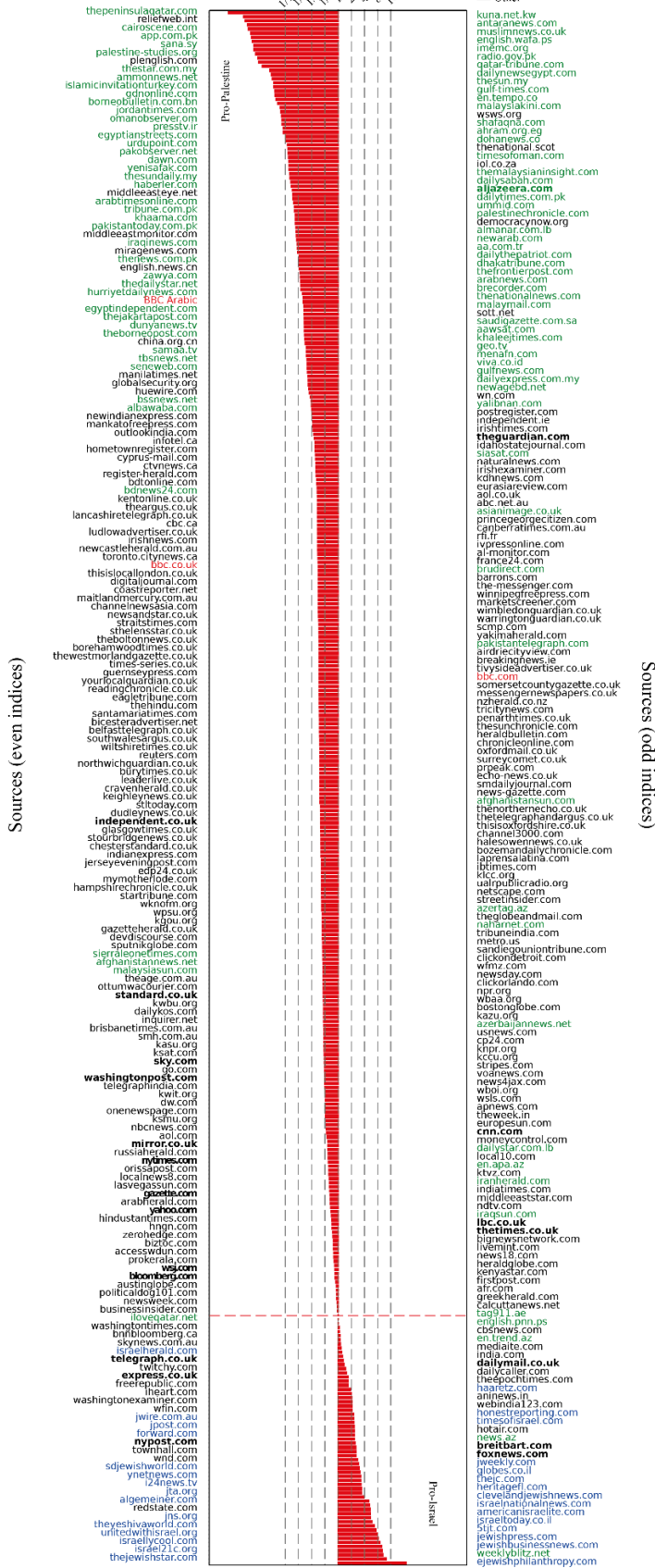
As expected, the blue and green outlets tended to be bunched at the extreme ends of the graph. The resulting graph demonstrates the somewhat extreme level of imbalance adopted by the BBC (highlighted in red), when compared with other international news outlets. BBC Arabic (also highlighted in red), is even more extreme than BBC English.

# THE ISRAEL-HAMAS WAR AND THE BBC

342,559 Articles from 376 Sources

Sympathy ratio: Israel/Palestine (log scale)

- Muslim affiliation
- Jewish affiliation
- Other



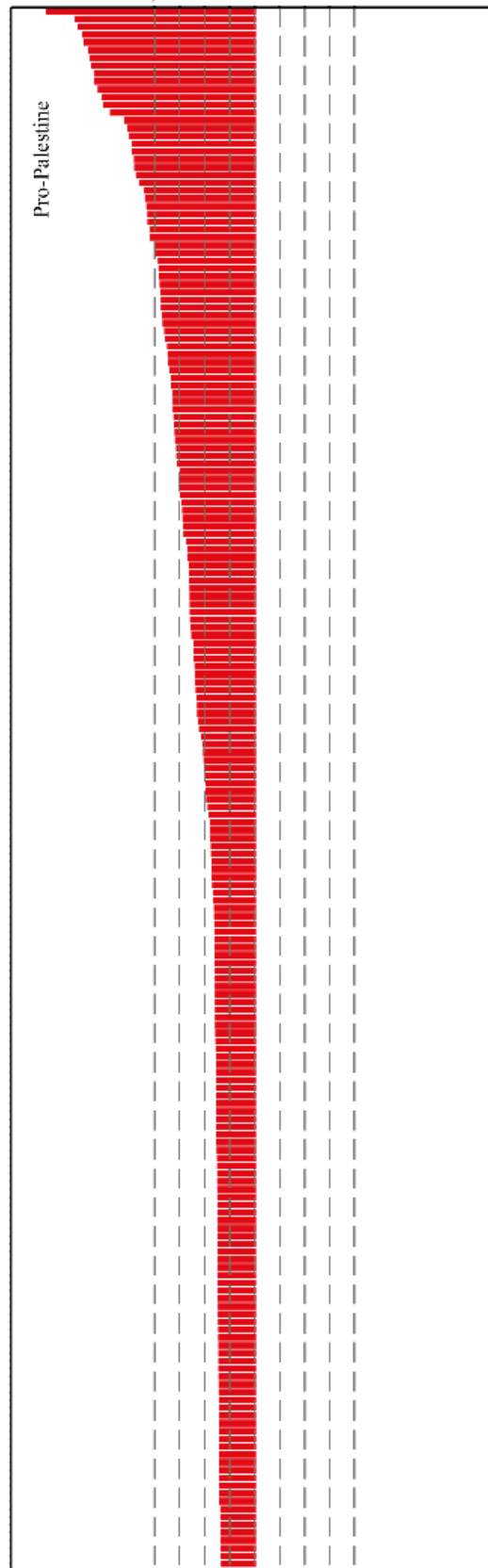
342,559 Articles from 376 Sources

Sympathy ratio: Israel/Palestine (log scale)

- Muslim affiliation
- Jewish affiliation
- Other

Sources (even indices)

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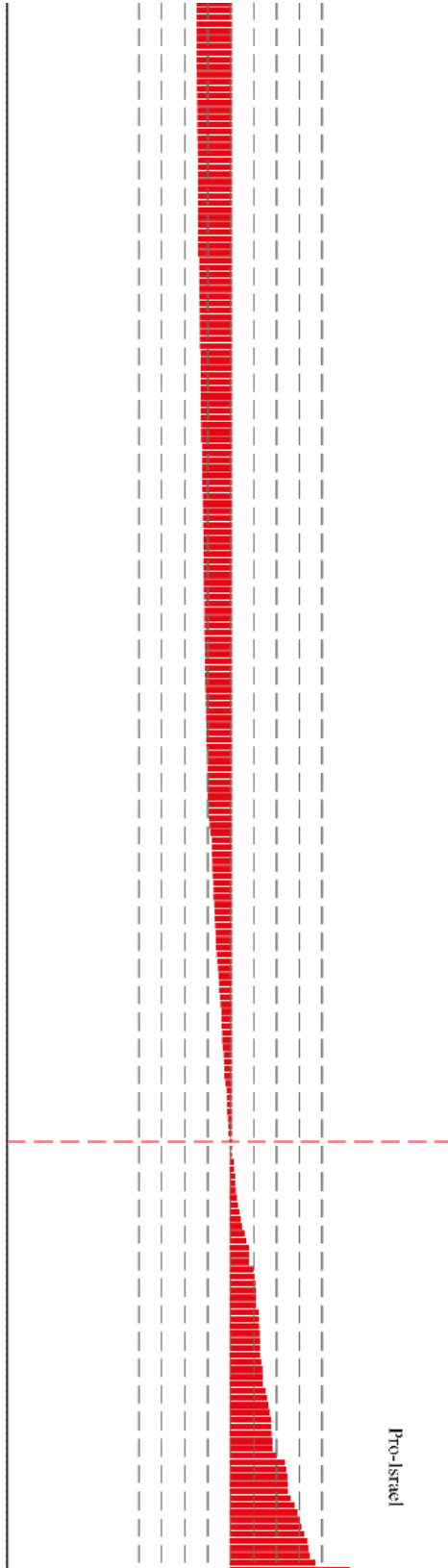


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- freerepublic.com
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- washingtonexaminer.com
- wfin.com
- jwire.com.au
- jpost.com
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- townhall.com
- wnd.com
- sdjewishworld.com
- ynetnews.com
- i24news.tv
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- theyeshivaworld.com
- unitedwithisrael.org
- israellycool.com
- israel21c.org
- thejewishstar.com



Pro-Israel

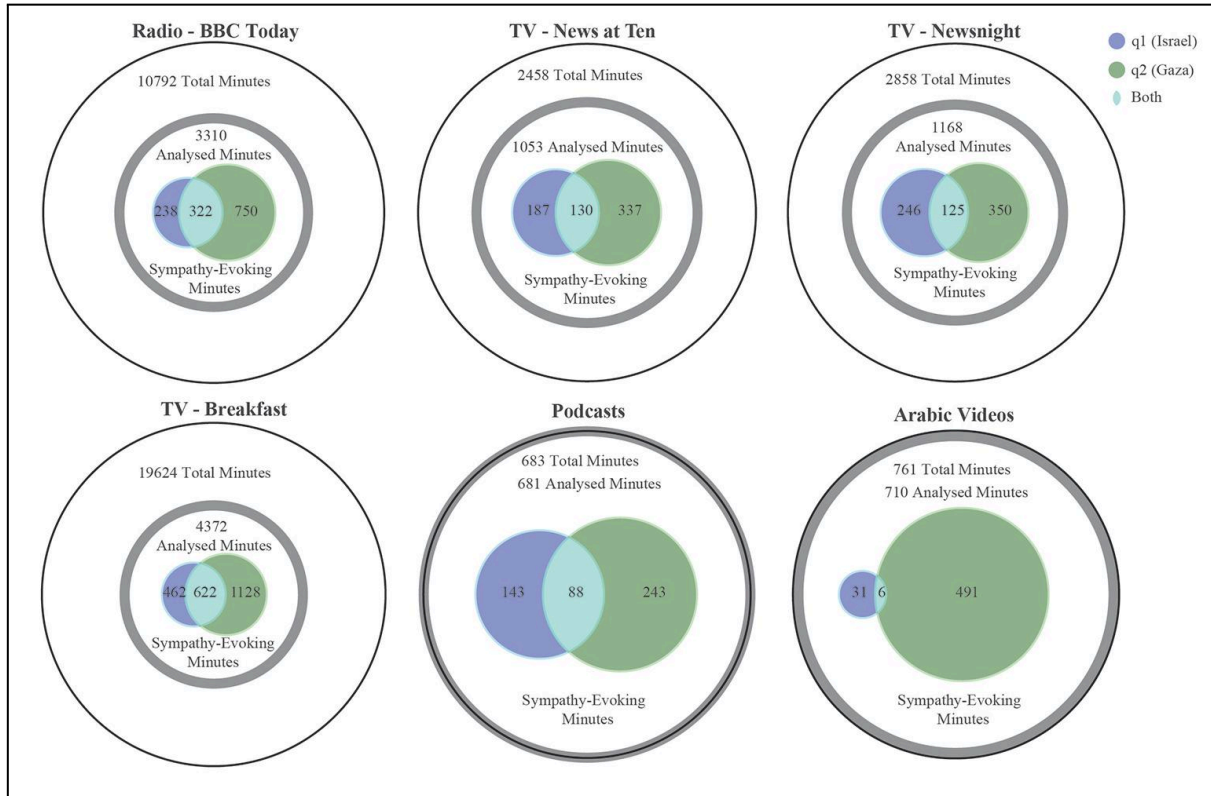
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- hotair.com
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- breitbart.com**
- foxnews.com**
- jweekly.com
- globes.co.il
- thejc.com
- heritagefi.com
- clevelandjewishnews.com
- israelnationalnews.com
- americanisraelite.com
- israeltoday.co.il
- 5tjt.com
- jewishpress.com
- jewishbusinessnews.com
- weeklyblitz.net
- ejewishphilanthropy.com

Sources (odd indices)



## H. Expanding the Assessment to other outputs

A similar analysis of other BBC English output (TV, Radio, Podcast), as set out in the full report of the experiment at Schedule 5, produced results broadly aligned to the result with BBC English articles which have been presently analysed. Notably, as per the image below, the Arabic videos showed the most bias towards Palestine.



## I. Conclusions

The ChatGPT 4 Sympathy Analysis carried out reveals notable biases, consistently favouring the Palestinian side. This is evident across both the main body of the articles and in their headlines. These biases were:

- a) Robust over time;

- b) Especially pronounced in headlines, where sympathy towards Palestine dramatically outweighed that towards Israel, by 3/6-fold on average in the English and Arabic websites, respectively, peaking at tenfold or more at some time-points;
- c) Furthermore, and independently to the main text analysis, we have found that even in the relatively few articles where the main text carries some sympathy towards Israel, this sympathy is rarely reflected in the headline, whereas the same is not true for Palestine; and
- d) With regards to BBC Arabic, these tendencies are notably exacerbated: Our analysis demonstrated it to be amongst the most extreme of all the media sources we scrutinised. A thorough investigation unveiled how its bias surpasses that of BBC English across all measured parameters.

## J. Sympathy Bias - Breach of Legal Obligations

We find that the BBC has materially breached the following binding principles:

***Editorial Values Principle 2*** – the BBC will ensure that no significant strand of thought is under-represented or omitted in BBC output as a whole.

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***Impartiality Principle 22*** – In applying due impartiality to news, the BBC will give due weight to events, opinion and the main strands of argument.

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***Impartiality Principle 23*** – When dealing with ‘controversial subjects’, the BBC must ensure a wide range of significant views and perspectives are given due weight and prominence, particularly when the controversy is active. Opinion should be clearly distinguished from fact.

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***Impartiality Principle 24*** – the BBC must take particular care to achieve due impartiality on a ‘controversial subject’ when it may be considered to be a ‘major matter’.

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## 6. HUMAN SYMPATHY ANALYSIS

We conducted a human sympathy analysis of all the Dataset in both English and Arabic language. We asked our reviewers across English Language and Arabic Web Articles to provide separate grades for each of:

- The entire article; and
- Individual images.

For each of the Dataset categories, one single grade was given for each piece of content.

### A. Methodology - The Fair Minded Observer

The 'fair minded and informed observer' is the hypothetical person in the common law test for apparent bias, explained by the House of Lords in the leading case of *Porter v Magill*. However there is debate, amongst lawyers, as to the appropriate level of knowledge to constitute this hypothetical person.

As this is a legal test, we asked our reviewers – mostly experienced lawyers – to consider whether any particular item broadcast by the BBC would affect a fair minded and informed observer, ignorant of wider context, and would evoke one of three possible reactions in such a person:

- a) Greater sympathy for Israelis or reduced sympathy for Palestinians – (Pro Israeli/anti Palestinian) which resulted in a grade of +1;
- b) Equal level, or no sympathy evoked towards either side –(Neutral) which resulted in a grade of 0;
- c) Greater sympathy for Palestinians or reduced sympathy for Israelis- (Anti-Israeli/pro Palestinian) which resulted in a grade of -1;
- d) A grade of +2/-2 was reserved for 'extreme' examples. The reviewers were instructed to use this grade sparingly. Across English language content a -2 grade was given 26 times.

Our reviewers were mostly Jewish with personal connections to Israel, so we were conscious of a need to combat potential bias. We took the following precautions:

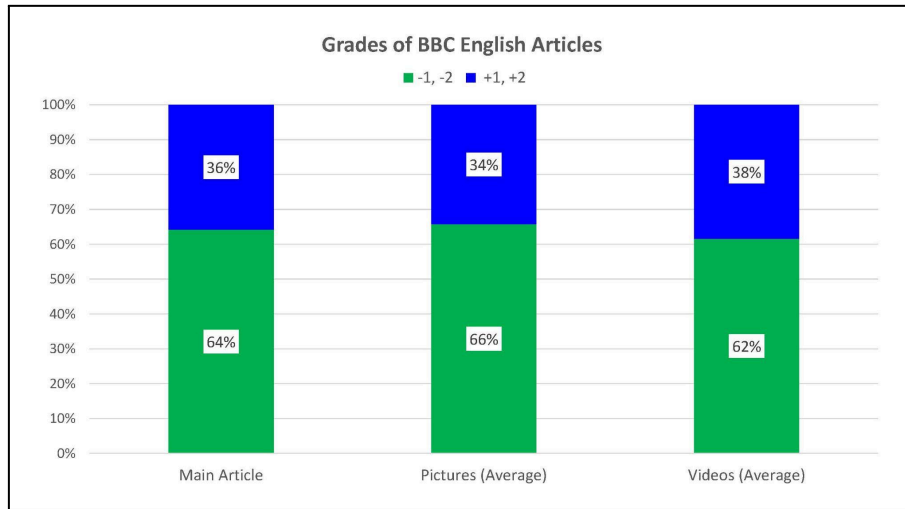
- a) Most reviewers were experienced lawyers, trained to distinguish good arguments from poor ones;
- b) We gave emphatic oral instructions at an initial meeting with the reviewers, that all reviewers combat their potential bias by being vigilant and always making any borderline decision to give the BBC the benefit of the doubt;
- c) That instruction was repeated at most weekly review meetings;
- d) We ran a trial, and excluded some of the team at the outset because of an apparent bias;
- e) We set an experienced litigation solicitor in charge of checking all reviews on receipt for signs of bias;
- f) We subjected c. 20% of reviewer decisions – randomly selected – to ‘senior reviewers’. These were mostly very senior lawyers, four former senior partners of substantial UK law firms, a JP, a senior retired barrister – fuller details are set out in Schedule 4. They broadly agreed with our grading, and some considered it “too kind” to the BBC;
- g) We ran the same material through a Large Language Model data science test, through ChatGPT, and received similar results to the human analysis test.

We have attached our own reviewers’ gradings, with their reasoning at Schedule 4 iii for others to assess.

We attach selected comments from our ‘senior reviewers’ at Schedule 4 iv.

What follows here are the principal findings from our sympathy analysis. The full dataset can be found at Appendix 5.

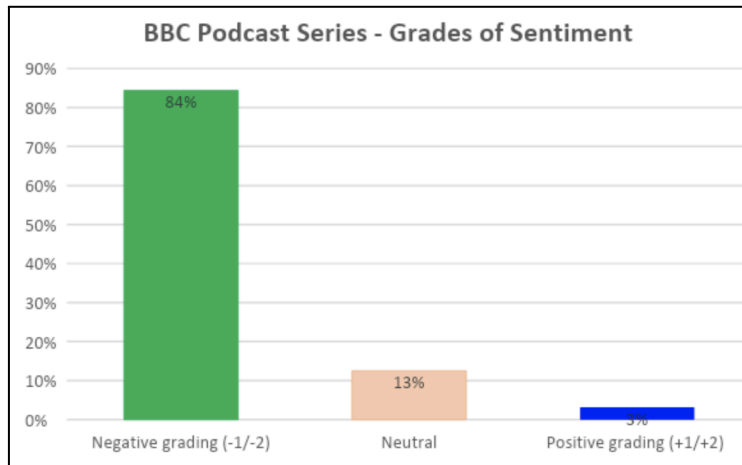
### B. Sympathy - English Language Web Articles



The graph above shows a breakdown of the human analysis of 1,529 English Language Web Articles. Neutral grades (0) and any grades that were either blank or 'to be decided' are not included.

The results indicate that a material imbalance existed between favouring Palestinians and favouring Israelis across all categories. The imbalance was at a similar level throughout, ranging from - 62% - 66%.

### C. Sympathy - Podcasts – Lyse Doucet and Jeremy Bowen

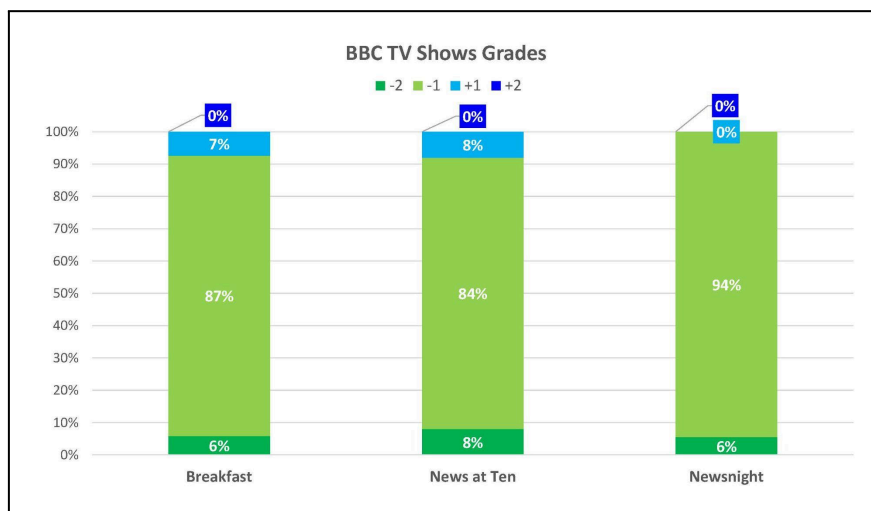


The graph above focuses on the analysis of the BBC Podcast series, which aired from 7 October 2023 until 23 December 2023. We found a significant (84% of the total and 90% of the non-neutral total) anti-Israeli/pro-Palestinian bias, with only one episode out of 33 (3%) that was graded as pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian.

It is hard to explain the discrepancy between a c.65% sympathy imbalance across 1,529 articles and the 90% imbalance across podcasts. However, as set out below, this is consistent with other analysis of the work of Jeremy Bowen.

### D. Sympathy - BBC Television

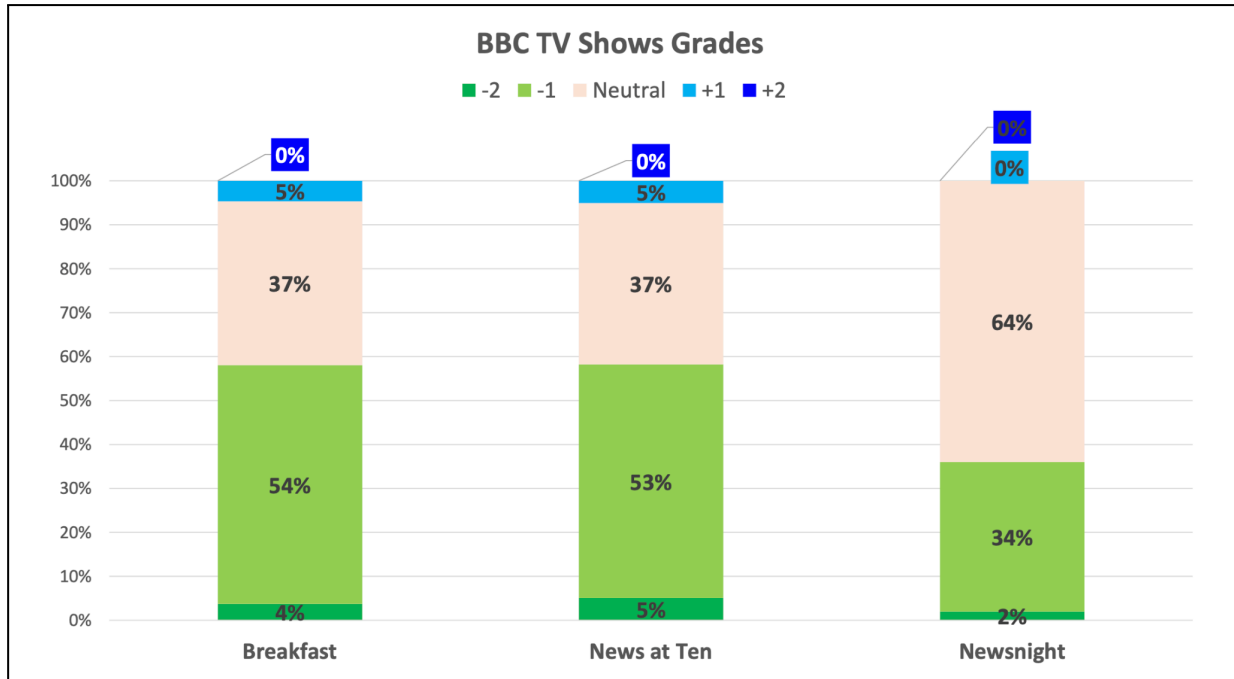
This graph compares the sympathy imbalance across the three BBC TV outputs that were analysed, again excluding neutral programmes.



The sympathy analysis showed a very marked pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli imbalance across all principal television news programmes. Newsnight showed the greatest level of imbalance – and consistency – broadcasting no programmes positive to Israel during the Reporting Timeframe.

Notably, there were no +2 (strong anti-Palestinian/pro-Israeli bias) seen across any of the TV output. In contrast, we see 5% strong pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli bias in BBC News at Ten. The vast majority of the TV gradings were -1, showing an anti-Israeli/pro-Palestinian bias.

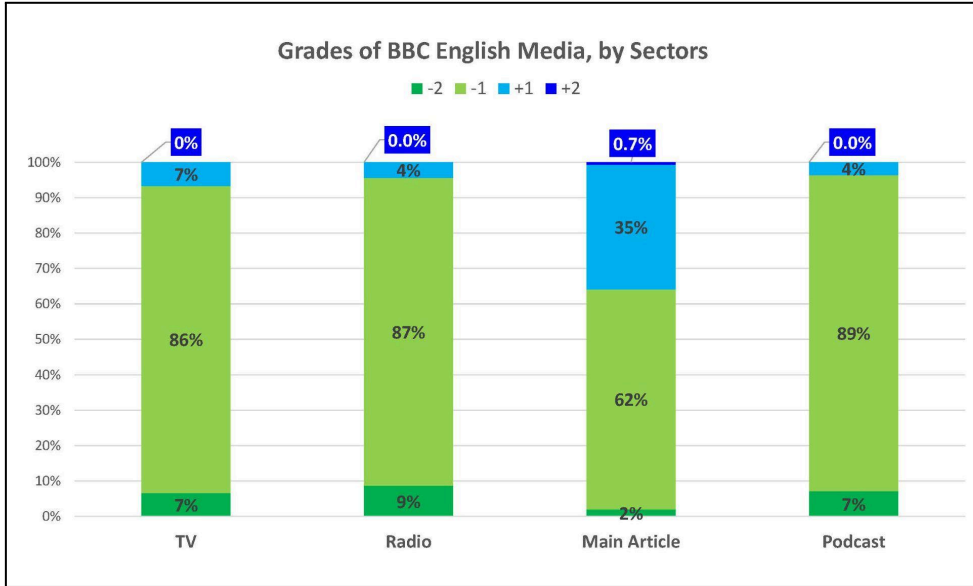




The above graph depicts the TV gradings, but also adds details of those programmes graded (0) indicating a balanced programme. BBC Breakfast and News at Ten share an equally low level of balanced reporting at 37%.

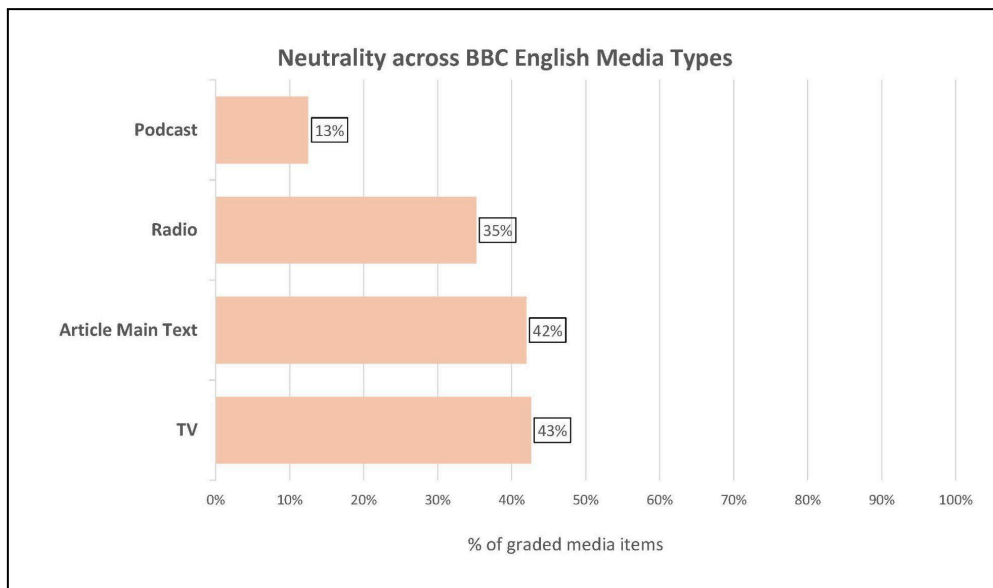
### E. Sympathy – BBC Media by Sectors

Note that TV, Radio and Podcast both carry a very material imbalance in favour of pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli material of 93%, and 96% respectively. This is far heavier than in web articles where the imbalance is at 65%.



Across all the English language output analyses, less than 1% (0.7%) of items were graded +2 pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian. By contrast TV, Radio and Podcast had 7% and 9% respectively strongly pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli (-2) grades.

### F. Sympathy– Cross sector impartiality scores



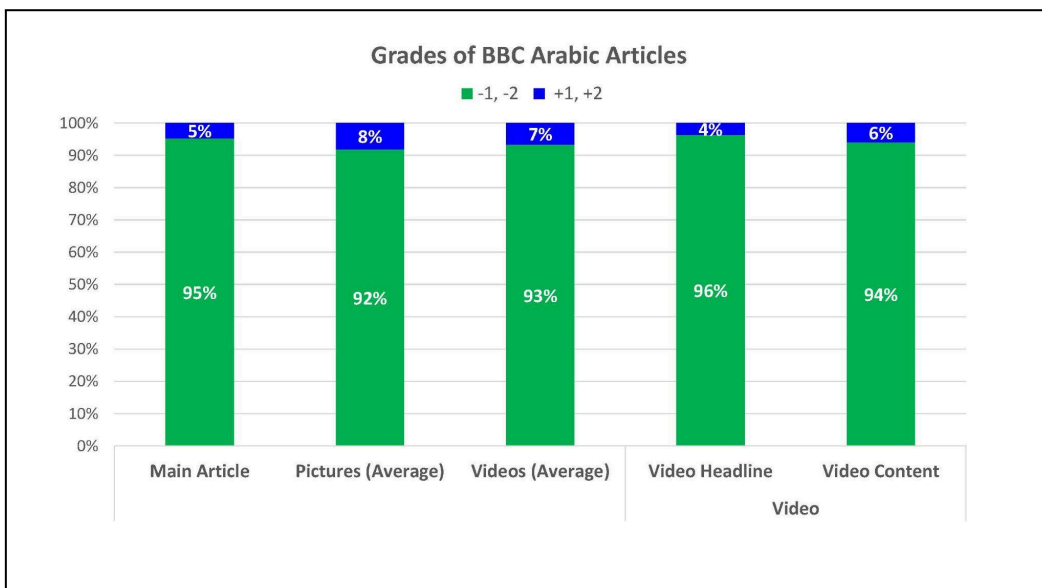
The graph above compares the impartiality measure (grade 0) across English language outputs. We can see that the TV had the highest proportion of impartial items, with the BBC Podcast having the lowest, at just 13%.

The fact that most parts of the BBC seem able to produce balanced programmes or articles makes the preponderance of unbalanced programmes, almost all leaning in the same direction, hard to justify.

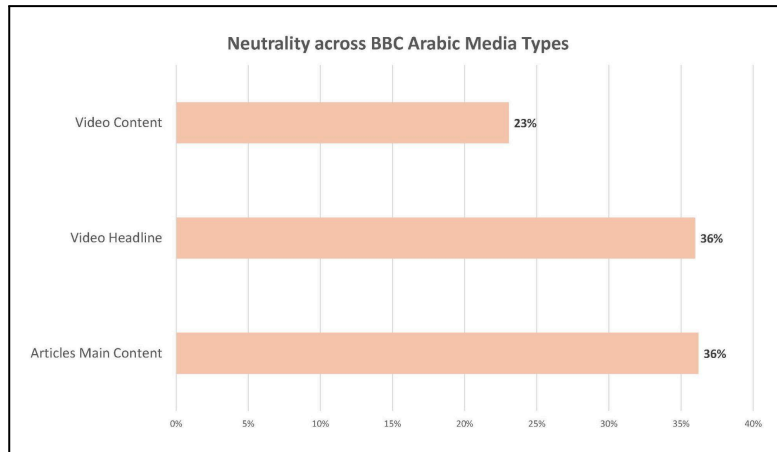
### G. Sympathy– BBC Arabic Web Articles and videos content

The graph below shows a breakdown of the human analysis of BBC Arabic Web Articles and headlines. Neutral grades (0) and any grades that were either blank or ‘to be decided’ are not included.

The results indicate that an extreme material imbalance existed between favouring Palestinians across both categories analysed, ranging between 92% to 96%.



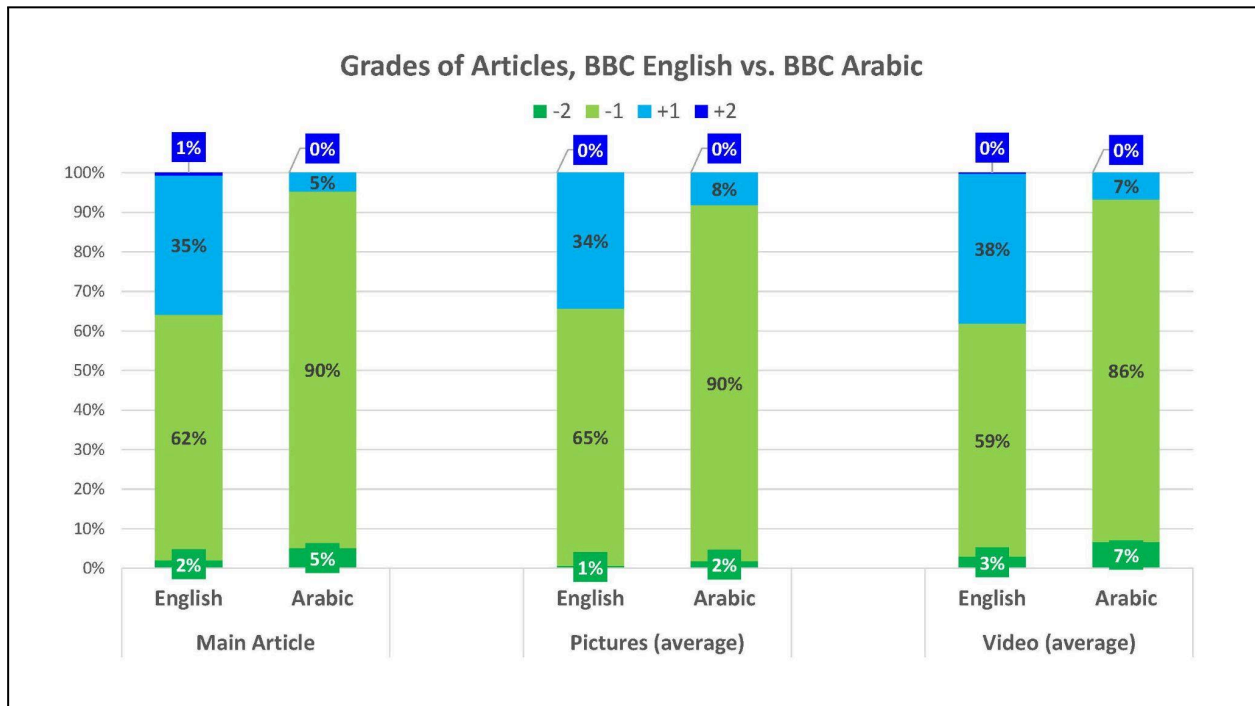
## H. Neutrality comparison across BBC Arabic output



If the BBC is to achieve a reputation for balanced output, a healthy majority of its output should be balanced. BBC Arabic fails to achieve this.

Of the unbalanced programmes, they should be approximately divided between positive sentiment for the opposing sides to the dispute. Again BBC Arabic fails to achieve this.

## I. Sympathy - comparison between English Language and Arabic Web Articles

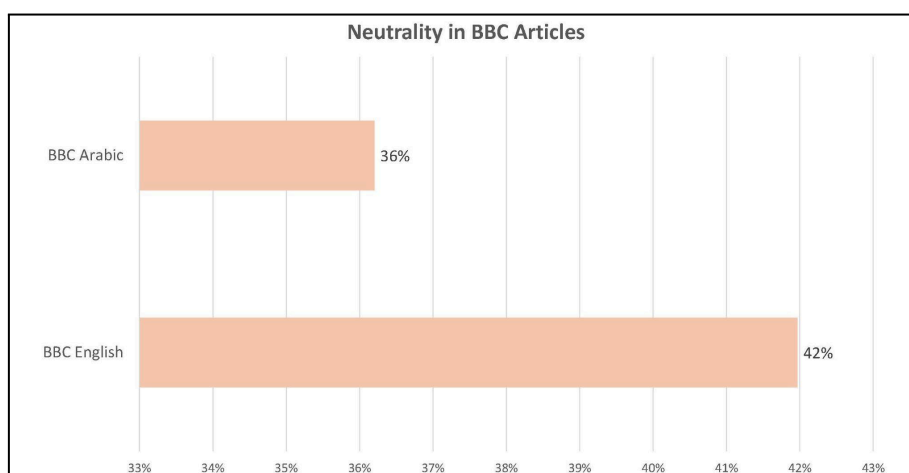


Note that there is a consistent significant balance in favour of the pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli narrative.

Without prejudice to arguing that the BBC has drawn its baseline imbalance at the wrong place, the audience can reasonably expect that baseline imbalance to be applied across Arabic language programming as well. However the BBC Arabic generally sets a baseline imbalance at c. 6.5% pro-Israeli/anti-Palestinian and c.93.5% pro-Palestinian/anti-Israeli.

The 93.5%/6.5% ratio would seem difficult to defend as exhibiting due impartiality. Accordingly we conclude that the BBC Arabic displays a breach by the BBC of its obligation of due impartiality.

### J. Neutrality comparison across BBC English and BBC Arabic



Across the Report we find a lack of impartiality in BBC English which is significantly more extreme across BBC Arabic.

### **K. Human Sympathy analysis - breach of legal obligations**

We find that the BBC has materially breached the following binding principles:

***Editorial Values Principle 2*** – the BBC will ensure that no significant strand of thought is under-represented or omitted in BBC output as a whole.

***Impartiality Principle 22*** – In applying due impartiality to news, the BBC will give due weight to events, opinion and the main strands of argument.

***Impartiality Principle 23*** – When dealing with ‘controversial subjects’, the BBC must ensure a wide range of significant views and perspectives are given due weight and prominence, particularly when the controversy is active. Opinion should be clearly distinguished from fact.

***Impartiality Principle 24*** – the BBC must take particular care to achieve due impartiality on a ‘controversial subject’ when it may be considered to be a ‘major matter’.

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## 7. BBC INTERVIEWEES

The BBC will frequently cover stories by conducting interviews, either in the field or in the studio. We sought to analyse the identity and affiliation of interviewees selected by the BBC to explore the extent to which such selection was handled in an impartial and balanced fashion over time.

### Methodology/Criteria for Selection

We only included direct interviewees. i.e. where the BBC had taken a positive step to invite or organise an interview with an individual. Press conferences, third party sources and public statements e.g. by politicians, or military leaders, whose words were merely being quoted, were not included.

Once the full list of interviewees had been established within the Dataset, the following criteria was used to establish their nationality, general affiliation, and the affiliation of a specific quote:

### Nationality

1. If the nationality of the speaker was not written or made clear in the article, the Human Reviewer researched the interviewee to establish their nationality. Dual/multi nationals were noted as such.
2. The Human Reviewers wrote down all nationalities, where they were known, however, for the purposes of this experiment, they were confined to Israeli (or Dual Israeli), Palestinian (or Dual Palestinian) or 'Other'.
3. Where the Human Reviewer could not clearly determine the Nationality of the interviewee, the nationality was marked 'unknown'.

### Speaker Affiliation

Interviewees were classified, where possible, as to their expected affiliation. However, this was a rebuttable presumption, as explained below.

1. There was a base assumption that Israelis were affiliated with Israel and Palestinians affiliated with Gaza. Unless the quote/wider context of the article stood to challenge this assumption, that is what was written.
2. For those of all 'other' nationalities, the Human Reviewer made a further assumption that anyone with close ties of love and affection (e.g. family members) in a particular region, would therefore also be affiliated with that region. Job roles, per se, did not equate to an assumption around affiliation, with the exception of some NGO's/religious leaders.<sup>69</sup>
3. If the affiliation of the speaker was not clear from reading the article, or researching more prominent figures, then their affiliation was marked as 'Neither'.

### Quote Affiliation

The affiliation of what interviewees actually said was assessed, and the Quote Affiliation was marked accordingly, as either Palestinian, Israeli or Other.

4. A UK national would have a Speaker Affiliation of 'Other' and if making a pro-Israeli statement, that would be classified as Israeli 'Quote Affiliation'. But a subsequent statement by the same speaker might be classified as having a Palestinian 'Quote Affiliation.'
5. Where the affiliation of a particular quote was not clear, the Human Reviewer marked it as 'Neither'.

### Word Count

1. The number of words uttered by each interviewee was counted electronically. Extraneous words such as "he said," "she reported" were excluded.

The full methodology can be found in Schedule 6, what follows is a summary of principal findings:

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<sup>69</sup> E.g. the Chief Rabbi of England was assumed to be affiliated to Israel.

## A. Interviewee analysis across BBC English content

### i. Introduction

The choice of interviewees can play a key role in affecting rates of sympathy evoked and can subsequently affect public sentiment. Therefore, after concluding the Sympathy Analysis, whereby it was shown that the BBC content evoked more sympathy for Palestinians than for Israelis, RIMe sought to analyse the identity and affiliation of interviewees selected by both BBC English and BBC Arabic.

Specifically, RIMe wanted to see if the two sides are given a similar opportunity to express their positions and if there are differences in the ways they are presented/portrayed.

### ii. Methodology

Using the same dataset as in the Sympathy Analysis, RIMe extracted the content in which there were direct interviewees. i.e. where the BBC had taken a positive step to invite or organise an interview with an individual. Press conferences, third party sources and public statements e.g. by politicians, or military leaders, whose words were merely being quoted, were not included.

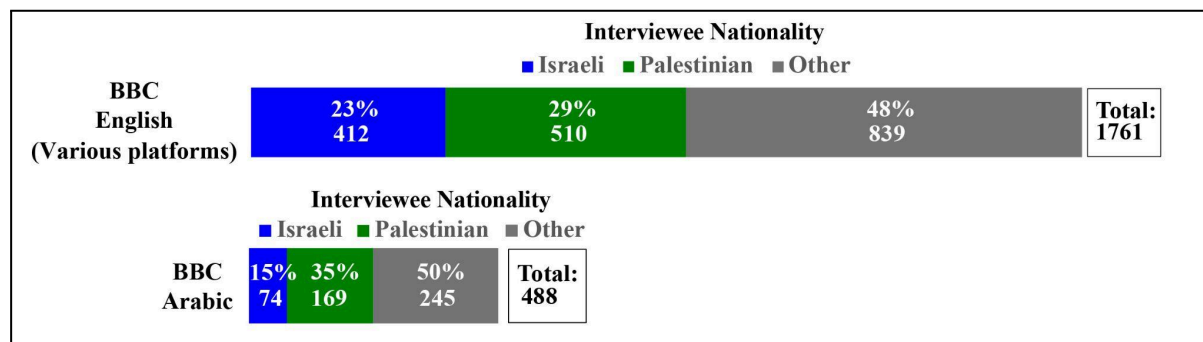
Once the full table of interviewees within the dataset and their respective quotes had been established, a team of human reviewers (both English and Arabic speakers) were asked to determine the following information for each interviewee and each quote:

- 1) Interviewee nationality - if the nationality of the speaker was not written or made clear within the article, the human reviewer researched the interviewee to establish their nationality. For the purposes of this experiment, we confined the nationality to Israeli, Palestinian or 'Other'.
- 2) Interviewee societal type - we distinguish between 'Official' (State, Government, Military, Politician) or 'Civilian' (general civilian, victim, reporter, professional and academic). In rare cases where neither of the options was suitable, the label was set as 'other'.
- 3) Quote affiliation - What interviewees actually said was assessed, and the Quote Affiliation was marked accordingly, as either Pro-Palestinian, Pro-Israeli or Other.

(Each quote was considered separately, even if by a repeated interviewee). Quote affiliation was only noted for article content.

The full methodology can be found at Schedule 6.

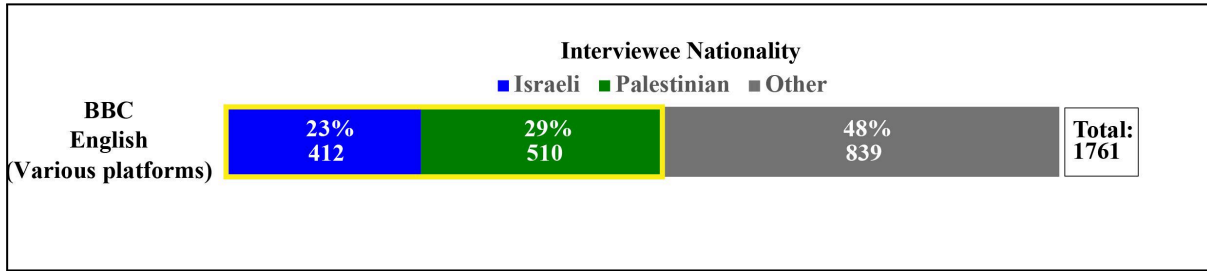
### iii. Results



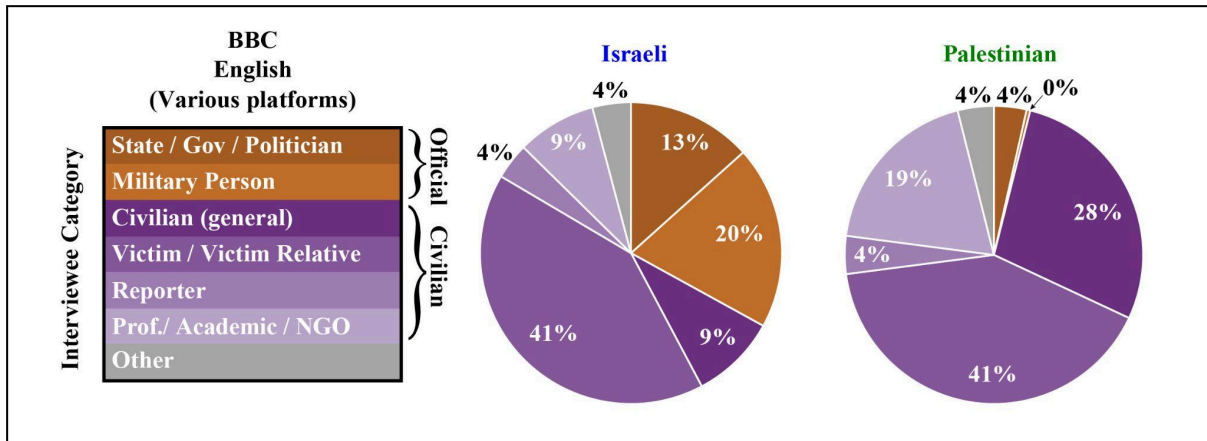
The above bar graphs show the comparative volume of the interviewees across BBC English output and BBC Arabic.

- 1) There is more than three times the volume of interviewees across BBC English, compared with BBC Arabic. That was expected given the greater size of the English dataset
- 2) The ratio of Palestinian/Israeli interviewees across BBC English (29% to 23%) is quite balanced, albeit in favour of Palestinians by a modest margin
- 3) The ratio of Palestinian/Israeli interviewees across BBC Arabic is heavily imbalanced, in favour of Palestinians by a margin greater than 2:1 (35% to 15%)

iv. English Language Result 1 – Israeli and Palestinian Interviewees



Having established the nationality of interviewees, RIME conducted further analysis to see if there were material differences in the ‘societal type’ of Israeli and Palestinian interviewees selected by the BBC.

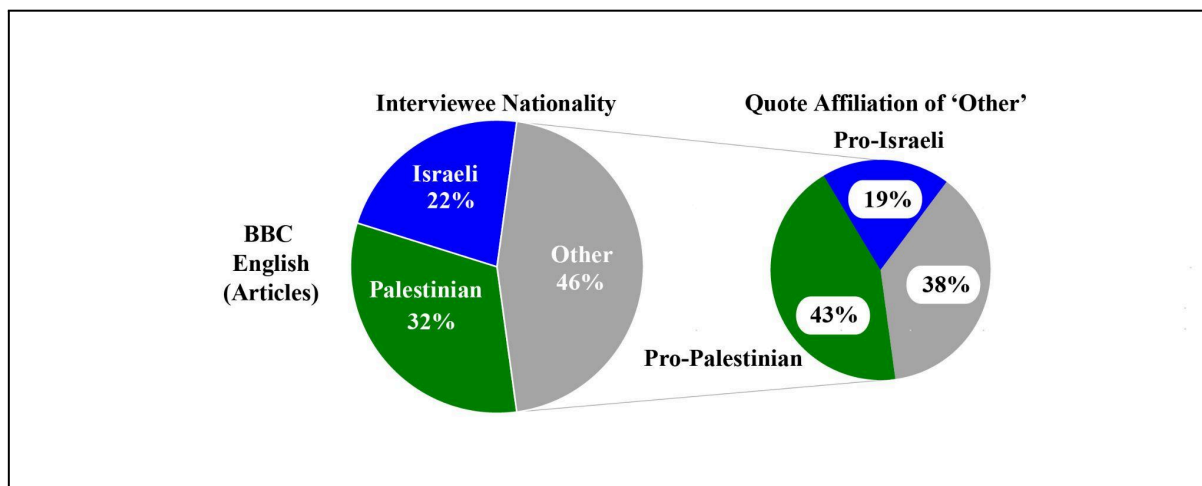


The above charts focus solely on English language interviewees who are of either Israeli or Palestinian nationality – a total of 922 individuals and their societal type as described above.

- 1) In interviewing Israeli nationals, the BBC has interviewed 33% in their ‘Official’ capacity – predominantly those from the military. Whereas 67% are made up of civilians.
- 2) In contrast, only 4% of Palestinian interviewees were ‘Official’ interviewees. Whereas 96% are made up of civilians.

### v. English Language Result 2 – Interviewees of ‘Other’ nationalities

The overall breakdown of Palestinian to Israeli narratives could also be affected by the affiliation of the ‘Other’ group of interviewees. Accordingly, RIME analysed this group to see how many of them had a clear affiliation with either Israel or Palestine.

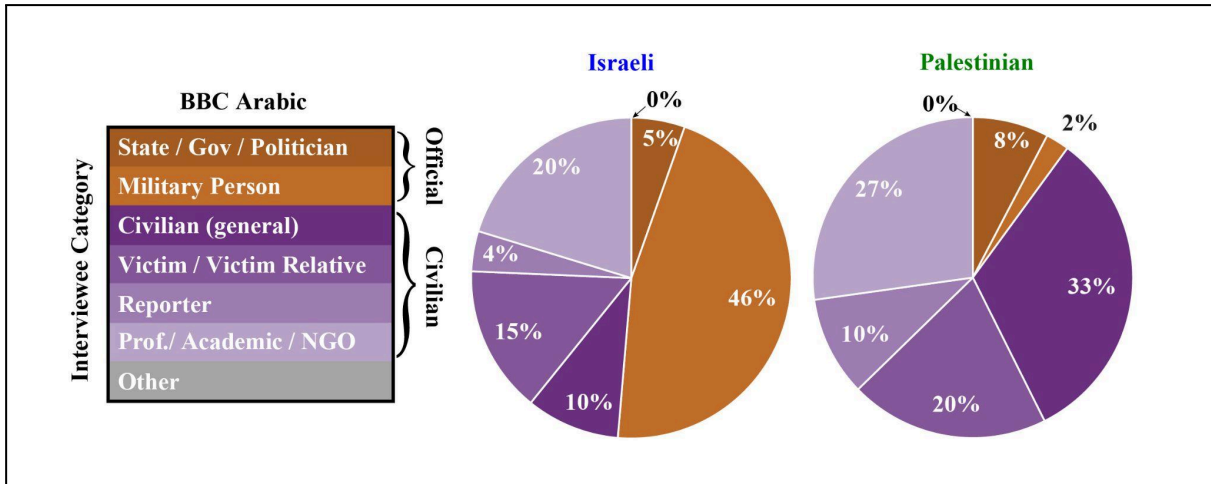
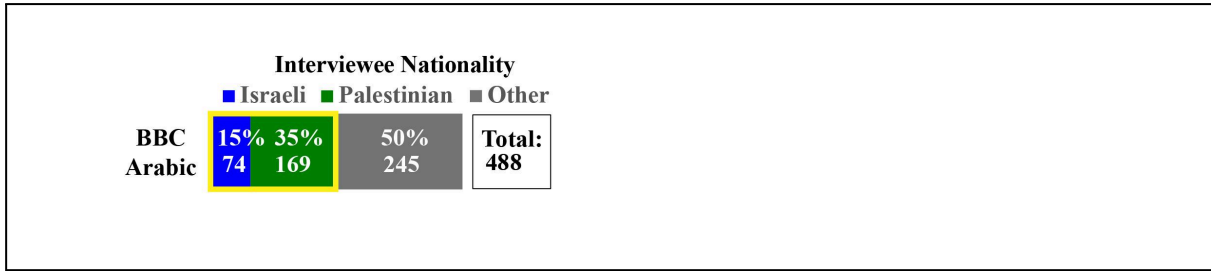


The above charts focus on those interviewees who were neither of Israeli nor Palestinian nationality – 540 interviewees - marked as ‘Other’.

In the analysis that checks the Quote Affiliation (captured only across BBC Articles), the occurrence of pro Palestinian quotes (43%) was more than two times greater than the occurrence of pro Israeli quotes (19%).

### vi. BBC Arabic Result 1 – Israeli and Palestinian Interviewees

Having analysed the BBC English Language dataset, RIME then repeated the analysis for BBC Arabic articles.



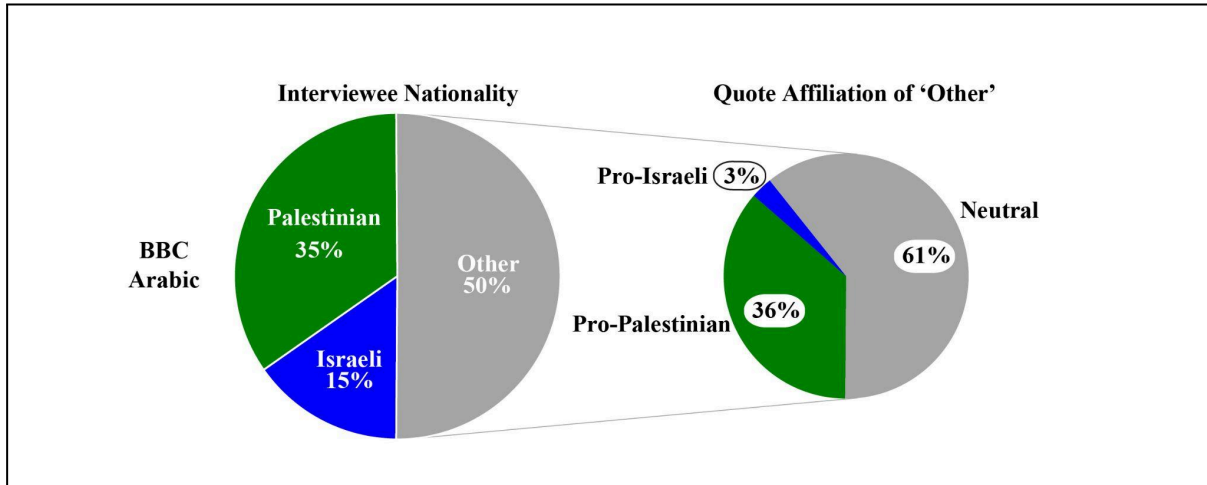
The above charts focus solely on BBC Arabic interviewees who are of either Israeli or Palestinian nationality – a total of 243 individuals and their societal type as described above. Note:

- 1) In interviewing Israeli nationals, BBC Arabic has interviewed more than half (51%) in their 'Official' capacity – overwhelmingly (46%) from the military. The remaining 49% are made up of civilians.
- 2) In contrast, only 10% of Palestinian interviewees were 'Official' interviewees. The remaining 90% are made up of civilians.



vii. BBC Arabic Result 2 – Interviewees of ‘Other’ nationalities

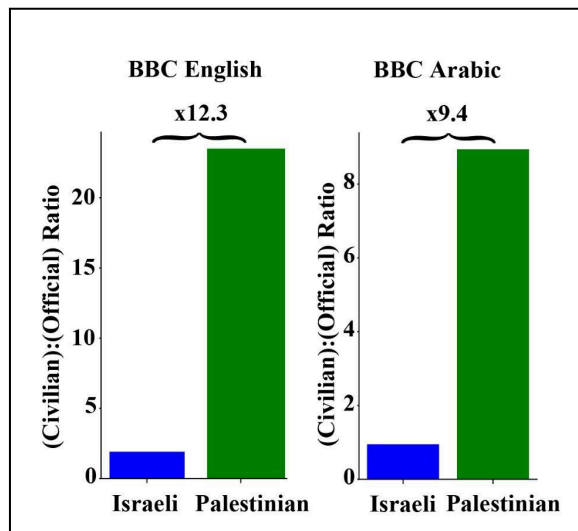
RIMe went on to analyse the group of ‘Other’ interviewees - 245 individuals in total.



The occurrence of pro-Palestinian quotes (36%) is twelve times greater than the occurrence of pro-Israeli quotes (3%).

viii. Comparative Result 1 – Interviewee Societal type: unequal representation of Israeli and Palestinian sides

The analysis highlights substantial discrepancies in the BBC's portrayal of the Israeli and Palestinian sides that may consequently impact public perceptions and sympathy.



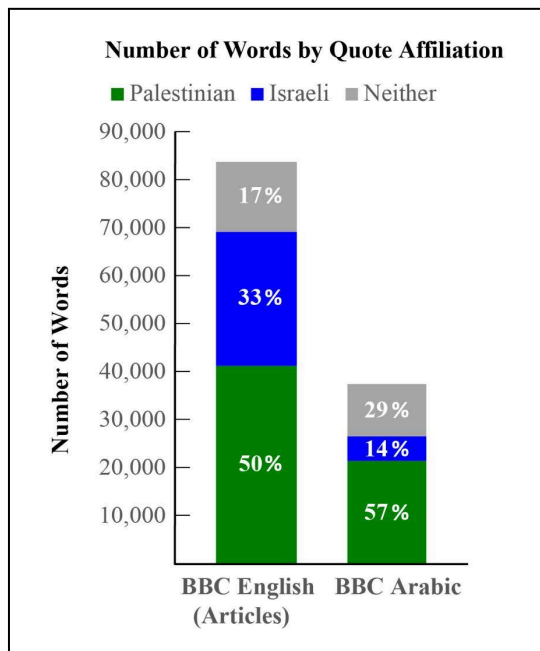
In BBC English, for every Israeli ‘Official’ interviewed, there are approximately two Israeli civilians (Ratio = 1.9:1, blue column), whereas for every Palestinian ‘Official’, there are more than 23 Palestinian civilians (Ratio = 23.5:1, green column). This indicates that the Palestinian side is overwhelmingly represented through civilian voices compared to the Israeli side, which is represented with a mix of civilian and official voices.

This disparity results in a stronger emphasis on the civilian perspectives in Palestinian experiences relative to Israeli civilian perspectives, with the Palestinian ratio being more than 12 times higher (12.3).

The same general trend is evident across BBC Arabic coverage, though the exact ratios differ with Palestinian ratio being 9.4 times higher than the Israeli ratio (while the civilian: ‘Official’ ratio is approximately 1 for Israelis and 9 for Palestinians.)

**ix. Comparative Result 2 - Number of words by Quote Affiliation**

The team wanted to further define a quantifiable measure for the extent to which the different voices, pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian are represented by interviewees in the coverage across the BBC English language articles. The number of words each quote contained was (electronically) counted and aggregated for each Quote Affiliation category. Extraneous words such as "he said," "she reported" were excluded.



The above chart shows the breakdown of the total number of words, defined by quote affiliation.

The results for this analysis were aligned with the previous findings:

- 1) Focusing on BBC English, we note that pro-Palestinian quotes are approximately 1.5 more prevalent than pro-Israeli quotes. This disproportion is much more pronounced across BBC Arabic articles, where pro-Palestinian quotes are more than 4 times more prevalent than pro-Israeli quotes.
- 2) Comparing the results across the different languages, we note that in BBC English, 33% of the words spoken by all interviewees were pro-Israeli, whereas in BBC Arabic it was 14% i.e. less than half the amount. The proportion of pro-Palestinian words was quite similar (50% for English language and 57% for BBC Arabic).

### x. Conclusion - Interviewee analysis

- 1) Across BBC English there was a balance between the number of Israeli interviewees and Palestinian interviewees, this measure was much less balanced in BBC Arabic, where for every Israeli interviewee there were more than two Palestinian interviewees.
- 2) The interviewees' societal status differed dramatically in both BBC English and BBC Arabic, such that the Israeli interviewees group comprised both 'Official' figures and civilians, while the Palestinian interviewees were almost exclusively civilians.
- 3) In both BBC Arabic and BBC English, those interviewees who were nominally 'neutral', i.e. who were neither Palestinian nor Israeli, there was a significant majority who spoke in favour of Palestine, thus further exaggerating the overall imbalance of interviewee affiliation.

- 4) Overall, when counting pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian words within interviewees' quotes, the Palestinian voice was significantly over represented in comparison to the Israeli one.

Together, these findings reveal how the BBC creates a disproportionate focus on the Palestinian narrative and differentially frames civilian suffering with regards to Palestinians, and 'Official' actions with regards to Israelis. We assume that civilians are often viewed as innocent and vulnerable, eliciting greater sympathy, while 'Official' personnel, associated with power and authority, evoke less sympathy.

These discrepancies skew the portrayal of each side and likely affect how audiences perceive the conflict. In a story about war, civilians are frequently framed as victims and officials/military personnel are more naturally framed as aggressors.

The findings from the above analysis are consistent with the bias we have identified throughout this Report.

## B. Affiliation of Arabic speaking BBC Interviewees

### i. Introduction

The BBC Guidelines state:

*"It's important that we make sure our audiences are told any relevant context about the contributors or experts that feature in our output. With individual contributors it may mean making clear, if appropriate, for instance that they are active members of organisations such as political groups. It may also be necessary to corroborate any claims that are made that are significant or substantial.*

*We also should not automatically assume that contributors from other organisations (such as academics, journalists, researchers and representatives of charities and think-tanks) are unbiased. Appropriate information about their affiliations, funding and particular viewpoints should be made available to the audience, when relevant to the context."*<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> BBC Guidelines, s. 4.

*“We should make it clear if our reports are censored or monitored or if we withhold information under duress, and explain, wherever possible, the conditions under which we are operating.”<sup>71</sup>*

We have sought to examine the extent to which the BBC has complied with its obligations in this regard. This has particular importance when, as in the Israel-Hamas War, the BBC is heavily reliant on sources of information from people in Gaza. Two particular problems arise:

- a. There is evidence that Hamas imposes restrictions on journalists based in Gaza (see section 8 (3)), thus putting the BBC on notice to be wary of the accuracy of stories coming from any journalist/contributor in Gaza; and
- b. If a journalist/contributor is ideologically aligned with Hamas, the BBC should arguably not give such an individual air-time at all. Where it does, it should both reveal this support of Hamas to its audience, and only use such contributions with considerable circumspection.

In the particular circumstances of the Israel-Hamas War, which we believe is a ‘controversial subject’,<sup>72</sup> the BBC’s obligations are engaged to a high degree. Thus the BBC should be making strenuous efforts both to check for and, when found, to inform its audience of relevant “*affiliations, funding and particular viewpoints*” of its contributors. Our findings suggest that it does not do so.

### ii. Interviewee Affiliation – Estimate of Non-Reported Hamas Supporters/Members

We identified 487 Arabic-speaking interviewees interviewed by the BBC during the Reporting Timeframe, of whom the BBC only gave details of 253.

Others were given descriptions such as “Mohammed from Khan Younis” which makes them impossible to identify.

Our list of 253 Interviewees (referred to as Arabic Interviewee List or the List) then underwent analysis by three different teams:

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<sup>71</sup> BBC Guidelines, s. 11.

<sup>72</sup> BBC Guidelines, Section 4: Impartiality.

- iii. Intelligence Analyst, Dr Khaled Hassan
- iv. Investigative Journalist, David Collier
- v. Our own research team

Between these teams we were able to identify 68 individuals who were either members of Hamas, or had posted on social media in support of terrorism against Jews, including celebrating 7 October 2023. We believe that such affiliations should have been reported to the BBC audience. We have not found evidence that they were.

Extrapolating from the 68 out of 253 (27%), it is logical to assume that across 487, at least 27% or 131 interviewees have affiliations which should either disbar them from being interviewed at all, or which require the BBC to notify its audience of such affiliation.

We assume that people interviewed who were not Arabic speakers would also include a number of Hamas members or Hamas affiliated individuals.

We now summarise the findings of our three teams.

### **a. Investigative Journalist Research - Khaled Hassan**

Research Director Khaled Hassan<sup>73</sup> sampled 160 interviewees selected randomly from the List. Of these, 45 had Reportable Affiliations and 14 were found to have official ties to Hamas.

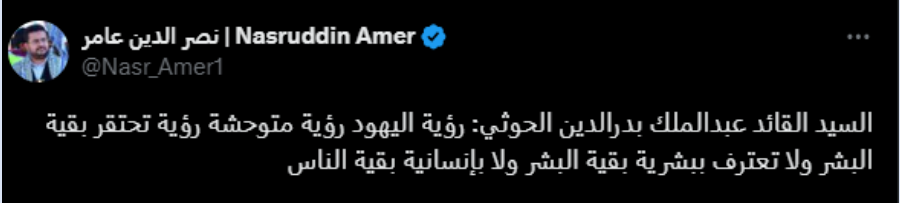
Mr Hassan used a three pronged approach to identify and analyse these interviewees, using Pimeyes (a facial recognition tool),<sup>74</sup> open AI sources and social media accounts. The full findings can be found in Appendix 9.

The following is a representative sample of findings:

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<sup>73</sup>Khaled Hassan is an Egyptian-British counter-terrorism researcher. His research interests include propaganda, antisemitism in the Arab world, terrorism and extremism.

<sup>74</sup> Information about PimEyes can be found at <https://pimeyes.com/en>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

Name of BBC Interviewee	BBC Article	Profession/ Status	Relevant Information Evidencing Affiliation
Dr Raed Al-Dabai	<a href="#">Does the increasing popular support for Hamas in the West Bank lead to a new uprising?</a>	Head of the Political Science Department at An-Najah National University	Quote from <a href="#">YouTube</a> "The Palestinian resistance [Hamas] is concerned with achieving a meaningful, honourable deal that releases a group of our prisoners of war and the withdrawal of Israeli forces from Gaza".  <a href="#">Quote on X</a> : "October 7 was a turning point for the Palestinians. The people, especially the new generation, support Hamas now, more than at any other moment."
Nasruddin Amer	<a href="#">Houthi missile hits US-owned container ships in Gulf of Aden</a>	Deputy Head of Yemeni Houthi Media Organisation	<a href="#">Post on X</a> from Feb 2024 "The view of the Jews is a savage vision, a vision that despises the rest of humanity and does not recognise the humanity of the rest of humanity or the humanity of the rest of the people."
			
Mousa Abu Marzooq	<a href="#">Musa Abu Marzouk to BBC: Hamas did not kill civilians in Israel</a>	Senior Hamas Leader	



Dr Hassan Jouni	<u>The International Court of Justice asks Israel to stop the attack on Rafah... Will Israel respond?</u>	Professor of International Law at University of Lebanon	Photographed below, speaking to the Global Gathering In Support Of The Choice Of Resistance. The organisation is allied with Hezbollah, Hamas and the IRGC, and has repeatedly congratulated Hamas on its October 7th attacks. <sup>75</sup>
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### b. Investigative Journalist Research - David Collier

Investigative journalist David Collier researched a number of names from the Arabic Interviewee List.<sup>76</sup> Mr Collier located the social media accounts of 30 individuals. Of these 30, he identified a total of 11 individuals who exhibited one or more of the following:

1. Social media posts that celebrated 7 October
2. Social media posts that glorified/praised Hamas
3. Social media posts carrying strong anti-Israel sentiment

See Appendix 10 for more detailed findings.

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<sup>75</sup> See i.e. [https://x.com/Public\\_GGSCR/status/1783374874557198429](https://x.com/Public_GGSCR/status/1783374874557198429).

<sup>76</sup> David Collier is a freelance investigative journalist. He specialises in antisemitism and Anti-Zionist activity. His in-depth reports into antisemitism in Palestinian solidarity groups in the US and the UK, particularly within the Labour Party, have been widely reported.

The following is a representative sample of findings:

Name of BBC interviewee	BBC Article	Profession/ status	Relevant Information Evidencing Affiliation
Samir Ragheb	<a href="#">Interviewed on 9 occasions across BBC English and BBC Arabic</a>	Retired Egyptian army officer - interviewed as a 'military expert'.	Mocked Israeli civilians for seeking shelter during Hamas rocket attacks. Quote from October 7 – “A new military miracle by all criteria – strategic, operational and tactical. October is the month of victory” <sup>77</sup>
Tariq Dahlan	<a href="#">Intense Israeli strikes in south Gaza city as hostages sent medicine</a>	Local journalist in Khan Younis	Evidence of Hamas support from Facebook post on 7 October 2023.
			
Rawan Qudaih	<a href="#">At least half of Gaza's buildings damaged or</a>	Gazan civilian	Post of celebration on 27 January 2023 following the deadly terrorist attack in Jerusalem. It is part of a larger piece arguing that patience over strategy and

<sup>77</sup> ‘BBC defends interviewing retired general who called Oct 7 attacks ‘month of victory’’, *The Daily Telegraph*, 8 June 2024. <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2024/06/08/bbc-arabic-gaza-anti-semitism-hamas-bias-samir-ragheb/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

	<p><a href="#">destroyed, new analysis shows</a></p>		<p>bearing hardships is the way to victory, success and happiness.</p>
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<p>Ghassan Abu Sita</p>	<p><a href="#">London doctor in Gaza says hospital ceiling fell in after blast.</a></p>	<p>UK based medical professional</p>	<p>In reference to the mastermind behind the murder of father-of-six Rabbi Raziel Shevach in a drive-by shooting near Nablus: "The martyrdom of the resistance member Ahmed Nasr Jarrar, the hero of the Nablus operation, at the hands of the Zionist occupation army..."<sup>78</sup> Posted 'likes' for terrorist attack on 27 January 2023 after 7 Israelis were murdered in Jerusalem.</p>
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<sup>78</sup> "Vehicle for Jew hatred': Jewish doctor heckled at British Medical Association conference', *The Jerusalem Post*, 25 June 2024.  
<https://www.jpost.com/diaspora/antisemitism/article-807720>, last accessed 29 August 2024



Fatma Aljaja

[Parents and siblings of UK woman killed in Gaza attack'](#)

UK resident with family in Gaza

Open celebrations of October 7 2023. Genocidal message: "Verily...we have a homeland and you have a grave"



### iii. Analysis by our research team

Our team of researchers conducted an analysis of 100 BBC interviewees.<sup>79</sup>

15 individuals were found to have exhibited one or more of the following (see Appendix 11 for full data findings).

1. Social media posts that celebrated 7 October;
2. Social media posts that glorified/praised Hamas;
3. Social media posts carrying strong anti-Israel sentiment.

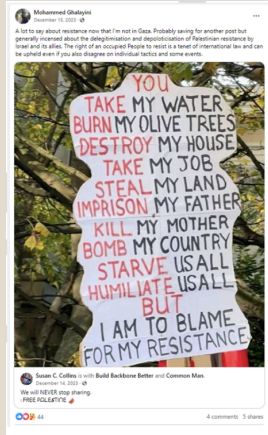
The following is a representative sample of findings:

Name of BBC interviewee	Article	Information gathered	Relevant Information Evidencing Affiliation
Dana Abuqamar	<a href="#">Manchester student says 15 relatives have died in Gaza</a>	President of the student group Manchester Friends of Palestine	A Palestinian activist, her visa was revoked after stating she was "full of joy" about the Hamas attack on October 7. <sup>80</sup>
Mohammed Ghalayin	<a href="#">Rafah border crossing between Gaza and Egypt fails to open for foreigners</a>	British scientist, family in Gaza	"Israel is a master of creating facts on the ground and is implementing its cynical plan of ethnic cleansing and genocide in plain sight..." <sup>81</sup>

<sup>79</sup> Our research team is composed of lawyers from a range of backgrounds that invested time over a period of months to appropriately analyse BBC interviewees on a broader scale.

<sup>80</sup> 'Manchester student says 15 relatives have died in Gaza', *BBC News*, 15 October 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-england-manchester-67116514>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>81</sup> "My Heart is Still in Gaza", *Democracy Now Productions*, 5 January 2024. [https://www.democracynow.org/2024/1/5/my\\_heart\\_is\\_still\\_in\\_gaza](https://www.democracynow.org/2024/1/5/my_heart_is_still_in_gaza), last accessed 29 August 2024.



<p>Iman Kishawi</p>	<p><a href="#">I wake up and check if my family in Gaza is still alive,' says Palestinian American</a></p>	<p>Palestinian living in the US</p>	<p>Facebook page comparison the IDF to ISIS in December 2023</p>
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<p>Mo El-Deeb</p>	<p><a href="#">British couple trapped in Gaza with</a></p>	<p>UK resident with family in Gaza</p>	<p>Blunt post against Israel (in the name of the freedom of speech)</p>
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[no UK help,  
says son](#)



#### iv. Concluding remarks

In total, from the Arabic Interviewee List, we identified the following with Reportable Affiliations:

- |  |    |
|--|----|
| 1. Intelligence Analyst, Dr Khaled Hassan -  | 45 |
| 2. Investigative Journalist, David Collier - | 11 |
| 3. Our own research team -                   | 15 |
| Total (after deducting 3 duplicates)         | 68 |

68 out of 253 = 27%

If one extrapolates 27% across the entire list of 487, then the number of unreported Reportable Affiliations could be c. 131 people, just amongst Arabic speakers. We think it likely that many other interviewees across BBC English could be added to this list.

The BBC has failed to draw audiences attention to these interviewees' Reportable Affiliations.



Given our present findings, and in line with its BBC Guidelines, we find that the BBC has materially breached the following binding principles:

***Accuracy Principle 15*** – Material supplied by third parties, including news providers, must be treated by the BBC with appropriate caution, taking account of the reputation of the source.

***Accuracy Principle 19*** – the BBC should normally identify on-air and online sources of information and significant contributors and provide their credentials, so that its audiences can judge their status.

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***Impartiality Principle 27*** – Appropriate information about the affiliations, funding and particular viewpoints of contributors from other organisations, should be made available to the audience, when relevant to the context.

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## 8. OMISSIONS

The BBC Guidelines promise that “no significant strand of thought is under-represented or omitted,” and that “We must be inclusive, considering the broad perspective and ensuring that the existence of a range of views is appropriately reflected.”<sup>82</sup>

We have found numerous breaches of this principle, manifested in partial or almost complete omission of elements of the Israel-Hamas War which need to be explained for the audience to understand the story.

As we have said above, we accept a high level of editorial discretion to decide what to report and how to report it. But this discretion is subject to the overriding obligation to comply with the BBC Guidelines. BBC editors may set the parameters for what they consider to be the due weight to be afforded to particular strands of argument. However, wherever this discretion is exercised, it should not be at the cost of failing to give due weight to the wider context and differing viewpoints. In particular, no significant strand of thought should be under-represented or omitted.

The BBC Guidelines restrict its editorial discretion, and set goals which the BBC considers “go beyond” the standards set by the Ofcom Broadcast Code.

“The Guidelines reflect the Ofcom Code but go beyond it in some respects.”<sup>83</sup>

The key word searches used for this part of the Report and a detailed explanation of our research methodology can be found in Schedule 7. The full search results can be found in Appendix 7.

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<sup>82</sup> BBC Guidelines, s. 1.2.

<sup>83</sup> Complaints Framework & Procedures, BBC, June 2020. Available at [https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/sites/default/files/2020-06/BBC\\_Complaints\\_Framework.pdf](https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/sites/default/files/2020-06/BBC_Complaints_Framework.pdf).

## Omission 1 – Failure to put due weight on the existence and content of the Hamas Charter

### Hamas' 1988 Charter

Hamas' original Charter emphasises four key themes:<sup>84</sup>

1. The 'obliterat[ion]' of Israel and establishment of an Islamic theocracy in Palestine.<sup>85</sup>
2. A 'duty' of unrestrained 'jihad' as being necessary to achieve this.<sup>86</sup>
3. Negotiated 'peaceful' resolutions of Jewish and Palestinian claims to the land being unacceptable.<sup>87</sup>
4. Historical anti-Semitic claims about Jews 'taking control of the world' that reinforce their goals.<sup>88</sup>

### The Revised 2017 Charter

In 2017 a Revised Charter was released by Hamas, without formally revoking the 1988 version.<sup>89</sup> With 42 paragraphs outlining the fundamentals of the Arab-Israeli conflict, some analysts suggest that the refusal to revoke the 1988 Charter might have been motivated by seeking to retain members, who otherwise may have joined rival Islamist factions.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>84</sup> 'Understanding Hamas's Genocidal Ideology', *The Atlantic*, 10 October 2023.

<https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2023/10/hamas-covenant-israel-attack-war-genocide/675602/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>85</sup> Hamas Charter 1988 Preamble; Article 11. Available at [https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th\\_century/hamas.asp](https://avalon.law.yale.edu/20th_century/hamas.asp).

<sup>86</sup> Hamas Charter 1988 Article 15.

<sup>87</sup> Hamas Charter 1988 Article 13.

<sup>88</sup> Hamas Charter 1988 Article 22 which also claims that the Jews 'with their money, they took control of the world media' and 'formed the League of Nations through which they could rule the world,' in addition to being responsible for 'the French Revolution, the Communist revolution and most of the revolutions we heard and hear about' as well as World War I and II.

<sup>89</sup> Brenner, Bjorn (2021). *Gaza Under Hamas: From Islamic Democracy to Islamist Governance*, p. 205-207.

<sup>90</sup> Seurat, Leila (2022). *The foreign policy of Hamas: ideology, decision making and political supremacy*. I.B. Tauris. p. 62.

The 2017 Charter describes the state of Israel, created with the help of Western nations, as 'entirely illegal'.<sup>91</sup> It rejects the Oslo accords,<sup>92</sup> asserting that 'jihad for the liberation of Palestine' remains 'a legitimate right, a duty and an honour',<sup>93</sup> adding 'armed resistance...is regarded as the strategic choice for protecting the principles and rights of the Palestinian people'.<sup>94</sup> It uses the phrase 'from the river to sea' which arguably suggests violent destruction of all of Israel.<sup>95</sup>

Hamas' conduct since it seized control of Gaza in 2007, and most particularly on 7 October 2023, is consistent with adherence to the literal words of the Hamas Charters.

The Hamas Charters expressly threaten violence in support of both a political, religious and ideological cause. They state that Islamic convictions drive an annihilatory war. Quoting Muslim Brotherhood founder Hassan al-Banna, the 1988 Charter declares 'Israel will exist and will continue to exist until Islam will obliterate it'. A translation into English of the Charters can be found in Schedule 8.

The existence of and adherence to the Charters is a significant strand of thought which is necessary to understanding the aims and actions of Hamas, and the subsequent response by Israel to Hamas. They explain why Hamas carried out the attack of October 7th and their repeated promises to do so again. In reference to the immediate aftermath, Ismail Haniyah, Hamas leader, announced:

*"Today, the enemy has had a political, military, intelligence, security and moral defeat inflicted upon it, and we shall crown it, with the grace of God".<sup>96</sup>*

In reference to 'liberating land', he said:

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<sup>91</sup> Hamas Charter 2017, Article 18. See <https://irp.fas.org/world/para/docs/hamas-2017.pdf>

<sup>92</sup> Hamas Charter 2017, Article 21.

<sup>93</sup> Hamas Charter 2017, Article 23.

<sup>94</sup> Hamas Charter 2017, Article 25.

<sup>95</sup> Hamas Charter 2017, Article 20.

<sup>96</sup> 'Haniyah outlines context and objectives of Hamas Operation Al-Aqsa Flood', MEMO, 9 October 2023. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231009-haniyah-outlines-context-and-objectives-of-hamas-operation-al-aqsa-flood/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

*“This is the goal that is worthy of this battle, worthy of this heroism, worthy of this courage. Al-Qassam Brigades made the enemy lose its balance in just a few minutes, with this grand and blessed incursion.”<sup>97</sup>*

Another senior Hamas official, Ghazi Hamad, said in an interview with a Lebanese news channel that the attack against Israel was just the beginning, vowing to launch “a second, a third, a fourth” attack until the country is “annihilated”. Referring to the existence of Israel, he said it has “no place on our land. We must remove the country because it constitutes a security, military and political catastrophe.”<sup>98</sup>

The Charters are vital in understanding Israel’s claim that it has to destroy Hamas if it is ever to have a peaceful co-existence with Gaza.

However, the BBC barely mentions the existence of, let alone the content of, the Hamas Charters. Our search identified 11 references to the Charters across the Reporting Timeframe, which can be found in Schedule 8. Of these, only three are editorial mentions, with minimal emphasis on the content. We set out some of these references below:

Origin	Source	Quote
<a href="#"> Hamas attack shocks Israel, but what comes next? </a> 07.10.2023	Yolande Knell, BBC Reporter	<i>“With this latest operation, Hamas seems keen to burnish its credentials once again as a militant organisation. Its charter remains committed to the destruction of Israel.”</i>
Newsnight 11.10.2023	Tzipi Hotovely, Israeli Ambassador to the UK	<i>“Well, it's definitely clear that there is no other alternative than fighting back if your enemy wants basically to make sure that no Jew will live in the land of Israel, and this is the Hamas charter.”</i>

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.

<sup>98</sup> MEMRI TV Clip #10592, Middle East Media Research Institute, 24 October 2023. <https://www.memri.org/tv/hamas-official-ghazi-hamad-we-will-repeat-october-seven-until-israel-annihilated-victims-everything-we-do-justified>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<p><b>BBC Breakfast</b> 13.10.2024</p>	<p>Grant Shapps, UK Defence Secretary</p>	<p><i>“This is, these are terrorists who, as I mentioned before, don't just want to eradicate Israel, They want to eradicate all Jews, that is in their plan, that's in their charter.”</i></p>
<p><b>Newsnight</b> 13.10.2023</p>	<p>Hadley Freeman, Sunday Times Columnist</p>	<p><i>“In Israel, Hamas is a terrorist organisation. Its founding charter is about Jewish genocide, so of course then Israel will respond in however way it responds.”</i></p>
<p><a href="#"><u>The Conflict x the Global News Podcast</u></a> 13.10.2023</p>	<p>Lyse Doucet, BBC Presenter</p>	<p><i>“Israelis get really worried and angry that Hamas has not changed its charter, its founding charter, which calls for the destruction of the state of Israel.”</i></p>

While we have identified several references to the fact that the Hamas Charters seek to destroy the state of Israel, those references are almost all made by interviewees, and the references are incidental.

We would expect the BBC to devote material time to exploring the Hamas Charters, explaining their importance, challenging pro-Hamas interviewees as to their meaning, and explaining their relationship with Israel’s stated war goal of the removal of Hamas from power. The Charters explain to some degree why Hamas has waged war on Israel from the moment it took control of Gaza and why it is likely only to continue to do so if it remains in power after the war.

If these elements of the motivation of Hamas and the response of Israel to that motivation are not properly explained, and given due weight and prominence, it is hard to see how the audience can understand the Israel-Hamas War. Yet the BBC has devoted no time to explaining these things in any depth, but made merely incidental passing references to the Charters.

In addition to the failure by the BBC to refer to the Hamas Charters, the BBC also fails adequately to report on the ‘operational plans’ found on the bodies of Hamas terrorists from 7 October, and on their future plans which are all consistent with their Charters.

These Hamas operational plans revealed the levels of coordination and planning required to target children and take hostages<sup>99</sup> and included the following instructions:

In reference to 'The Mission' they are instructed to

*"...take control of the Kibbutz, inflicting as many human losses as possible, using explosives and capturing hostages."*<sup>100</sup>

In reference to the 'Mission Execution'

*"...They must shoot down as many victims as possible, take hostages and take some of them to the Gaza Strip using various cars."*<sup>101</sup>

The BBC also failed to report on Hezbollah leader Nasrallah congratulating Hamas on their 'victory'. Nasrallah gave a speech in which he honoured the fighters who were killed. He referred to 7 October as a "big event" and said that Hezbollah also entered the war the day after the Hamas attack happened, making assurances that "this will not be the end. This will not be sufficient."<sup>102</sup>

## Omission 2 – Failure to Identify Hamas as a dictatorship

The BBC states in its Guidelines that:

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<sup>99</sup> 'Top secret' Hamas documents show that terrorists intentionally targeted elementary schools and a youth center', *NBC News*, 14 October 2023.

<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/investigations/top-secret-hamas-documents-show-terrorists-intentionally-targeted-elem-rcna120310>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>100</sup> 'I can't erase all the blood from my mind', *Human Rights Watch*, 17 July 2024.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2024/07/17/i-cant-erase-all-blood-my-mind/palestinian-armed-groups-october-7-assault-israel>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>101</sup> 'Israel shows Hamas bodycam footage to journalists', *BBC*, 23 October 2023.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67198270>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>102</sup> 'Hezbollah's Hassan Nasrallah speech on Israel-Gaza War: Key Takeaways', *Al Jazeera*, 3 November 2023.

<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/11/3/hezbollahs-hassan-nasrallah-speech-on-israel-hamas-war-key-takeaways>, last accessed 29 August 2024.



“...our editorial standards do not require absolute neutrality on every issue or detachment from fundamental democratic principles.”<sup>103</sup>

Hamas is an authoritarian, dictatorial organisation, recognised by the British Government and others as a terrorist organisation. Evidence from credible sources indicates that Hamas operates as a brutal dictatorship in the Gaza Strip.

Human Rights Watch describes how Hamas violently suppressed protests, arbitrarily arrested demonstrators, journalists, and human rights activists, and routinely uses torture and intimidation to silence critics.<sup>104</sup>

Amnesty International accuses Hamas of serious human rights abuses, including torture and extrajudicial killings during the 2014 conflict with Israel, highlighting public executions and intimidation tactics against political opponents.<sup>105</sup>

Deutsche Welle reports on torture and public executions by Hamas aimed at intimidating opposition, detailing the environment of fear and repression in Gaza.<sup>106</sup>

Reuters covers the arrest and violent dispersal of demonstrators protesting power cuts in Gaza, demonstrating Hamas' intolerance for dissent and use of force to maintain control.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>103</sup> BBC Guidelines, s. 1.2.

<sup>104</sup> ‘Another Brutal Crackdown by Hamas in Gaza’, *Human Rights Watch*, 20 March 2019. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2019/03/20/another-brutal-crackdown-hamas-gaza>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>105</sup> ‘Gaza: Palestinians tortured, summarily killed by Hamas forces during 2014 conflict’, *Amnesty International*, 27 May 2015. <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2015/05/gaza-palestinians-tortured-summarily-killed-by-hamas-forces-during-2014-conflict/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>106</sup> ‘Hamas, torture and jihad’, *Deutsche Welle*, 27 May 2015. <https://www.dw.com/en/amnesty-accuses-hamas-of-torture-and-executions/a-18479800>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>107</sup> Clip #164157, *Reuters Screenocean*, 27 January 2015. <https://reuters.screenocean.com/record/164157>, last accessed 31 August 2024.

The Israeli Government is elected by all adult Israeli citizens.<sup>108</sup> Israel has a free press, a strong independent judiciary and all the other features of an open liberal society.

The BBC Guidelines encourage the BBC to promote democratic values. The BBC should consistently ensure that the audience is aware that the Israel-Hamas War is being fought between a democratic and multicultural State on the one hand and an Islamist dictatorship on the other.

In fact, we find that the BBC fails to draw these distinctions, and if anything tends to question the credibility of the Israeli government and its institutions more readily than those of Hamas.<sup>109</sup>

In particular, the BBC almost entirely fails to point out that Hamas runs Gaza as a dictatorship. A search of our Dataset of the below terms produced the following results:

Within 15 words of one of the following:	Hamas*	Gaza*
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Dictator*</li> <li>● Autocr*</li> <li>● Authoritarian*</li> <li>● Despot*</li> <li>● Absolute rule*</li> <li>● Tyrann*</li> <li>● Oppress*</li> <li>● Totalitarian*</li> </ul>	2	1

Of these references, two are made by outsiders, and only one by a BBC journalist, Jeremy Bowen, who describes Hamas as having “*become more authoritarian*”. This is extremely mild in light of the actual conduct of Hamas both towards Gazans and Israelis.

As a single comment from BBC journalists, across more than 8 million words, it seems wholly inadequate to properly explain who or what Hamas is.

<sup>108</sup> Following the Oslo Accords, Palestinians who are not Israeli citizens have the right to elect a government in the Palestinian Territories within the West Bank. In Gaza, following Israel’s disengagement in 2005, Gazans have had the right to elect their own government. In both territories, the right to vote has effectively been suppressed due to internal factors.

<sup>109</sup> See s.12 of this Report on Trends for evidence of this fact.

The three relevant references are:

*"You know, I think the Palestinian people deserve better than Hamas. They cannot talk about it because it's a totalitarian regime. But I think that there are better options for us and that all of us that believe that the region should have to support the life of its inhabitants on both sides should look for governments that bring that."*<sup>110</sup>

*Scottish Tory leader Douglas Ross said his party "stands with Israel", but also with civilians in Gaza, saying: "The Palestinian people are not Hamas. They are civilians, they are innocent, they are simply caught in a terrible situation. And they are also suffering from the tyranny, exploitation and oppression of Hamas terrorists."*<sup>111</sup>

*"To start with, some people thought Hamas were, Palestinians, I mean, were quite a breath of fresh air, but things have changed, became more authoritarian and they haven't been so popular in Gaza and also here in the West Bank."*<sup>112</sup>

### Omission 3 – Failure to address levels of journalistic freedom in Gaza

The BBC states in its War Terror and Emergencies Principle 32 that:

*"The BBC should make it clear if its reports are censored or monitored or if it is withholding information under duress, and explain wherever possible, the conditions under which it is operating."*

Palestinian and foreign journalists operating in the Gaza Strip face heavy journalistic repression from Hamas' Internal Security Forces (ISF).<sup>113</sup> Freedom House scores the

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<sup>110</sup> Quote from Sharon Lipschitz, daughter of hostages. 'BBC Radio Today', BBC, 15 January 2024.

<sup>111</sup> 'Scottish Labour leader Sarwar says Israel 'breaking international law' in Gaza', BBC News, 24 October 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-scotland-67210216>, last accessed on 29 August 2024.

<sup>112</sup> Jeremy Bowen in 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Israel Hostage Crisis', BBC [Podcast], 13 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0gl7z5v>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>113</sup> 'Internal Security Force (ISF) - Hamas', European Council for Foreign Relations. [https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping\\_palestinian\\_politics/internal\\_security\\_force/](https://ecfr.eu/special/mapping_palestinian_politics/internal_security_force/), last accessed 29 August 2024.

territory zero points for media freedom,<sup>114</sup> while a 2018 Report from Human Rights Watch lays out the pattern of journalist arrests and interrogations in Gaza, of which beatings and torture are common features.<sup>115</sup>

During previous conflicts, Hamas published an instructional video detailing how to report and discuss events to external audiences, stating:

*“...anyone killed or martyred is to be called a civilian from Gaza or Palestine, before we talk about his status in jihad or his military rank. Don't forget to always add 'innocent civilian' or 'innocent citizen' in your description of those killed in Israeli attacks on Gaza...”*<sup>116</sup>

In August 2022, the ISF issued an order specifically prohibiting any journalist in Gaza from reporting on multiple recent incidents where civilians had been killed by misfired Hamas rockets.<sup>117</sup>

Pal Jorgensen, a Norwegian reporter, said in 2014 that foreign journalists had been “kicked out of Gaza because Hamas does not like what they have written or said”.<sup>118</sup> According to Jorgensen’s account, Hamas ‘severely’ threatens foreign journalists with expulsion and ‘serious trouble’ if they record that Hamas fires rockets.<sup>119</sup>

The Foreign Press Association (FPA) is aware that Hamas has a ‘vetting procedure’, with a comprehensive blacklist of specific journalists, including Radjaa Abu Dagga.<sup>120</sup> Dagga was “forcibly blocked from leaving Gaza and detained and interrogated by members of

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<sup>114</sup> ‘Freedom in the World Report 2023’, *Freedom House*, March 2023.

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/gaza-strip/freedom-world/2023>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

Gaza scored 0/4 points for ‘free and independent media’, and 11/100 points overall.

<sup>115</sup> ‘Arbitrary arrest and torture under the Palestinian Authority and Hamas’, *Human Rights Watch*, 23 October 2018.

<https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/10/23/two-authorities-one-way-zero-dissent/arbitrary-arrest-and-torture-under/>, last accessed 29 August 2024..

<sup>116</sup> ‘Special Dispatch No. 5799’, *Middle East Media Research Institute*, 17 July 2014.

[https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-interior-ministry-social-media-activists-always-call-dead-innocent-civilians-dont-post#\\_ednref2](https://www.memri.org/reports/hamas-interior-ministry-social-media-activists-always-call-dead-innocent-civilians-dont-post#_ednref2), last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>117</sup> ‘Freedom in the World Report 2023’, *Freedom House*, March 2023.

<https://freedomhouse.org/country/gaza-strip/freedom-world/2023>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>118</sup> ‘Journaliser blir utvist fra Gaza fordi Hamas ikke liker det de gjør’, *TV 2 Nyheter (Norway)*, 10 August 2014. <https://tv2.com/2014/08/10/nyheter/5887617>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>120</sup> Statement by the Foreign Press Association, 3 November 2014.

<https://foreignpressassociation.online/statements-2014/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

Hamas's al-Qassam Brigade" after writing about the Hamas operation from inside civilian bases.<sup>121</sup> He wrote an account about his treatment for French publication Liberation; an article later unpublished at his own request.

Other reporters, including Wall Street Journal's Nick Casey and the Financial Times' John Reed, have also come under threat from Hamas after publishing reports on Hamas firing rockets from civilian areas.<sup>122</sup>

Human Rights Watch also reports that Hamas arrested a Gaza journalist in 2016 for alleging corruption in the "Health Ministry."<sup>123</sup>

Given that journalistic output in Gaza is restricted, we would expect this to be explained when reporting from Gaza.

We therefore searched our Dataset across the reporting timeframe for any mention of this. We used the following searches:

- 1.Freedom\* within 20 words of gaza\* and press\* or reporter\* or journalis\* or media\*
- 2.Control\* within 20 words of gaza\* and media\* or reporter\* or journal\* or press\*
- 3.Censor\* within 20 words of gaza\* and press\* or reporter\* or journal\* or media\*
- 4.Freedom within 20 words of press\* or reporter\* or journalis\* or media\*
- 5.Control\* within 10 words of media\* or reporter\* or journal\* or press\*
- 6.Censor\* within 20 words of press\* or reporter\* or journal\* or media\*

We did not identify any instances of the BBC reporting on any form of restriction or media control by Hamas in Gaza.

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<sup>121</sup> 'Trapped in Gaza: How Hamas punishes reporters for the truth', *The Australian*, 31 July 2014. <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/opinion/trapped-in-gaza-how-hamas-punishes-reporters-for-the-truth/news-story/410ed7246752eb3fbe251557c43647d4>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>122</sup> 'Hamas threatening journalists who expose abuse of civilians', *Times of Israel*, 28 July 2014. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/hamas-threatening-journalists-in-gaza-who-expose-abuse-of-civilians/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>123</sup> 'Palestine: Crackdown on journalists, activists', *Human Rights Watch*, 30 August 2016. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/08/30/palestine-crackdown-journalists-activists>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

We did, however, find several allegations by BBC journalists that Israel is seeking to restrict or control the media output in Gaza:

Jeremy Bowen alleged that Israel's military campaign in Gaza is "opaque" due to "restrictions on reporting and lack of access". He does not, however, point out what those restrictions on reporting are.<sup>124</sup>

*"I don't think we'll get in until there's a ceasefire.... I think it's because there's stuff going on there they don't want us to see. I don't think they're worried about whether we're safe or not." .... " [the Israelis are] fighting on all fronts and controlling the media is one of them." (Jeremy Bowen responding to Nick Robinson's suggestion that "the Israelis are so desperate to stop you [Jeremy Bowen] getting in.")<sup>125</sup>*

This appears to be an expression by Bowen of a personal opinion, in breach of Impartiality Principle 26,<sup>126</sup> surmising that Israel is committing unlawful acts, and using control of the media to hide its conduct. No evidence in support is provided.

The BBC elsewhere has acknowledged that Israel does not seek to control the media. The BBC's Middle East bureau chief, Joe Floto said that there is "no censorship", save for "certain things that we can't show" ... "showing weapon systems" ... "locating VIP visits in an active area" .... "very common" [during a] "state of war".<sup>127</sup> Meanwhile, Freedom House scores Israel highly for media freedom, describing the state of the media sector as "vibrant and free to criticise", with "robust legal protections for journalists".<sup>128</sup> One point is deducted for the perceived political and financial pressure being placed on domestic media outlets by the Netanyahu government.

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<sup>124</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Israel's Military Strategy' BBC [Podcast], 1 November 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gg8dh7>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>125</sup> 'BBC Radio Today', BBC, 13 December 2023.

<sup>126</sup> "BBC presenters, reporters and correspondents may not express personal views on matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or on 'controversial subjects' in any other area publicly, including in any BBC-branded output or on personal blogs and social media."

<sup>127</sup> 'Gaza Hospital: Chaos, claim and counter claim' [Podcast], BBC, 18 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gmcxf3>.

<sup>128</sup> 'Freedom in the World Report 2023', Freedom House, March 2023. <https://freedomhouse.org/country/israel/freedom-world/2023>, last accessed 29 August 2024. Israel scored 3/4 points for 'free and independent media', and 77/100 points overall.

## Conclusion - Journalistic Freedom

The BBC is choosing to report the Israel-Hamas War principally as a story of Palestinian civilian deaths caused by Israel. When it relies on Gaza-based reporters for its information, it ought to be aware that Hamas exercises control over the flow of information and that the audience must be made aware of this. It is barely mentioned.

## Omission 4 – Failure to use the word ‘terrorist’ across BBC reporting Use of the word terrorist to describe Hamas

### i. Hamas’ 1988 Charter

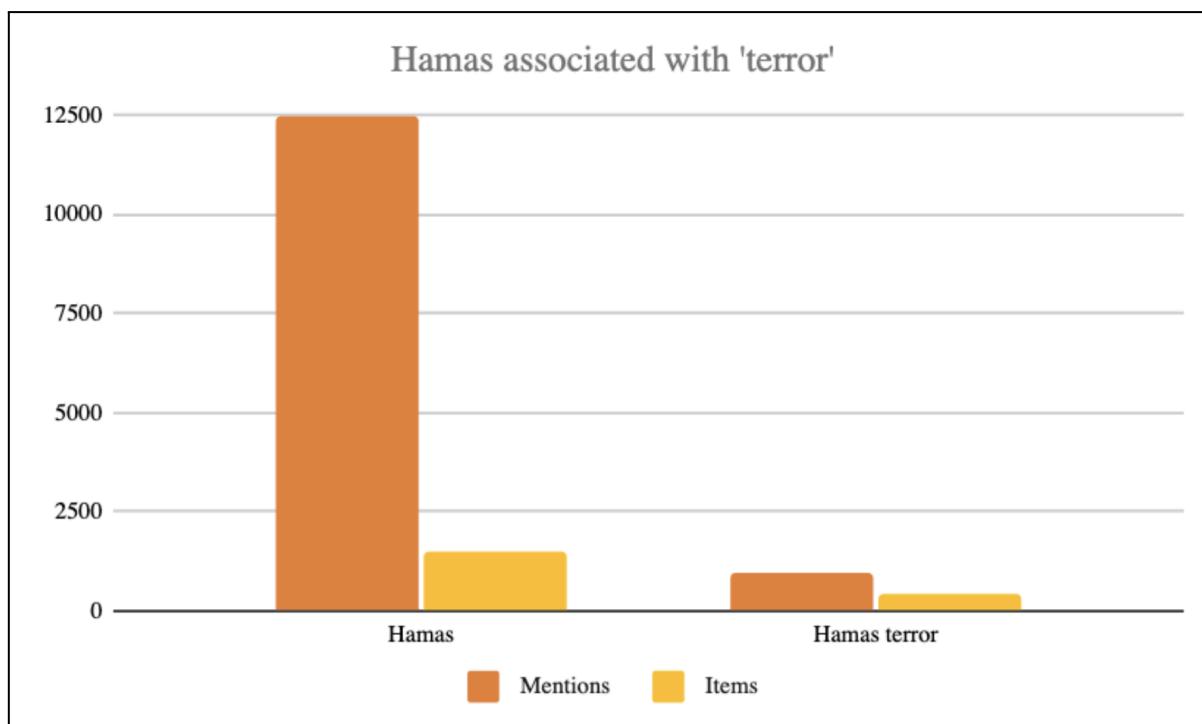
The BBC has repeatedly failed to describe Hamas as a terrorist organisation or Hamas’ adherents as terrorists. We see this failure as one of inaccuracy,<sup>129</sup> but it also amounts to an omission, as outlined here.

We have conducted a number of keyword searches of the full English Language segment of the Dataset across our Reporting Timeframe to investigate the extent to which the BBC associates Hamas with terror. We consider:

- i) The total number of times the relevant words are mentioned;
- ii) The total number of BBC items, i.e. articles, podcasts, Radio or TV programmes, that the relevant words are mentioned in.

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<sup>129</sup> See s. 9 of this Report on Accuracy.



As seen in the graph above, the word Hamas appears 12,459 times, across 1,500 BBC items.

- Hamas was associated with the word “terror” 963 times out of the 12,459 mentions (7.7%).
- Hamas was associated with the word “terror” in 444 BBC items out of the 1,500 relevant items (29.6%).

By comparison, the BBC associates the “West Bank” with being “occupied” at a higher rate than it associates Hamas with being a terror organisation.

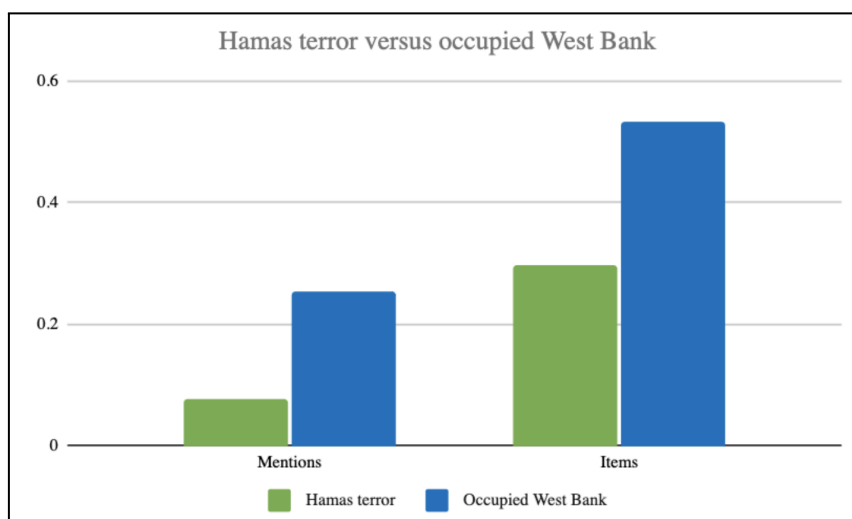
We conducted a parallel search to the one above, by searching for mentions of the West Bank within 10 words of occup\*. This showed the following:

- In the reporting timeframe, the West Bank was mentioned 962 times, across 325 BBC items.



- The West Bank was associated with the word “occupy”, “occupies” or “occupation” 244 times out of the 962 mentions (25.4%).
- The West Bank was associated with the word “occupy”, “occupies” or “occupation” in 173 BBC items out of the 325 relevant items (53.2%).

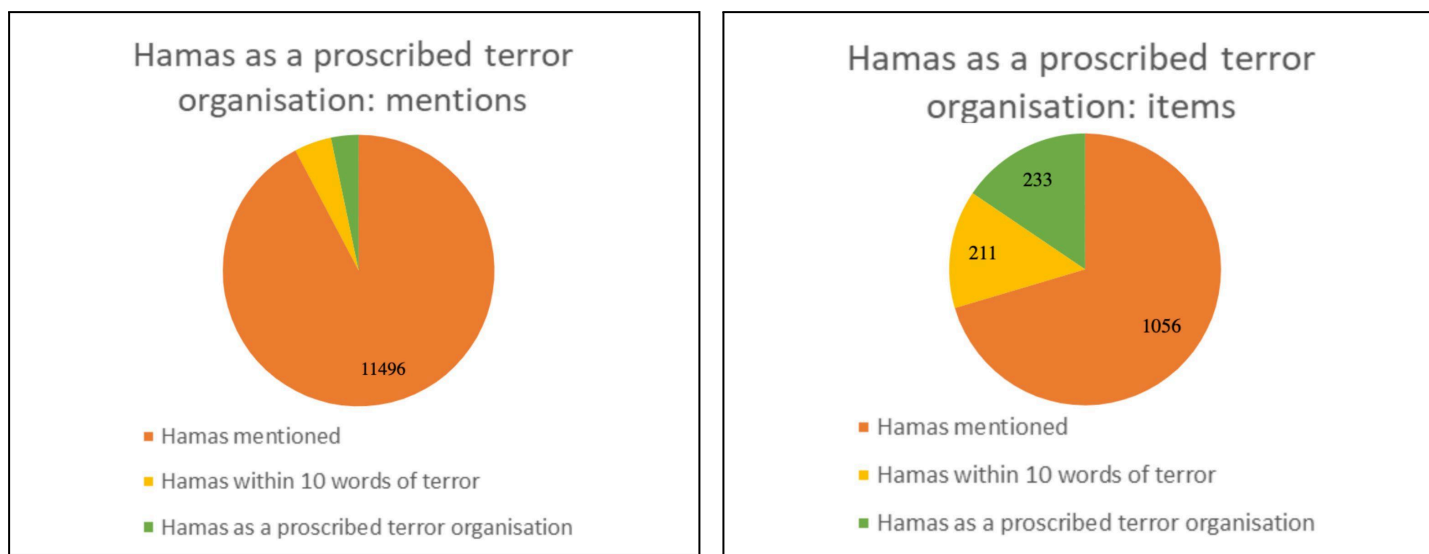
The contrasting rates are shown in the graph below:



Additionally, when the BBC failed to use the word “occupied” to describe Bethlehem, it posted an apology and a correction.<sup>130</sup>

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<sup>130</sup> See section 9(v) on Accuracy.



ii. Hammas as a proscribed terror organisation

In late October 2023, the BBC said it would describe Hamas “where possible” as a “proscribed terrorist organisation”.<sup>131</sup>

The BBC “took care to say who was describing someone as a terrorist. BBC reports regularly refer to Hamas as being a proscribed terrorist organisation by the UK government”.<sup>132</sup>

“Our use of language is also a hotly-debated topic, and one which is of great importance to our audiences. The BBC uses the word ‘terrorist’ with attribution. When we mention Hamas, we make it clear, where possible, that they are a proscribed terrorist organisation by the UK government and others. We are also using the phrases ‘terror attack’ and ‘act of terror’ with attribution”.<sup>133</sup> Deborah Turness, 26 October 2023

<sup>131</sup> ‘How the BBC is covering Israel-Gaza’, BBC Media Centre, 25 October 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/articles/2023/how-bbc-is-covering-israel-gaza>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>132</sup> ‘BBC chief grilled by Conservative MPs over Israel-Gaza conflict’, BBC News, 26 October 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-politics-67219556>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

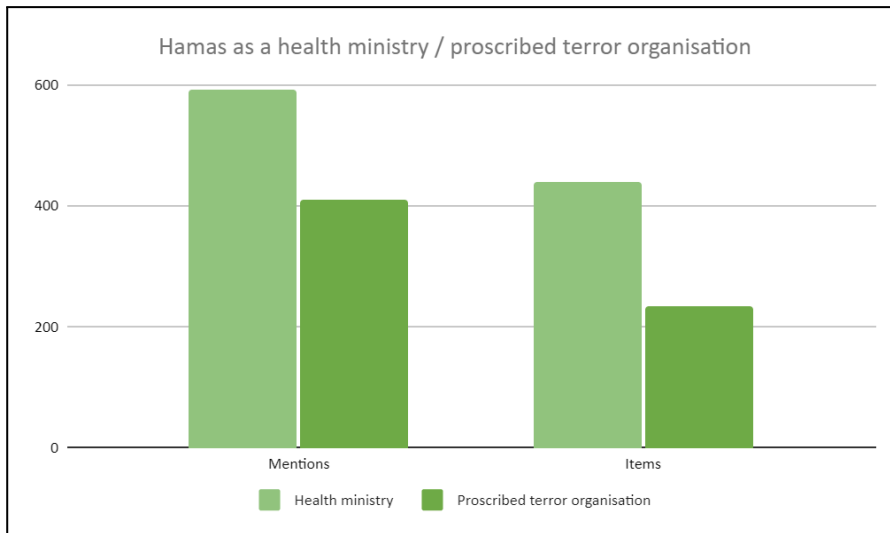
<sup>133</sup> ‘How the BBC is covering Israel-Gaza’, BBC Media Centre, 25 October 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/articles/2023/how-bbc-is-covering-israel-gaza>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

However, we identified Hamas being described as a ‘proscribed’, ‘designated’ or ‘recognised’ terrorist organisation only 409 out of 12,459 times (3.2%) and in 233 out of 1,500 items (15.5%).

The BBC’s usage of ‘proscribed’, ‘designated’ or ‘recognised’ terrorist organisation to describe Hamas declined rapidly over time. By the end of December 2023, less than two months after stating it would employ this terminology “where possible”, use of the term had dwindled, so that it was rarely used.



**iii. Hamas as a ‘health ministry’**



The BBC frequently refers to the Hamas 'run' or 'controlled' Gaza Health Ministry. We have found:

- a) 593 mentions of Hamas within 10 words of 'health' and 'ministry' (in other words, 4.8% of all mentions of Hamas); and
- b) 440 of the BBC items mention Hamas within 10 words of 'health' and 'ministry' (in other words, 29.3% of all items mentioning Hamas).

Thus, Hamas is more likely to be referred to in connection with a Health Ministry than as a 'proscribed terrorist organisation'.

## Omission 5 – Failure adequately to represent War Crimes

### i. Terminology

In this section we refer to 'War Crimes' as shorthand for each or any of war crimes; breaches of international law; crimes against humanity; genocide and other such violations. We recognise that there are subtle differences between those various phrases, and the complexities of proving them. However this report is concentrating on BBC output, not on arguments within the field of international law.

### ii. Introduction and Thesis

Hamas members filmed and publicised themselves committing acts which appear to constitute War Crimes during the Reporting Timeframe,<sup>134</sup> in particular:

- a. Taking of hostages;
- b. Intentionally directing attacks against a civilian population;
- c. Wilful killing or murder;
- d. Torture or inhuman treatment; and
- e. Persecution against an identifiable group on political, racial, national, ethnic, cultural or religious grounds;

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<sup>134</sup> 'Horrific Footage of Hamas Atrocities Revealed by IDF Shakes Global Media', *The Medialine*, 24 October 2023. <https://themedialine.org/top-stories/horrific-footage-of-hamas-atrocities-revealed-by-idf-shakes-global-media/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

During the Reporting Timeframe, further evidence existed of acts by Hamas which may support possible War Crimes including:

- f. Rape and sexual violence;<sup>135</sup>
- g. Utilising the presence of a civilian or other protected person to render certain points, areas or military forces immune from military operations (i.e., the use of human shields);<sup>136</sup>
- h. Enforced disappearance of persons; and
- i. Wilfully impeding relief supplies.<sup>137</sup>

At the same time, Israel stands accused of War Crimes in proceedings commenced by the Republic of South Africa in the International Court of Justice during the Reporting Timeframe, in which it is alleged that Israel is:<sup>138</sup>

- j. Engaged in the intentional killing of civilians in large numbers;
- k. Causing serious bodily and mental harm to civilians; and
- l. Inflicting conditions of life intended to bring about the destruction of a distinct national, racial and ethnic group as a group, including by:
  - i. expulsions from homes and mass displacement, alongside the large-scale destruction of homes and residential areas;
  - ii. deprivation of access to adequate food and water;
  - iii. deprivation of access to adequate medical care;

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<sup>135</sup> Press Release 24 March 2024, *United Nations Office of the Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict*. <https://www.un.org/sexualviolenceinconflict/press-release/israel-west-bank-mission/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>136</sup> For a fuller explanation of this charge, with attached evidence, see: Michael Schmitt, 'Israel – Hamas 2023 Symposium – What is and is not Human Shielding?', *Lieber Institute*, 3 November 2023, <https://lieber.westpoint.edu/what-is-and-is-not-human-shielding/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>137</sup> 'IDF releases clip of mortar attack on troops escorting UN aid convoy, blames Hamas', *Times of Israel*, 25 June 2023. [https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog\\_entry/idf-releases-clip-of-mortar-attack-on-troops-escorting-un-aid-convoy-blames-hamas/](https://www.timesofisrael.com/liveblog_entry/idf-releases-clip-of-mortar-attack-on-troops-escorting-un-aid-convoy-blames-hamas/), last accessed on 28 August 2024.

<sup>138</sup> *Application of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide in the Gaza Strip (South Africa v. Israel) [ICJ 192]*. A transcript of South Africa's submission is available at <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240111-ora-01-00-bi.pdf>.

- iv. deprivation of access to adequate shelter, clothes, hygiene and sanitation;
- v. the destruction of life; and
- vi. imposing measures intended to prevent births.<sup>139</sup>

For the purposes of this Report we assume that no party has openly admitted the commission of War Crimes, and all such allegations are denied and not yet proven. We believe that items a. – e. above appear simpler to prove, than say f. – i. Nevertheless, for the purposes of this Report we assume that the allegations of War Crimes in both directions remain prima facie on an equal footing until proven in a court of competent jurisdiction.

Taking that assumption, we would expect that BBC output should achieve balance in frequency and treatment of the allegations of War Crimes in both directions.

### iii. The Experiment

We searched the English part of the Dataset – c. 8.1m words – for ‘War Crimes’ and its various synonyms. After discarding non-relevant results, our findings were as follows:

- a.) There was a low incidence of association of Hamas with War Crimes;
- b.) By contrast there was a high incidence of association of Israel with War Crimes;
- c.) The actual use of War Crimes and its synonyms that we identified was as follows:

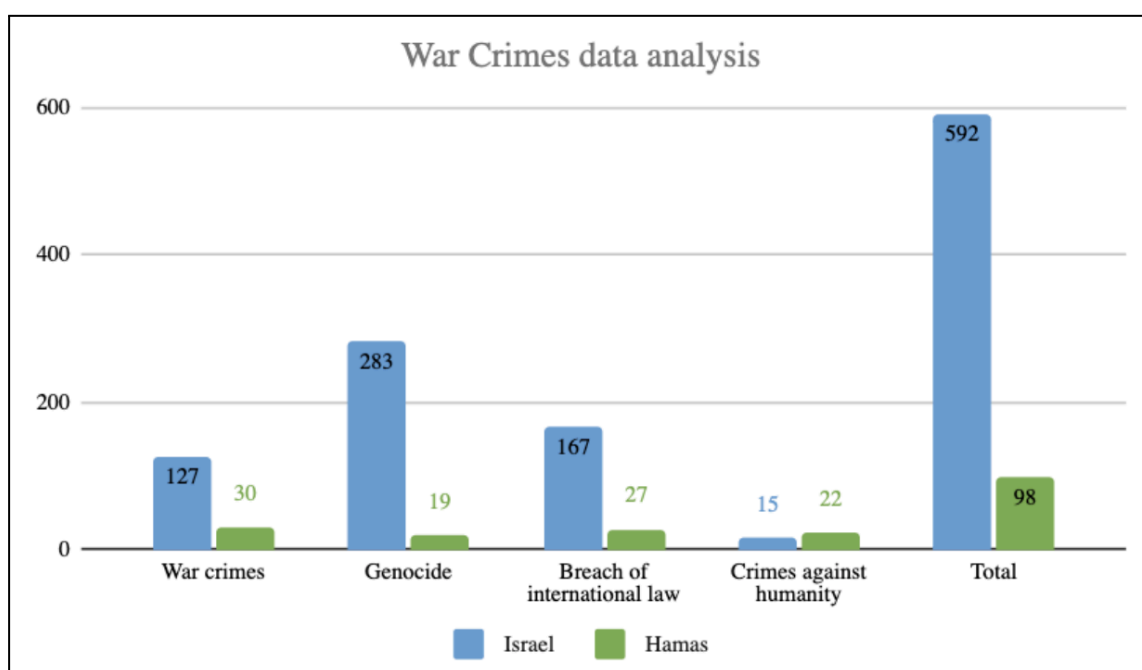
Israel

Hamas

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<sup>139</sup> *Application instituting proceedings and request for the indication of provisional measures (South Africa v. Israel)* [ICJ 192], available at <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20231228-app-01-00-en.pdf>.

War Crimes	127	30
Genocide	283	19
Breach of International law	167	27
Crimes against humanity	15	22
Total	592	98



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<sup>140</sup> During the Reporting Timeframe, the Republic of South Africa brought a claim against Israel before the International Court of Justice, alleging that Israel was committing breaches of the Genocide Convention. This fact will have affected the frequency with which the word 'genocide' would have been mentioned in connection with Israel.

#### iv. Conclusion

The preponderant mention of War Crimes in association with Israel, and the concomitant occasional reference to War Crimes in association with Hamas is hard to explain and appears to be inconsistent with treating both parties in a balanced and impartial way.

It is true that there are more Palestinian deaths than Israeli deaths, but those deaths are not obviously evidence of War Crimes.

The disparity of treatment of the allegations against Hamas and Israel by the BBC suggests lack of impartiality.

### Omission 6 – Failure to explain military threats to Israel

Israel faces what it considers an existential threat.

Since 7 October, it has been under attack from 7 separate territories: Gaza, the West Bank, Iran, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Yemen.

The Israeli Government has said that it must defeat Hamas and recover the hostages if it is to remain as a viable country that can be seen to defend its citizens<sup>141</sup>. Most Israelis agree with this.<sup>142</sup>

Whilst we accept that Hamas supporters consider Hamas' attack on 7 October and the taking of hostages to be justified, the alternative strand of thought, that Israel is fighting a just defensive war is one widely held, including by the British Government, and should not be omitted or under-represented.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>141</sup> 'Statement by PM Netanyahu', *Prime Minister's Office*, 28 October 2023, <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/event-statement281023>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>142</sup> 'Most Israelis want Hamas crushed despite Gaza casualties, UN rebuke', *Reuters*, 14 December 2023. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israelis-say-hamas-must-be-crushed-despite-gaza-casualties-un-rebuke-2023-12-13/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>143</sup> 'UK's Sunak slams ICC arrest warrant for Netanyahu', *Politico*, 21 May 2024. <https://www.politico.eu/article/uk-rishi-sunak-slams-icc-arrest-warrant-for-benjamin-netanyahu-no-moral-equivalence/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.



**i. The Experiment**

A search throughout our Dataset for references to existential threats to Israel produced 14 relevant results. They are set out in the table below:

Our search identified only one program that gives more than a passing reference to the existential threat facing Israel. BBC Breakfast on 28.10.2023 dedicates nearly 6 minutes of airtime to this topic. In this programme, Sebastian Usher talks about Lebanon and Hezbollah, and the fact that there “isn't any appetite in the Arab world amongst its governments to get actively involved in this in any kind of military terms”. This downplays the risk facing Israel.

However, the program fails to mention the threat posed to Israel by Iran, a threshold nuclear state, which has threatened to destroy Israel for decades.<sup>144</sup> The program fails to point out that Israel is surrounded by enemies, some of which threaten its very existence.

The following quotations show that various interviewees raised this issue. However, we were unable to identify any programme in which the BBC devoted significant time to explaining the arguments in relation to whether Israel does or does not face an existential threat.

Origin	Quote
Sir Richard Dalton, former consul general in Jerusalem  BBC Breakfast 08.10.2023	<i>“So far, Hezbollah has attacked 3 military positions... But it is open to them to take a decision to attack Israel using the vast arsenal of missiles which they have developed, including very accurate weapons. And that indeed would plunge Israel into an existential crisis.”</i>
Fleur Hassan-Nahoum, deputy mayor of Jerusalem	<i>“But I think it has brought the country together...dealing with what's really important, which is the external enemy posing a threat to Israel,</i>

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<sup>144</sup> ‘Iran threatens to annihilate Israel should it launch a major attack’, *Reuters*, 23 April 2024. <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/iran-threatens-annihilate-israel-should-it-launch-major-attack-2024-04-23/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

Newsnight, 09.10.2023	<i>a threat to our, the southern border and some would say even an existential threat."</i>
BBC Breakfast 10.10.2023 Ehud Barak, former Israeli Prime Minister	<i>"However painful, this event does not represent an existential threat to Israel. We are stronger. We are determined we will win this war."</i>
Republican Senator Josh Hawley <u>Shockwaves from Israel-Hamas war disrupt US politics</u> 10.10.2023	A social media post earlier today by Republican Senator Josh Hawley seemed to suggest the latter. <i>"Israel is facing existential threat,"</i> he wrote.
<u>Israel country profile</u> 13.10.2023	He [Benjamin Netanyahu] has taken a tough line towards the Palestinians, putting security concerns at the top of any talk of peace, and long warned of existential danger to Israel from Iran.
Ronen Bergman, Israeli writer for the New York Times Newsnight 19.10.2023	<i>"They believe that if something is not done, something aggressive, severe, something with an end, meaning disassembling the Hamas regime, then Israel put itself in an existential threat that others, Hezbollah for example, Iran, would be next in line."</i>
Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis <u>Israel-Gaza: Chief Rabbi Ephraim Mirvis speaks of hopes for peace</u> 27.10.2023	Rabbi Ephraim added that Hamas <i>"cannot be allowed to continue to exist, because as long as it is there it poses an existential threat to the state of Israel and a threat to Jews worldwide"</i> .
John Simpson, BBC world affairs editor BBC Breakfast 28.10.2023	<i>"The Arab world erupted in support of Hamas after its brutal incursions into southern Israel. But these are very different times from the days when the</i>

	<i>countries bordering on Israel posed a major threat to its very existence."</i>
BBC Newsreader BBC Breakfast 29.10.2023	<i>"As people protested against attacks on Gaza... the crowds were chants of from the river to the sea. Palestine will be free, seen by Israel and most Jewish communities as a threat to its existence"</i>
Yolande Knell, BBC Middle East correspondent BBC Breakfast 29.10.2023	<i>"He [Benjamin Netanyahu] casts this very much as a war for Israel's survival, for its existence, and said that Israel would be victorious in the end."</i>
Anna Foster, BBC reporter BBC Breakfast, 31.10.2023	<i>"Benjamin Netanyahu, the Israeli Prime Minister is unequivocal on this point. He is very clear that Hamas are an existential threat to Israel."</i>
Jack Lew, US ambassador to Israel  <u>Jack Lew confirmed as new US Ambassador to Israel</u> 31.10.2023	He also said he would do everything in his power to stop the Israel-Hamas War from expanding, aid innocent Palestinians trapped in Gaza, and stymie the influence of Iran, which he called <i>"a threat to regional stability and to Israel's existence"</i> .
Nathan Tek, deputy spokesperson at the US Department of State  Newsnight 09.11.2023	<i>"At the end of the day, this is an existential fight for Israel. Israel is engaged in a right to defend itself"</i>
<u>100 days since Hamas attacked Israel, triggering war in Gaza</u>  14.01.2024	One hundred days ago, the previously unthinkable happened in Israel. A state, born out of adversity and war only 75 years ago, woke up to what some have since described as a threat to its very existence.

**ii. Conclusion - Existential Threats to Israel**

The simultaneous attack from enemies in 7 locations is seen by many in Israel as posing an existential threat. We believe that is a consideration deserving proper analysis, and presentation to the BBC's audience with sufficient frequency and detail to enable the audience to understand the importance of this strand of thought and thus enable the audience to better understand the story.

## Omission 7 – Failure adequately to report on elements of the hostage ordeal

Israel's stated war aims are to destroy Hamas and to bring the hostages home. From this it will readily be seen that the hostages are at the centre of this war.<sup>145</sup>

*"The war continues and it will continue until the end, until we complete all our goals: the return of the abductees, the elimination of Hamas, and the assurance that Gaza will no longer pose a threat to Israel."*<sup>146</sup>

The hostages are mentioned extensively throughout the BBC coverage across our Reporting Timeframe. A search of the Dataset revealed 5,453 mentions of the word 'hostage' across 971 English Language items.

**i. The Experiment**

We analysed the extent of coverage of the hostages, in relation to three aspects of this story which we consider important to understanding the hostage story as a whole:

1. Breach of International law
2. Denial of access to the Red Cross
3. Trauma including sexual abuse in captivity

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<sup>145</sup> 'The Aims of the War in Gaza – and the Strategy for Achieving Them', *Tel Aviv University Institute for National Security Studies*, 26 February 2024. <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/gaza-war-targets/>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>146</sup> 'Netanyahu: War will end with return of hostages, assurance Gaza will not pose threat', *i24 News*, 17 July 2024. <https://www.i24news.tv/en/news/israel-at-war/1705506974-netanyahu-the-war-will-end-with-the-return-of-the-hostages-assurance-that-gaza-will-not-pose-a-threat>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

Although hostages are mentioned extensively, we found that the above three topics were only referenced in 0.57% of the times ‘hostages’ were mentioned.

Hostages – Mentioned in the context of:	Number of times mentioned	As a percentage of total hostage mentions (5,453)
1. The fact that taking hostages is a breach of international law/war crime	9	0.17%
2. Being denied access to the Red Cross by Hamas	19	0.35%
3. Trauma and sexual abuse in captivity	3	0.06%
<b>Total</b>	<b>31</b>	<b>0.57%</b>

**1. Taking hostages is a breach of international law**

Taking hostages is a clear breach of international law.<sup>147</sup> Given that international law and war crimes have been mentioned extensively in the Reporting Timeframe, we would expect the illegality of hostage taking to be given due emphasis. It is only mentioned 0.17% of the times where hostages are mentioned, and in 0.98% of items.

**2. Hostage access to Red Cross**

<sup>147</sup> 1979 International Convention against the Taking of Hostages; Article 8 of the Rome Statute.

There have been many calls, including from the Israeli government, for Hamas to allow the Red Cross access to the hostages. Hamas has consistently refused.<sup>148</sup> The Red Cross has not visited the hostages once.<sup>149</sup>

We have found only 19 references to the Red Cross being unable to visit hostages in the Dataset, which covers 4 months and over 3,000 items, including 5,453 mentions of hostages and over 12,000 mentions of Hamas.

Of the 19 mentions, 17 were interviewees, including hostage relatives.

We identified only one BBC editorial reference to the Red Cross failing to visit hostages, and remarkably the BBC appeared to equally place the blame on Israel. The article reported that the Red Cross have been:

*“asking to visit the hostages, deliver medical supplies, and bring news to desperate families. None of that can happen unless both Hamas and Israel agree”.*<sup>150</sup>

The suggestion that access to the Hostages is reliant on Israeli consent seems baseless.

### 3. Hostage trauma and sexual abuse in captivity

The trauma suffered by those kidnapped and taken hostage on 7 October 2023 was the subject of numerous human-interest stories in Israeli and other press throughout our Reporting Timeframe, particularly following the release of many hostages during November 2023. Facts which have emerged include:<sup>151</sup>

- a) hostages both witnessed and were subjected to sexual abuse;
- b) hostages were kept for days in small cages in complete darkness;

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<sup>148</sup> ‘Frequently asked questions on ICRC and the hostas held in Gaza’, *International Committee of the Red Cross*, 29 December 2023.

<https://www.icrc.org/en/document/frequently-asked-questions-icrc-and-hostages-held-gaza>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>149</sup> ‘Explainer: What is the Red Cross doing to help hostages taken from Israel?’, *British Red Cross*, 2024.

<https://www.redcross.org.uk/stories/disasters-and-emergencies/world/what-is-the-red-cross-doing-to-help-hostages-in-gaza>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>150</sup> ‘Israel-Gaza war: The Red Cross’s delicate role in hostage crises’, *BBC*, 27 November 2023.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67520263>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>151</sup> ‘Hostages were drugged, abused in Gaza: Israeli doctor’, *France 24*, 11 December 2023.

<https://www.france24.com/en/live-news/20231211-hostages-were-drugged-abused-in-gaza-israeli-doctor>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

- c) child hostages having been drugged with ketamine.

Professor Eitan, head of psychiatry at the Ichilov Tel Aviv medical centre, said that she “couldn’t believe the degree of cruelty”.<sup>152</sup> With Hamas still holding over 100 hostages, families of those held face daily trauma not knowing what their family members are suffering. Concern is widespread. Israelis wear clothing indicating support for the hostages; dramatic public memorials have been set up; almost daily political demonstrations take place.

In a search we found just three instances across our Dataset where sexual abuse against the hostages is mentioned.

### ii. Searches across BBC Arabic

The same trend can be seen across BBC Arabic. In a search led by RIME, native Arabic speakers looked into BBC Arabic Articles across the Reporting Timeframe for the terms ‘Rape’ and ‘Sexual Violence’. The team found a total of only 3 occurrences of the word, highlighting a significant under representation.

### iii. Conclusion - the Hostage Ordeal

The BBC’s under-reporting of important aspects of the hostage ordeal and its effect on the Israeli public and on the support for continuing the war effort constitutes a failure to give its audience important information needed to enable them to understand this war.

## Omission 8 – Failure to address the socio-economic cost of war on Israel

The economic and social cost of the war has been enormous for Israel. The economic cost alone was estimated in November 2023 to be in the region of \$400 billion across the next decade,<sup>153</sup> resulting inter alia from a disrupted workforce, reduced investment and a damaged tourist industry. It will be higher now, when the war is nearly a year old.

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<sup>152</sup> ‘Many hostages released by Hamas still being treated for Trauma’, *The Guardian*, 28 December 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/dec/28/many-hostages-released-by-hamas-still-being-treated-for-trauma> last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>153</sup> ‘From the Ashes of Hamas-Israel War, Can Economics Drive Peace?’, *RAND*, 28 November 2023. <https://www.rand.org/pubs/commentary/2023/11/from-the-ashes-of-hamas-israel-war-can-economics-drive.html>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

### i. Economic Damage

- a. In the last quarter of 2023, the economy shrank by 20% - primarily due to labour shortages and the 300,000 plus Israelis who were called to serve in the IDF.<sup>154</sup>
- b. Also in Q4 2023, business exports declined by 18% and business investment decreased by 68%.<sup>155</sup>
- c. Since the attacks of 7 October, most of the c 165,000 Palestinian workers from the West Bank have been prohibited from coming to Israel for security reasons, affecting major parts of the economy including construction.
- d. Over 17,000 foreign workers have left Israel since 7 October, primarily in the agricultural, construction and medical sectors.<sup>156</sup>
- e. In November 2023, the Bank of Israel reported that the war was costing the Israeli economy \$600 million per week, which equates to 6% of the GDP. This is caused inter alia by hundreds of thousands of workers who were absent from their jobs due to commitments to army reserves.
- f. Following the suspension of most international air carriers, the tourist industry has slumped. The Israel Central Bureau of Statistics reported a 96% decrease in same day visits between January 2023 and January 2024.<sup>157</sup>

### ii. Social Disruption

- a) Some 200,000 citizens have been forced to evacuate their homes, disrupting whole communities, taking children out of school and away from their friends;

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<sup>154</sup> 'Israel's economy shrank at 20% rate after outbreak of war', *Financial Times*, 19 February 2024, <https://www.ft.com/content/763bb384-a974-4222-996f-8aefbc32074>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>155</sup> 'Israel-Hamas war takes its toll on Israel's economy', *Euronews*, 19 February 2024. <https://www.euronews.com/business/2024/02/19/israel-hamas-war-takes-its-toll-on-israels-economy>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>156</sup> 'Official; Over 17,000 foreign workers left Israel since 7 October', *Middle East Monitor (MEMO)*, 28 November 2023. <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20231128-official-over-17000-foreign-workers-left-israel-since-7-october/>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>157</sup> 'Israeli tourism remains in post October 7 'state of collapse', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 15 February 2024. <https://www.thejc.com/news/israel/israeli-tourism-remains-in-post-october-7-state-of-collapse-xer1w8e1>, last accessed 1 September 2024.



removing people from their jobs; destroying local jobs; and causing considerable stress and psychological illness.<sup>158</sup>

- b) Hundreds of thousands of people have been removed from their homes and jobs in order to serve in the army, often for months at a time. Parents; spouses; children are all living under the continuous tension of not knowing if these soldiers will be injured or killed.
- c) Mothers have to cope as single parents for months on end.<sup>159</sup>
- d) The reserve soldiers themselves have to halt either university studies or their careers.
- e) Many have lost their jobs as the strain of war has undermined businesses.<sup>160</sup>
- f) There have been huge practical and psychological strains placed on all sectors of society because of the war.<sup>161</sup>

We understand that Palestinians have suffered more death and destruction than Israelis, and significant psychological distress. As shown, that suffering has been extensively covered by the BBC. By comparison, we have identified almost no mentions of the social and economic suffering of Israelis in BBC coverage.

### iii. The Experiment

A search of the word 'economy' within 10 words of Israel produced six results referencing the fact that the war has had a significant economic impact on Israel. All of these were mentioned in passing and we have not identified a single in-depth feature about this subject.

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<sup>158</sup> 'Evacuating was a mistake': Israelis push to return to border homes', *BBC*, 20 February 2024. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68338551>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>159</sup> Tamar Uriel-Beeri, 'Becoming a de facto single mom amid the Israel-Hamas War - comment', *The Jerusalem Post*, 6 January 2024. <https://www.jpost.com/opinion/article-780953>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>160</sup> 'Impact of the war in Gaza on the labour market and livelihoods in the Occupied Palestinian Territory; Bulletin No. 4', *International Labour Organisation & Palestinian Central Bureau of Statistics*, June 2024. Available at <https://www.ilo.org/media/556706/download>.

<sup>161</sup> 'A seaside town shelters thousands of Israeli evacuees, but struggles without tourists', *npr*, 4 February 2024. <https://www.npr.org/2024/02/04/1227892139/israel-eilat-tourism-israeli-evacuees-hamas-gaza-war>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

### iv. Displacement of Israelis blamed on Israel

Some 200,000 Israelis were internally displaced due to the war, mostly from communities close to Gaza and Lebanon.<sup>162</sup> Searches for the words “displaced” and “evacuate” within 10 words of “Israel” have identified a total of 32 relevant results.

However, the only in-depth feature article about this story focuses on Eritrean migrants who were displaced by the war and appears to blame Israel,<sup>163</sup> implying that the Eritrean suffering might be the result of Israeli racism or poor treatment of illegal immigrants.

The fact that this significant source of suffering is only reported in any detail where it can be used as a platform for insinuating negative features about Israel suggests that the failure to give due weight to this aspect of the war may be more than a mere omission.

### v. Searches across BBC Arabic

A similar trend was found across BBC Arabic Articles. In a search led by RIME, native Arabic speakers looked into BBC Arabic Articles across the Reporting Timeframe for the words ‘refugees’ and ‘displaced’. The result is displayed below. With a total of 133 mentions, these words were used only 2 times to describe Israelis (with 128 times in relation to Palestinians), indicating that this story is also significantly under-represented across BBC Arabic.

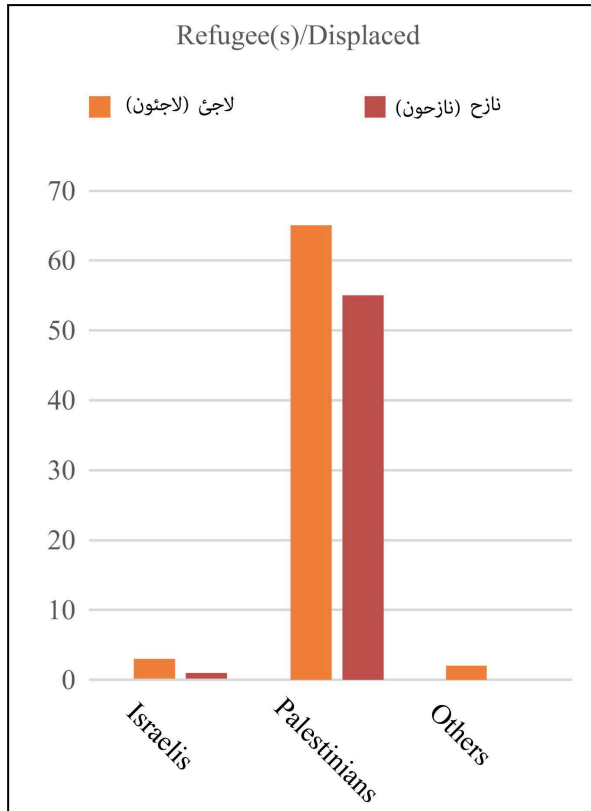
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<sup>162</sup> ‘About 200,000 Israelis internally displaced amid ongoing Gaza war, tensions in north’, *The Times of Israel*, 11 October 2023.

<https://www.timesofisrael.com/about-200000-israelis-internally-displaced-amid-ongoing-gaza-war-tensions-in-north/>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>163</sup> ‘Eritrean asylum seekers in Israel: ‘Our second country is bleeding’, *BBC*, 15 October 2023.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-67115875>, last accessed 1 September 2024.



**vi. Conclusion - Socio-Economic Cost of War on Israelis**

The BBC's under-reporting of important aspects of the socio-economic effect of the war constitutes a failure to give its audience important information needed to enable them to understand this war.

## 9. ACCURACY

### A. Identifying inaccurate reporting

It is beyond the scope of this Report to seek to identify every inaccurate statement broadcast by the BBC. Rather, with the exception of BBC Arabic coverage (for which the BBC does not publish a running list of corrections), we confine ourselves to analysis of errors which the BBC itself accepts it has made, and which appear on its “Corrections and Clarifications”<sup>164</sup> page.

Within the Reporting Timeframe, eight such corrections appear in English-language BBC output, with a further two, as at the date of this Report, outside the Reporting Timeframe. These are summarised in the following table:

No.	Reporting date	Incident Summary	Correction/clarification date	Time lag	Place of correction	Bias of original error
i)	17 October 2023	Incorrectly reporting that Israel struck Al Ahli hospital	19 October 2023	2 days <sup>165</sup>	Corrections & Clarifications page	anti-Israel/pro-Palestinian
ii)	16 October 2023	Pro-Palestinian demonstrators incorrectly described as “Hamis supporters”	24 October 2023	8 days	Corrections & Clarifications page, on air.	pro-Israel/anti-Palestinian
iii)	15 November 2023	Israel wrongly alleged to be targeting medical teams and Arabic speakers	15 November 2023	0 days	Corrections & Clarifications page, on air.	anti-Israel/pro-Palestinian

<sup>164</sup> ‘Corrections and Clarifications’, *BBC Help and Feedback*, 2024. Available at [https://www.bbc.co.uk/helpandfeedback/corrections\\_clarifications](https://www.bbc.co.uk/helpandfeedback/corrections_clarifications).

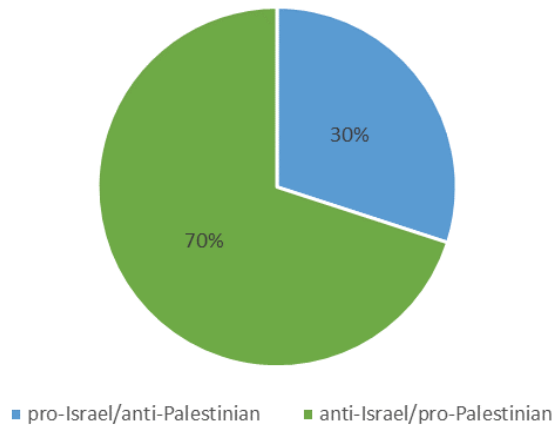
<sup>165</sup> An initial correction was published on 19 October 2023, and was updated to include an apology on 23 October 2023.

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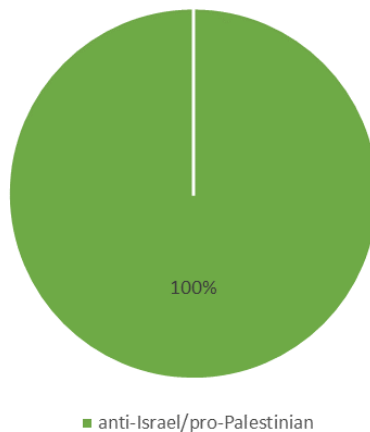
iv)	19 December 2023	Repeat of incorrect report that Israel struck Al Ahli hospital	22 December 2023	3 days	Corrections & Clarifications page.	anti-Israel/ pro-Palestinian
v)	24 December 2023	False allegation of Israeli summary executions of civilians in Gaza	5 January 2024	12 days	Corrections & Clarifications page.	anti-Israel/ pro-Palestinian
vi)	23 December 2023	Failure to refer to Bethlehem as in the “occupied” West Bank	18 January 2024	26 days	Corrections & Clarifications page	pro-Israel/ anti-Palestinian
vii)	12 February 2024	Incorrectly referring to Palestinian Envoy as “Ambassador of the State of Palestine to the UK”	13 February 2024	1 day	Corrections & Clarifications page, on air.	anti-Israel/ pro-Palestinian
viii)	9 January 2024 – 9 February 2024	Reporting that the number of people killed during the 7 October attacks by Hamas is about 1,300, rather than 1,200.	14 February 2024	NA	Corrections & Clarifications page, article correction notes.	pro-Israel/ anti-Palestinian
ix)	15 April 2024 (*Outside Reporting Timeframe)	Interviewer asking David Cameron about “Israel attacking and murdering tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians).	17 April 2024	2 days	Corrections & Clarifications page, interviewer post on ‘X’	anti-Israel/ pro-Palestinian
x)	23 May 2024 (*Outside Reporting Timeframe)	Describing a Palestinian protest outside a cinema as a vigil.	31 May 2024	8 days	Corrections & Clarifications page, online report and on the following	anti-Israel/ pro-Palestinian

As explained below, we divide these corrections between 'Material' and 'Less Material' It is notable that the majority of corrections made by BBC English – 7 out of 10 – are retractions of stories which would have reduced sympathy for Israel. We refer to these as 'anti-Israel/pro-Palestinian' stories.

Clarifications & Corrections made from articles that were deemed incorrect including material and less material changes



Clarifications & Corrections made from articles that were deemed materially incorrect



## B. Materiality of inaccuracies

We divide the corrections between those which are Material, and those which are Less Material.

The Material corrections are stories which will have made headlines around the world, or are likely to have done so if not corrected immediately, and can be envisaged to have caused widely felt strong negative reactions. Bombing a hospital and killing 500 people; lining people up and executing them; deliberately targeting medical teams for assassination are stories which could or did have such an effect.

We do not argue here with the BBC's view that failing to refer to the West Bank as "occupied" is important enough to merit a correction. But the omission of the word "occupied" would not make headlines around the world, and is unlikely to have elicited widely felt strong reactions. We therefore categorise this and similar errors as Less Material.

We consider that the inaccuracies in the above table which are Material are items i, iii, iv, v and ix. As set out in the following paragraphs, these were substantial errors of fact, as opposed to instances of mistaken terminology or mistaken details of stories.

All of these Material inaccuracies reflected an anti-Israel/pro-Palestinian bias. We now deal with those Material inaccuracies in turn.

### **Al Ahli hospital – items i and iv**

On 18 October 2023 the BBC reported on the BBC news site that Israel had targeted the Al Ahli hospital in Gaza and killed 500 people.<sup>166</sup> It was soon revealed that the blast occurred in the 'hospital grounds' and the cause of the blast was, in all likelihood, a mis-fired rocket from the Palestinian Islamic Jihad, another Gaza-based terror

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<sup>166</sup> 'Hospital blast in Gaza City kills hundred - health officials', *BBC News*, 18 October 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67140250>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

organisation.<sup>167</sup> US intelligence agencies initially assessed a death toll of 100-300 people.<sup>168</sup>

The BBC appears to have relied on the assessment of a reporter on the ground with no military expertise. Jon Donnison, when reporting on 17 October 2024 from Gaza, stated:

*“...but it is hard to see what else this could really be given the size of the explosion other than an Israeli airstrike or several airstrikes.”*<sup>169</sup>

### Targeting Medical Teams and Arab Speakers – item iii

On 15 November 2023 a BBC newscaster stated that Israeli forces entering Al Shifa Hospital “were targeting medical teams and Arab (*sic*) speakers.” In an on-air correction minutes later the BBC stated that the newsreader was mis-citing a Reuters report<sup>170</sup>.

This story was highly inflammatory, falsely accusing Israeli forces behaving in a racist and criminal manner. However the rapidity, clarity and transparency of the correction, on the same programme as the original erroneous broadcast, likely prevented this story from developing traction.

### Allegation of Israeli summary executions – item v

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<sup>167</sup> ‘A barrage and a midair explosion: What visual evidence shows about the Gaza hospital blast’, *The Washington Post*, 26 October 2023.

<https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/2023/10/26/gaza-hospital-blast-evidence-israel-hamas/>, last accessed 1 September 2024; ‘Human Rights Watch says rocket misfire likely cause of deadly Gaza hospital blast’, *Reuters*, 26 November 2023.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/human-rights-watch-says-rocket-misfire-likely-cause-deadly-gaza-hospital-blast-2023-11-26/>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>168</sup> ‘Between 100 and 300 believed killed in Gaza hospital blast, according to preliminary US intelligence assessment’, *CNN*, 19 October 2023.

<https://edition.cnn.com/2023/10/19/politics/us-intelligence-assessment-gaza-hospital-blast/index.html>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>169</sup> ‘Israel accuses BBC of ‘modern blood libel’ over reporting of hospital strike’, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2023.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/19/israel-accuses-bbc-of-modern-blood-libel-over-reporting-of-hospital-strike>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>170</sup> ‘Newsday, BBC News Channel, initial coverage of Israeli forces operation at Al-Shifa hospital, 15th November 2023’, *Contact the BBC*, 22 November 2023. Available at

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/complaint/newsdayapology>.



This story alleged that the Israeli army had carried out the summary execution of 137 Palestinian civilians in Gaza.

It was first broadcast on Christmas Eve, 24th December 2023, by a total of 6 broadcasts on the BBC World Service and Radio 4.

Based merely on an untruthful Hamas statement, the story was apparently not believed by other major media outlets and so was not repeated elsewhere.<sup>171</sup>

### **Allegation of Israel ‘murdering tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians’ – item ix**

On 15 April 2024, on BBC Radio 4 Today, a BBC reporter asked David Cameron about Israel “attacking and murdering tens of thousands of innocent Palestinians”,<sup>172</sup> insinuating the intentional and unlawful targeting by the IDF of civilians. This suggestion, for which no evidence was presented during the interview, amounts to a serious allegation of breaches of International Humanitarian Law by Israel.

A clarification was posted on the BBC Clarification and Corrections page two days later and stated that the presenter “could have been clearer”,<sup>173</sup> and that the views he expressed were not his own, or those of the BBC. There was an ‘acknowledgement of controversy’ also posted on the presenter’s social media channel,<sup>174</sup> but neither outlet carried a correction. Thus the allegation that Israel has deliberately targeted tens of thousands of Palestinians remains on the record.

### **Material inaccuracies – breach of legal obligations**

We find that the BBC has materially breached the following binding principles:

***Accuracy Principle 6*** - BBC output must achieve due accuracy.

***Accuracy Principle 12*** - in news and current affairs content, the BBC must prioritise achieving due accuracy over speed.

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<sup>171</sup> ‘BBC says sorry for report Israel executes Palestinians in Gaza’, *Ynet*, 9 January 2024. <https://www.ynetnews.com/article/sjOfgzjda>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>172</sup> ‘Corrections and Clarifications’, *BBC Help and Feedback*, 2024. Available at [https://www.bbc.co.uk/helpandfeedback/corrections\\_clarifications](https://www.bbc.co.uk/helpandfeedback/corrections_clarifications).

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>174</sup> Tweet (X) by Nick Robinson, 15 April 2024. Available at <https://x.com/bbcnickrobinson/status/1779832731041423623?lang=en>.

**Accuracy Principle 20** – the BBC should normally acknowledge serious factual errors and correct such mistakes quickly, clearly and appropriately.

We set out the BBC’s failures in respect of each Material Inaccuracy in the following paragraphs.

### **Quickly, clearly and appropriately**

As stated, the BBC “should normally acknowledge serious factual errors and correct such mistakes quickly, clearly and appropriately.”<sup>175</sup>

We have not found any guidance as to how each of these words “quickly, clearly and appropriately” is interpreted by the BBC. We therefore consider the plain meaning of each of these words in the context of the BBC’s overall duties:

1. **Quickly.** The need for quick remedial action must surely increase with the potential for the inaccurate story to cause harm – particularly where it is a major matter i.e. “matters of public policy or industrial controversy that are of national or international importance” and/or controversial.

Other than item number ix in the table above, the Material Inaccuracies were corrected in 2-12 days. Given the materiality, this is either slow or very slow.

2. **Clearly.** Most of the corrections we have identified have been made clearly.

As explained, the allegation of ‘murdering’ civilians has not been clearly withdrawn at all.

The other exception relates to the Al Ahli hospital. Many major English language media organisations also alleged that Israel was responsible, and subsequently apologised or corrected that story.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>175</sup> BBC Guidelines s. 3.3.28.

<sup>176</sup> ‘NYT admits error in Gaza hospital report’, *Politico*, 23 October 2023.

<https://www.politico.com/news/2023/10/23/gaza-hospital-new-york-times-00122986>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

The BBC by contrast has never written an adequate apology or correction. BBC Verify attempted to conduct an in-depth analysis, however, despite this claiming to be a “*highly specialised operation*” it drew no conclusions or improved understanding of the situation.<sup>177</sup>

The BBC continues to argue that, although it was “*wrong to speculate*”, the correspondent “*did not report it was an Israeli air strike*”.<sup>178</sup> Donnison said:

*“...but it is hard to see what else this could really be given the size of the explosion other than an Israeli airstrike or several airstrikes.”*<sup>179</sup>

It seems hollow to argue that these words do not amount to reporting that it was an Israeli airstrike.

Jeremy Bowen refused to apologise for the error, stating “*I don't regret a single thing in my report, because I think I'm measured all the way, I don't feel bad at all.*”<sup>180</sup>

3. **Appropriately.** A correction hidden away on BBC Verify or the official corrections page is entirely inadequate, particularly for a Material Inaccuracy. Such potentially damaging stories need to be corrected with at least comparable prominence and frequency as was afforded to the erroneous reporting.

As described further below, the BBC has corrected articles on 61 occasions, leaving a permanent record of the correction on the original output. This demonstrates that the BBC can properly correct matters when it so chooses.

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<sup>177</sup> ‘Explaining the ‘how’ - the launch of BBC Verify’, *BBC*, 22 May 2023.

<https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-65650822>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>178</sup> ‘Hospital explosion coverage | BBC admits: ‘It was wrong to speculate this way’, *Israel National News*, 20 October 2023.

<https://www.israelnationalnews.com/news/378857>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>179</sup> ‘Israel accuses BBC of ‘modern blood libel’ over reporting of hospital strike’, *The Guardian*, 19 October 2023.

<https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/19/israel-accuses-bbc-of-modern-blood-libel-over-reporting-of-hospital-strike>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

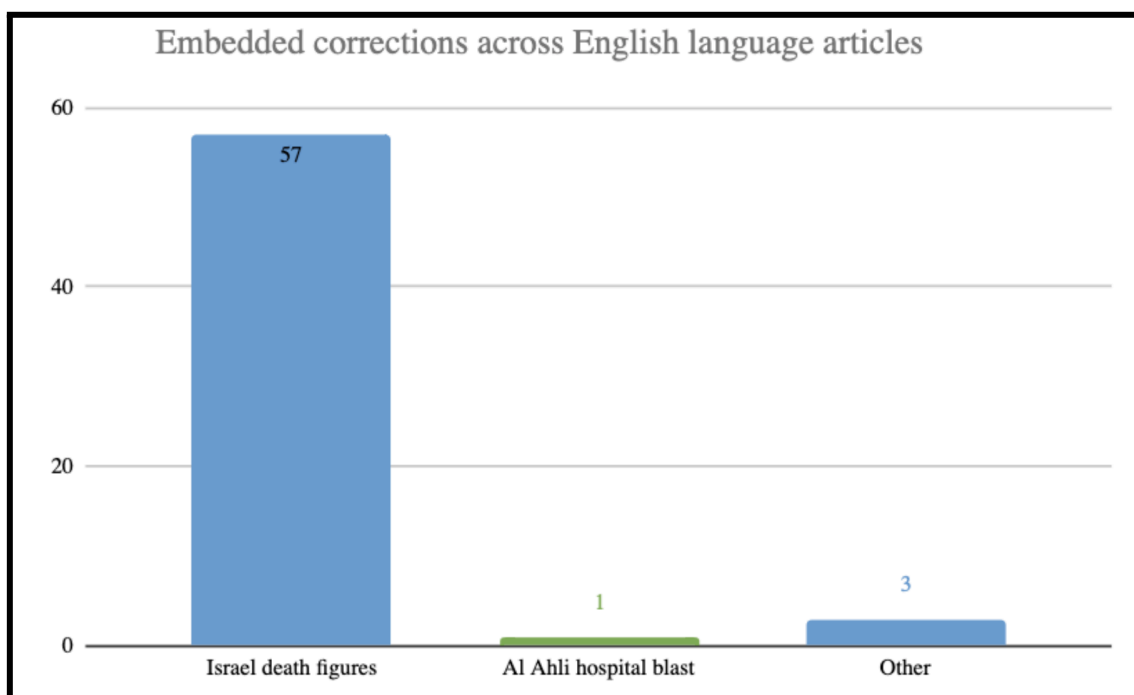
<sup>180</sup> ‘BBC’s Jeremy Bowen doubles down after blaming Israel for Al-Ahli bombing’, *The Jerusalem Post*, 26 November 2023. <https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/article-775198>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

Of those 61 occasions, 57 are repeats of a reduction to Israel’s earlier estimate of the death toll on 7 October.

### C. Corrections across English Language Web Articles

Within our Reporting Timeframe, there are 61 instances where a correction has been added to the end of an article:

- 57 articles correcting Israel’s death toll on 7 October 2023 – in each case suggesting that Israel previously exaggerated the number (original story was pro Israel/anti Palestinian) .
- 1 regarding the Al Ahli hospital, rendering the story less critical of Israel (original story was anti-Israel/pro Palestinian)
- 3 technical corrections (neutral)



## Notable points

The BBC Guidelines require that corrections be made “quickly, clearly and appropriately”.<sup>181</sup>

1. The 57 corrections of Israeli casualties are arguably the only corrections which are made in a manner which is ‘clear and appropriate’. The correction appears in almost all places where the original error is published and is as visible and prominent as the original corrected figure.
2. The Al Ahli hospital correction appears only once. It is unclear, since it merely states

*“This article originally said that Al-Ahli hospital has been destroyed and has been amended to clarify that the building was the site of a deadly explosion.”*

The reader is left to wonder what in fact happened at Al Ahli hospital. The correction fails to correct the original report which indicated that Israel had targeted a hospital and killed 500 people, when in fact the death toll was more likely to have been somewhere between 50 and 300<sup>182</sup> and had been caused by a rocket fired by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, as outlined above.

The correction is also “inappropriate” since it is broadcast at the end of a single article whereas the original inaccurate report was broadcast widely in written articles, television and radio. We have not identified any corrections on television or radio, other than an interview with Jeremy Bowen where he defended the original erroneous story and refused, when invited, to express regret for it.

## D. Corrections and Clarifications – BBC Arabic

CAMERA – the Committee for Accuracy in Middle East Reporting and Analysis, a US-based pro-Israel media monitoring organisation, submitted 69 complaints to the BBC over c. 8 months from 7 October 2023 with the following results:<sup>183</sup>

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<sup>181</sup> BBC Guidelines s. 3.3.

<sup>182</sup> ‘False al-Ahli casualties still included in Hamas/UN data’, *UKLFI News*, 9 June 2024.

<https://www.uklfi.com/false-al-ahli-casualties-still-included-in-hamas-un-data>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>183</sup>

(a) Upheld	47	68%
(b) Rejected	13	19%
(c) Pending appeal, or ignored	18	27%

According to CAMERA, the BBC has failed to meet its own Guidelines on corrections:

**Quickly** – The BBC must make corrections “quickly”,<sup>184</sup> however CAMERA has informed us that the average processing time for their complaints was in excess of 27 working days.

**Clearly** – CAMERA had identified two instances where an editor's note was added, out of the 82 corrections at hand.

**Appropriately** – where no notification is made, the standard of ‘appropriate’ cannot be met.

A summary of the full CAMERA corrections list can be found in Schedule 12 (last updated as of June 2 2024)..

## E. Accuracy and the use of the word ‘terrorist’

As shown above, the BBC has failed to consistently describe the acts of Hamas as ‘terrorism’, Hamas itself as a ‘terrorist’ organisation, or its members as ‘terrorists’.<sup>185</sup> This comprises a breach of the BBC’s obligations to report accurately<sup>186</sup> (and impartially) on a consistent basis.

### i. Evidence that Hamas is a Terrorist Organisation

The word “terrorist” is defined in the Oxford English Dictionary as:

*“A person who uses violent and intimidating methods in the pursuit of political aims”.*<sup>187</sup>

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<sup>184</sup> BBC Guidelines, s. 3.3.

<sup>185</sup> See above Omission 4 - Failure to use the word ‘terrorist’ across BBC reporting.

<sup>186</sup> *Accuracy Principle 9 – the BBC must not knowingly and materially mislead its audiences. It should not distort known facts, present invented material as fact or otherwise undermine the audiences’ trust in its content.* The BBC has committed to ‘achieving due accuracy in all its output’, see Section 3.1 of the BBC Guidelines.

<sup>187</sup> Oxford English Dictionary, s.v. “terrorist (n.), sense 1.b,” July 2023. Available at <https://doi.org/10.1093/OED/5093642493>.

Regarding the use of the term “terrorism”, the BBC is aided by the UK Parliament which has defined it under Section 1 of The Terrorism Act 2000 as follows (inter alia):

*“(1) in this Act “terrorism” means the use or threat of action where—*

*(a) the action [involves serious violence against a person... or serious damage to property],*

*(b) the use or threat is designed to influence the government ... or to intimidate the public or a section of the public, and*

*(c) the use or threat is made for the purpose of advancing a political, religious, racial or ideological cause....*

*4 (d) “the government” means the government of the United Kingdom....or of a country other than the United Kingdom.”*

The acts of Hamas on 7 October 2023 (some of which, such as-the taking of hostages, - continue to this day) clearly fall within the definition of “terrorism” in the Terrorism Act. Hamas both threatened and carried out violence against people and property in accordance with the political, religious and ideological aims set out in its Charters.

It follows that the perpetrators of these acts of terrorism are themselves terrorists.

The same can be said of Hamas’ accomplices or accessories after the fact, who, in breach of international law, took, and continue to hold Israeli and international hostages, with the purpose of furthering the terrorist aims of Hamas.

The Terrorism Act also provides for a method by which an organisation can be proscribed as a terrorist organisation. This requires a complex set of steps to be taken, closely controlled by law and subject to challenge. The UK Government has proscribed Hamas as a terrorist organisation.<sup>188</sup>

The BBC can be in no doubt that Hamas is a terrorist organisation and that its members are carrying out terrorist acts in its name predominantly against Israelis. A failure to describe Hamas as a proscribed terrorist organisation under UK law is therefore inaccurate by omission.

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<sup>188</sup> ‘Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations’ [Policy Paper], Home Office, 26 April 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations-accessible-version>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

Furthermore, since the word “terrorist” carries negative connotations, the failure to use the word when the facts demand and when properly attributed, would appear improperly to protect Hamas from the opprobrium that it has earned. This failure to describe Hamas accurately is also a breach of the BBC’s duty of impartiality, which includes an obligation not to depart from democratic principles.

### ii. Gaza’s Health Ministry

As shown in the present study, the BBC cites the “Gaza Ministry of Health”, also known as “the Hamas-run Gaza Ministry of Health” for casualty figures in Gaza. By using the term ‘ministry’ in connection with Hamas’ de facto rule over Gaza, Hamas is elevated in the audience’s mind to a Westminster-style government. By failing to consistently describe Hamas as a terrorist organisation and/or to consistently attribute information released by the “Gaza Ministry of Health” to Hamas, the pronouncement by Hamas of the number of deaths in Gaza is given greater credence than it arguably deserves. In fact, Hamas appears to have provided unreliable Gazan casualty numbers.<sup>189</sup>

The UK Government has stated that “the approach of distinguishing between the various parts of Hamas is artificial.”<sup>190</sup> There is no basis for the BBC to make any such distinction, and the BBC does not provide any such basis.

### iii. The opinions of others

The authors of this Report are not alone in noting the failure of the BBC to use the phrase “terrorist organisation” when describing Hamas. The table below lists other public figures sharing the authors’ concern. An open letter from a group of eminent public lawyers in the UK on this issue can be found at Schedule 9:

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<sup>189</sup> ‘How the Gaza Ministry of Health Fakes Casualty Numbers’, *Tablet Magazine*, 7 March 2024. <https://www.tabletmag.com/sections/news/articles/how-gaza-health-ministry-fakes-casualty-numbers>, last accessed 1 September 2024; ‘Statistically Impossible: A Critical Analysis of Hamas’s Women and Children Casualty Figures’, *Fathom Journal*, March 2024. <https://fathomjournal.org/statistically-impossible-a-critical-analysis-of-hamass-women-and-children-casualty-figures/>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>190</sup> ‘Proscribed terrorist groups or organisations’ [Policy Paper], *Home Office*, 26 April 2024. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/proscribed-terror-groups-or-organisations--2/proscribed-terrorist-groups-or-organisations-accessible-version>, last accessed 1 September 2024.



Name	Position	Criticism (in quotation)
Rishi Sunak	Leader of the Conservative Party	"This is not a time for equivocation, we should call it out for what it is." Speech in Nottinghamshire, 10 October 2023. <sup>191</sup>
Keir Starmer	Prime Minister	"I think the BBC needs to explain why it isn't." "I said 'terrorism' and 'terrorist', and to me that's obviously what we are witnessing." LBC Interview, 10 October 2023. <sup>192</sup>
Grant Shapps	Former Secretary of State for Defence	"Parliament has defined them [Hamas] as a terrorist organization, Ofcom have confirmed that the BBC is wrong to claim that Ofcom won't let them call them terrorists. I think it's time for the BBC to move on." Interview with POLITICO, 18 October 2023. <sup>193</sup>
David Cameron	Foreign Secretary, Former Prime Minister	"Maybe it's a moment actually for the BBC to ask itself again, should we describe these people as terrorists? They are terrorists." Interview with the BBC, 14 <sup>th</sup> May 2024. <sup>194</sup>
Lucy Frazer	Former Secretary for Culture	"We are at the moment witnessing the most horrific and terrible tragedy... What I see are acts of terror and I think it should be called out." Solidarity Service, 11 October 2023 <sup>195</sup>
Ephraim Mirvis	Chief Rabbi of the UK and Commonwealth	"If one doesn't use the term 'terrorist', it is as if one is providing a window of opportunity for justification" Sky News interview, 9 October 2023

<sup>191</sup> 'Rishi Sunak turns on BBC over Hamas coverage as Beeb refuses to apologise for 'offensive' report', GB News, 10 October 2023. <https://www.gbnews.com/politics/israel-news-rishi-sunak-bbc-hamas>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>192</sup> 'BBC defends decision not to label Hamas 'terrorists', *The National*, 11 October 2023. <https://www.thenational.scot/news/23848251.bbc-defends-decision-not-label-hamas-terrorists/>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>193</sup> Grant Shapps slams BBC's John Simpson over 'shameful' Nazi comment', *Politico*, 18 October 2023. <https://www.politico.eu/article/grant-shapps-slams-bbcs-john-simpson-over-shameful-nazi-comment/>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>194</sup> 'BBC rejects UK foreign secretary's call to label Hamas a terrorist group', *The Times of Israel*, 14 May 2024. <https://www.timesofisrael.com/bbc-rejects-uk-foreign-secretarys-call-to-label-hamas-a-terrorist-group/>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>195</sup> 'Keir Starmer: Diane Abbott is 'free' to stand as Labour candidate', *The Jewish Chronicle*, 31 May 2024. <https://www.thejc.com/news/politics/abbott-free-to-stand-as-labour-candidate-mod3eol3>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

George Carey	Former Archbishop of Canterbury	<i>"I am ashamed of the BBC. This is not independent, impartial broadcasting..."</i> Statement on 15 October 2023 <sup>196</sup>
Isaac Herzog	President of Israel	<i>"We are dealing with one of the worst terror organisations in the world... because the BBC has a certain linkage and it is known... all over the world, there has to be an outcry so that there will be a correction..."</i> Excerpt from meeting with Rishi Sunak, 18 October 2023

As mentioned, the BBC’s impartiality requires it not to depart from democratic principles.<sup>197</sup> The BBC’s unwillingness to refer to Hamas, which took control of Gaza by force in 2007 and is known for its dictatorial, corrupt and repressive style of governance, as a terrorist organisation, is indicative of a detachment from fundamental democratic principles.

On 20 October 2023, after meeting with the Board of Deputies of British Jews, the BBC announced that it would describe Hamas as a “proscribed terrorist organisation”.<sup>198</sup>

Since this time, however, we have found that the BBC has continued to refrain from consistently referring to Hamas as a proscribed terrorist organisation, breaching even the commitment it made to itself and its audience.

## F. Accuracy in reporting casualty numbers

The following binding principles from the BBC Guidelines are engaged here:

<sup>196</sup> ‘Former Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey slams BBC for not calling Hamas terrorists’, *Express*, 15 October 2023.

<https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1824028/archbishop-of-canterbury-george-carey-bbc-hamas>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>197</sup> See Impartiality Principle 21.

<sup>198</sup> ‘BBC quietly drops use of ‘militants’ to describe Hamas after weeks of mounting pressure’, *Daily Mail*, 20 October 2023.

<https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-12655365/BBC-quietly-drops-use-word-militants-Hamas-weeks-mounting-pressure.html>, last accessed 1 September 2024; How the BBC is covering Israel-Gaza, *BBC Media Centre*, 25 October 2023.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/articles/2023/how-bbc-is-covering-israel-gaza>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

**Editorial Values Principle 1** - the BBC must seek to establish the truth.

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**Public Interest Principle 3** – the BBC must provide information that assists people to better comprehend or make decisions on matters of public importance.

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**Public Interest Principle 4** - the BBC must seek to prevent people from being misled by the statements of individuals or organisations.

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**Accuracy Principle 6** - BBC output must achieve due accuracy.

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**Accuracy Principle 7** – BBC output must be well sourced, based on sound evidence, and corroborated.

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**Accuracy Principle 8** – the BBC must be honest and open about what it does not know and avoid unfounded speculation.

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**Accuracy Principle 15** – Material supplied by third parties, including news providers, must be treated by the BBC with appropriate caution, taking account of the reputation of the source.

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**Accuracy Principle 16** – the BBC should only use other material supplied by third parties if it is credible and reliable.

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**Accuracy Principle 19** – the BBC should normally identify on-air and online sources of information and significant contributors and provide their credentials, so that its audiences can judge their status.

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**Impartiality Principle 23** – When dealing with ‘controversial subjects’, the BBC must ensure a wide range of significant views and perspectives are given due weight and prominence, particularly when the controversy is active. Opinion should be clearly distinguished from fact.

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**War, Terror and Emergencies Principle 31** - First estimates of casualty figures often turn out to be inaccurate. If different sources give different estimates, the BBC should either report the range or go for the source which carries the greatest authority and attribute the estimate accordingly.

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### i. Background

One of the BBC's most widely-publicised facts about the Israel-Hamas War is the number of civilian deaths alleged to have been caused by Israel. The BBC usually reports this number at the end of web articles, and often in live broadcasts. Typical wording would be:

*In response to an unprecedented attack on southern Israel on 7 October, during which about 1,200 people were killed and 251 others were taken hostage<sup>199</sup>, some [X,000] Palestinians have been killed by Israel, most of them women and children.*

This language, along with references in many articles to Israel seeking 'retaliation' and 'revenge'<sup>200</sup> suggests that Israel is on a revenge-driven killing spree, principally of Palestinian women and children. Juxtaposition of Israeli deaths on day one of the war with alleged Palestinian deaths throughout the war seems designed to create an impression that the civilian death rate inflicted by Israel is disproportionately high.

We are indebted to Jonathan Turner at UKLFI for his analysis, parts of which are repeated in the following section and table, and which is attached in full at Schedule 10 to this Report.

### ii. From UKLFI<sup>201</sup>

1. This content [repetition of Hamas alleged death figures] has been defective in the following respects:
  - (a) None of the BBC reports that were likely to reach large audiences have drawn attention to the strong evidence that the figures produced by the Hamas ministries have been fabricated and manipulated and are highly unreliable, as regards both the total numbers killed and the breakdown between men, women and children. Mentioning that the numbers are according to Hamas-run ministries is wholly inadequate to convey to typical viewers the strength of the evidence undermining their validity.

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<sup>199</sup> The ambiguous nature of this wording, is studied at Section 10 (BBC Analysis of Obscure Language) .

<sup>200</sup> See Section 12 (Trends)

<sup>201</sup> UKLFI – UK Lawyers for Israel – is a non-for-profit organisation: <https://www.uklfi.com/>.

- (b) Almost none of the BBC reports has mentioned that the numbers include Palestinian combatants killed, still less mentioned Israeli or other estimates of these numbers.
- (c) None or virtually none of the BBC reports has pointed out that women and “children” can also be combatants, and some pieces have claimed or suggested that “children” cannot be combatants.<sup>202</sup> In fact, Hamas and other Palestinian terrorist groups actively recruit teenagers who are classed as “children” in the casualty figures.
- (d) Virtually none of the BBC reports has mentioned the ratio of Palestinian civilians to combatants killed or how that compares with other conflicts in urban areas.
- (e) None of the BBC reports has mentioned that the numbers include Palestinians killed by Palestinian fire, explosive devices or rockets or any estimate of these casualties.
- (f) None of the BBC reports has mentioned the possibility that the figures include those who died of natural causes and would have died if not for the war or any estimate of the numbers of deaths by natural causes.”

The following table summarises the results of the extensive research conducted by UKLFI. That research is more fully set out in their report at Schedule 10.

<b>UKLFI - GAZA DEATH CALCULATION</b>	<b>29 Feb 24</b>	<b>31 Jul 24</b>
Total deaths per Gaza Ministries – before deductions	30,228	39,445
Less, deaths reported by media sources or Google form (not reliable – disbelieved)	(12,943)	
Less, estimated deaths due to natural causes (20% of expected total due to natural causes if no war)	(532)	(1,097)

<sup>202</sup> ‘Israel Gaza: Checking Israel’s claim to have killed 10,000 Hamas fighters’, *BBC*, 29 February 2024. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-68387864>, last accessed 1 September 2024; ‘Bowen: Five new realities after four weeks of Israel-Gaa war’, *BBC*, 3 November 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-middle-east-67306902>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

Add back “additional deaths” to compensate for any underestimation in the above	2,446	
Less estimated reports of deaths that have not been identified (28.5% of total)		(11,242)
Estimated total Palestinians killed due to war	19,199	27,106
Estimated Palestinian combatants killed (IDF estimates discounted by 25%)	(9,000)	(12,000)
Estimated Palestinian civilians killed (total deaths, less deaths of combatants)	10,199	15,106
<b>Estimated Palestinian civilian: combatant deaths ratio</b>	<b>1.1</b>	<b>1.3</b>

If there are 10,199 civilian deaths and 9,000 combatant deaths, or 15,106 civilian deaths and 12,000 combatant deaths, the resultant ratios of 1.1:1 and 1.3:1, respectively, indicate a civilian-to-combatant casualty rate that is substantially lower than those documented in similar urban warfare operations conducted by other Western countries.<sup>203</sup>

### iii. Conclusion

We consider the most efficient way to summarise this section is by analysing the BBC’s adherence to the binding principles referred to at the top of this section.

Given the importance of the output on the topic of civilian deaths, the duty to seek the truth, and of accuracy, and impartiality are heavily engaged. The BBC appears to have failed to meet these BBC Guidelines, apparently ignoring cogent independent evidence undermining Hamas’s figures.

The BBC seems to have taken evidence from Hamas as its predominant source, knowing that Hamas has a vested interest; is not credible, and that other more credible sources were available.

As outlined above, in accordance with War, Terror and Emergencies Principle 31, *‘first estimates of casualty figures often turn out to be inaccurate. If different sources give different estimates, the BBC should either report the range or go for the source which carries the*

<sup>203</sup> ‘Ninety Per Cent of War-Time Casualties Are Civilians, Speakers Stress, Pressing Security Council to Fulfil Responsibility, Protect Innocent People in Conflicts’, UN, 25 May 2022. <https://press.un.org/en/2022/sc14904.doc.htm>, last accessed 27 August 2024.

*greatest authority and attribute the estimate accordingly.* The BBC has turned this principle 31 on its head. It has not reported the range; it has relied on the least reliable source – a terrorist dictatorship with a vested interest; it has almost entirely failed even to mention the arguments of the more reliable source, the IDF, or of independent academic studies, arguably the most reliable sources.

#### iv. Corrections and clarifications on death calculations following UN revisions

On 6 May 2024, while still referencing Hamas' "Government Media Office" figures that reported 9,500 women and 14,500 children dead, the UN stated that the number of women and children alleged by Hamas to have been killed in Gaza had been exaggerated and required downward revision.<sup>204</sup> Two days later, on 8 May 2024, the UN released updated figures, showing a significant reduction in the reported deaths: using 'health ministry' data, the numbers were revised to 4,959 women and 7,797 children. This adjustment was attributed to the exclusion of individuals with incomplete information in the demographic breakdown.<sup>205</sup>

Following this release, we note the following two key points:

- The BBC published one 'BBC Verify' article on 16<sup>th</sup> May 2024 with the headline 'Why is the UN citing lower death toll for women and children.'<sup>206</sup>
- Despite this Report, and despite the overwhelming evidence that the death calculations are materially inaccurate, the BBC has neither clarified and corrected, nor added this additional context to the hundreds of times it has cited the death figures across its reporting.

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<sup>204</sup> United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, 'Gaza War: UN Revises Death Toll of Women and Children', *ReliefWeb*, 17 May 2024.

<https://reliefweb.int/report/occupied-palestinian-territory/gaza-war-un-revises-death-toll-women-and-children#:~:text=On%206%20May%2C%20the%20UN,in%20Gaza%20remains%20over%2035%2C000>, last accessed on 29 August 2024.

<sup>205</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>206</sup> 'Gaza War: Why is the UN citing lower death toll for women and children?', *BBC News*, 16 May 2024., <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-69014893>, last accessed on 29 August 2024.

## 10. ANALYSIS OF BBC OBSCURE OR AMBIGUOUS LANGUAGE

### A. An Observation

Our human review team noticed a tendency by the BBC to obscure the descriptions of Israeli deaths. These were often expressed using such ambiguous language, leading to statements where it was unclear who had died, and at whose hand.

For example:

*"The death toll in Israel has reached 1,200, with more than 900 people killed by Israeli air strikes on Gaza."<sup>207</sup>*

Whilst the details can perhaps be deduced by those with contextual knowledge, this language lacks any direct statement addressing who caused the death toll in Israel, or who in Israel has died. Conversely, the language is quite clear that 900 people in Gaza have been killed by Israel.

### B. The Experiment

The RIME team conducted an experiment to analyse convoluted and ambiguous language. The full report and methodology can be found in Schedule 11.

Briefly, they used all BBC Web Articles within the Reporting Timeframe and asked ChatGPT4 if either Israeli and/or Palestinian casualties are mentioned in the article, and if so – how many. In parallel, they used expert readers who were assigned with the task of finding the real numbers of the casualties mentioned in each article on each side. Lastly, they measured the discrepancy between the two methods.

RIME used ChatGPT4 for three reasons. Firstly, it is an unbiased proxy for the 'casual everyday audience for news' that does not have an opinion on the conflict. Secondly, it is unaware of the purpose of the experiment at hand. Finally, and most importantly,

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<sup>207</sup> 'Gaza War: Why is the UN citing lower death toll for women and children?', *BBC News*, 11 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/uk-67076865>, last accessed on 29 August 2024.



ChatGPT4 reads the text as given, without drawing implicit conclusions. Thus, the numbers it extracts from the text reflect a proxy for the casualty numbers as they are reported in a straightforward manner, at purely face value.

The human labellers, on the other hand, were well informed about the conflict, and were also instructed to search online (e.g. in different reports) to verify any doubt they encountered, in order to reach an informed conclusion regarding the actual number of casualties to which the article is referring. .

Treating the human labellers as the 'ground truth', the types of errors that ChatGPT4 makes could be assessed in terms of underestimation/overestimation of the real casualty numbers. Over big numbers, if the BBC were impartial, then errors of the same type should be similarly distributed for both Palestinian and Israeli casualties. Furthermore, if errors are completely random (i.e. reflect pure noise rather than a true feature by either ChatGPT or the BBC coverage), they should be distributed approximately evenly, with 50% of overestimation and 50% of underestimation for each side, Palestinians and Israelis.

Conversely, if convoluted and ambiguous language was used disproportionately to describe mostly Israeli or mostly Palestinian casualties, which resulted in ChatGPT4 overestimating or underestimating those casualties, that could suggest a bias in BBC language usage. Such bias would be demonstrated by a deviation from the 50-50 split in error types within the casualty figures for one side (Palestinians or Israelis) but not the the other.

### C. Methodology

Each article was given as an input to ChatGPT4 with a request to analyse the text of the article and state:

1. the number of Israeli casualties identified
2. the number of Palestinian casualties identified

In parallel, human reviewers also carried out the same exercise, reading each article and reporting the number of Israeli and Palestinian casualties identified, and researching

further afield if unsure. We then compared for each report the numbers reported by the human experts relative to ChatGPT4.

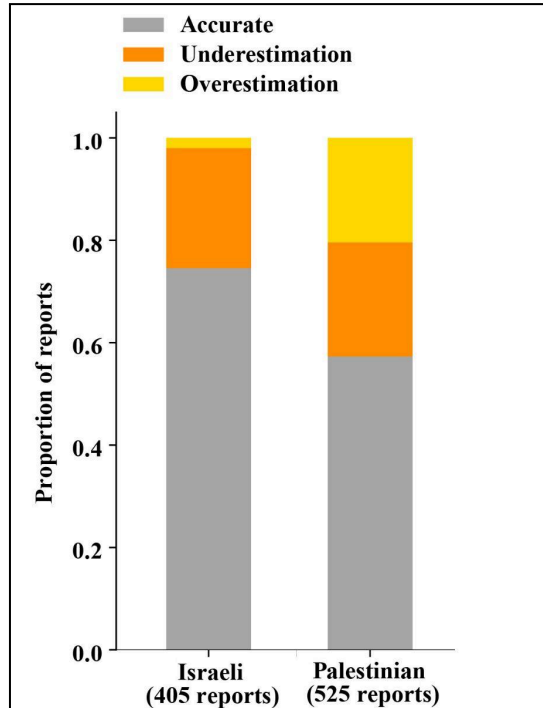
We summarised the reports by ChatGPT4 and separated them into the following categories:

- 1) Accurate answer - Chat GPT4 stating that the number of casualties matched the human reviewer, reflecting agreement between the two
- 2) Underestimation error - ChatGPT4 stating that the number of casualties was lower than the human reviewer
- 3) Overestimation error - ChatGPT4 stating that the number of casualties was higher than the human reviewer

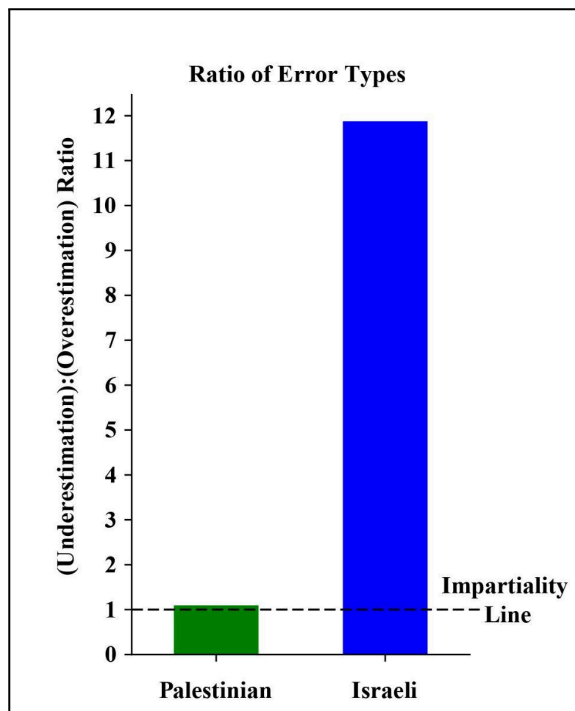
### D. Results

In the majority of cases there was an agreement between ChatGPT and the human experts, i.e. ChatGPT provided an accurate answer. In line with the hypothesis, ChatGPT showed similar proportions of underestimation (117) and overestimation (107) errors for the Palestinian side (a split of 48%/52%).

However, when considering errors on the Israeli side, the results were substantially different: underestimation errors (95) were significantly higher than overestimation (8) errors, representing a split of 8%/92%. See the graph below.



A direct comparison of each side shows that the ratio of different error types for Palestinian was close to 1, reflecting impartiality. For reports of Israeli deaths, there were almost 12 times more underestimation errors than overestimation errors. In other words, Palestinian deaths were equally likely to be either under or overestimated by the 'casual' everyday audience for news. By contrast, under representation errors for the Israeli casualty figures are almost 12 times more common than over representation errors. See the graph below.



## E. Conclusion - Obscure or Ambiguous Language

When regularly reporting on death figures - a sensitive and controversial topic - the BBC should use easily accessible, clear and understandable language.

RIME's findings show a material difference between the ways that deaths on the two sides are reported. Deaths of Palestinians are reported with an even number of ambiguous statements, misread by ChatGPT4 (the 'casual reader') to both underestimate and overestimate Palestinian deaths.

By marked contrast, the ambiguous and obscure language which is used to describe Israeli deaths causes ChatGPT4 (the 'casual reader'), overwhelmingly and materially, to underestimate the number of deaths.

Journalists and editors at the BBC are highly trained wordsmiths. The stark difference between the language used regarding Palestinian deaths as compared to Israeli deaths indicates bias. Whether this bias is subconscious or conscious remains unclear.

Notably, this observation was further highlighted when we repeated the experiment across BBC Arabic, where we identified a very small error rate (less than 3%) by ChatGPT4 for both Israeli and Palestinian casualty reports. This error rate produced too few samples to allow material conclusions to be drawn from a similar error analysis.

## 11. ANALYSIS OF DESCRIPTION OF CASUALTIES

### A. Introduction

This analysis was conducted by RIME, triggered by a previously published report<sup>208</sup> which looked into the words used to describe casualties, and whether they were personalised or not.

The way a casualty is described can evoke a range of emotions, including:

- Building positive emotions such as compassion, empathy and sympathy through using descriptive words such as ‘mother’, ‘young child’ or ‘elderly grandfather’. These types of descriptive words are often related to familial connections or age.
- Emotions which actively encourage detachment, distance, unfamiliarity and disconnection, such as ‘person’, ‘people’ or ‘them’.
- Building negative emotions such as anger and resentment through using descriptive words such as ‘soldier’ or ‘attacker’. These types of descriptive words invite less sympathy, perhaps suggesting a death is more acceptable, due to intentional active involvement in a conflict, or as a casualty of an act of a ‘soldier’ or ‘attacker’.

The RIME team sought to check the use of such descriptions by the BBC. If such descriptions are used unequally to describe the deaths of either Palestinians, or of Israelis, this could be a potential indication of bias.

### B. Methodology

Each article in the Dataset of the BBC English articles was tagged, using human experts, to note any mentions of Israeli and/or Palestinian casualties. Where casualties were mentioned, the number, any descriptive words used (e.g. killed, died) and any words used to describe their identity (e.g. mother, son) were reported.

The words used to describe the identity of the casualties, were grouped into seven categories:

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<sup>208</sup> [GitHub - liet-git/bbc-bias: Analysing the 101bias in BBC reporting on Palestine.](https://github.com/riet-git/bbc-bias)

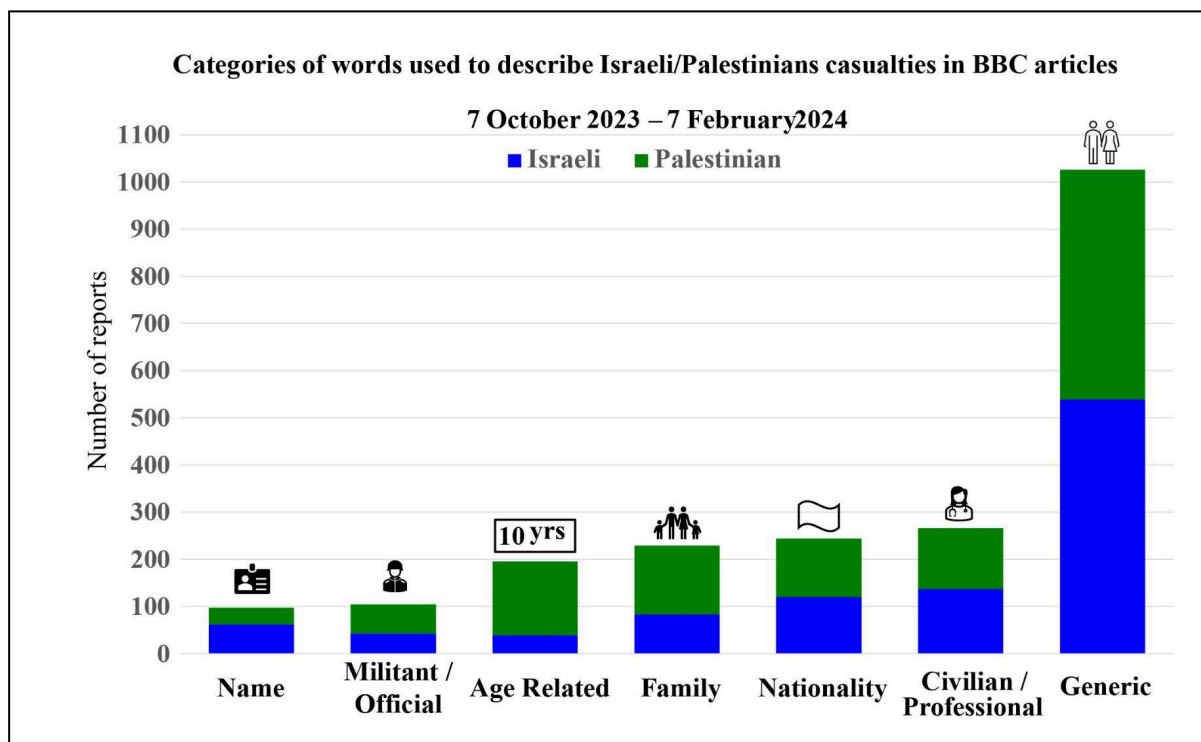
Category	Examples
Age Related	Young people, elderly, 10-years old, toddler, boy, girl
Family Member	Mother, father, grandmother, son, daughter
Generic	People, men, bodies, casualties
Civilian / Professional	Hostage, displaced people, innocent, patients, partygoers, citizens, civilians, driver, medics, farm worker, journalist, student
Militant / Official	Soldiers, commander, officer, terrorists, attackers, gunmen, Palestinian officials, police officers, Hamas leader
Name	Any specific name – Deborah, Mohammad
Nationality	Israeli, Palestinian, Gazan

A full report of the methodology is at Schedule 13.

## C. Results

### Description of Casualty Identities

The RIME team consolidated all the occurrences of all the descriptive words in each category and counted them separately for Israeli and Palestinian casualties.



Within the Reporting Timeframe a total of **2,161** instances where adjectives were used to describe casualties were recorded.

Of these, **36%** were deemed to carry sympathy or invoke a feeling of connection, for example using the adjective 'son' as opposed to 'person' to describe a casualty (This includes the categories 'Name', 'Family', 'Age Related', 'Civilian/Professional').

Out of this 36% that carried sympathy or invoked connection:

- 60% invoked connection/sympathy towards Palestinians;
- 40% invoked connection/sympathy towards Israelis

Most categories show a somewhat balanced use between Israeli and Palestinian casualties, except for:

- Words from the 'Age-related' category were used four times more frequently to describe Palestinian casualties than to describe Israeli casualties (80% of words in this category were referred to Palestinians vs. 20% that were referred to Israelis).
- 'Family' related terms were used more to describe Palestinian casualties in a ratio of approximately 2:1
- Names were used more frequently to describe Israeli casualties in a ratio of approximately 2:1. This is virtually the opposite ratio as observed in the "Family" category above, but note that 'Names' were used less often than 'Family'.

Generally, the BBC used more sympathetic descriptions for Palestinian casualties - primarily from the 'Family' and 'Age-Related', categories, thus inviting greater levels of positive sentiment and connection.

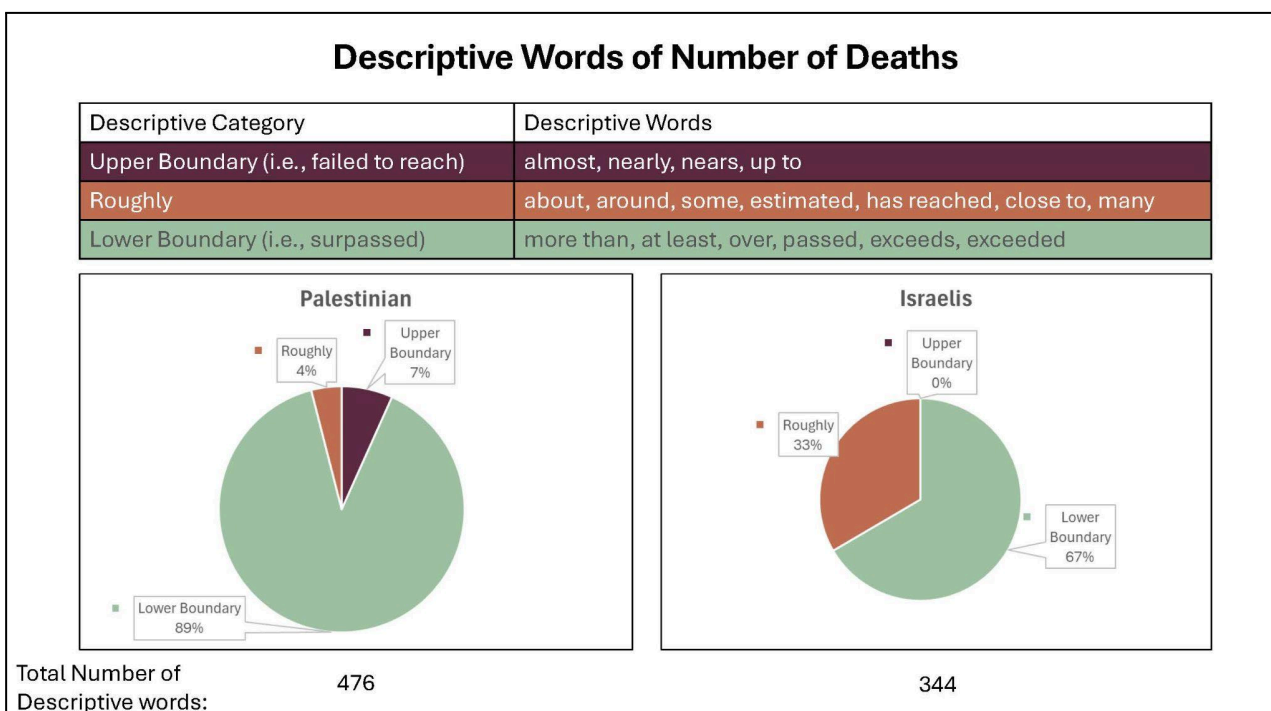
### Descriptive words used for death

The RIMe team listed the words describing the deaths of Israelis vs. those of Palestinians, for example 'shot', 'murdered' or 'kill(ed)'. The total number of words used was similar - 783 words used for Israelis and 733 for Palestinians, with no material differences in the choice of words.

### Description of quantity of deaths

The team analysed the words used to describe the quantity of deaths, grouping them into three categories:

- ‘Upper Boundary’ - words which imply the actual number of casualties is lower;
- ‘Roughly’ - words which are an approximation; and
- ‘Lower Boundary’ - words which imply the minimum, i.e. the actual number of casualties could be higher.



- The percentage of ‘Lower Boundary’ words used to describe Palestinian casualties was substantially higher (89%) than the percentage of ‘Lower Boundary’ words used to describe Israeli casualties (67%). i.e. phrases such as ‘more than’, ‘at least’ and ‘exceeds’ were used when describing Palestinian deaths more often than when describing Israeli deaths - inflating the number of deaths in the mind of the audience.



- Approximation words, such as 'roughly' or 'some' were used in 33% of cases for the Israeli casualties, whereas only 4% for Palestinian casualties. This was unexpected because
  - Israeli casualties were posted daily and made publicly available on an official government website,
  - Accurate figures for Palestinian casualties are hard to obtain, with Hamas being a proven unreliable source.

### D. Conclusion – adjectives used to describe casualties

- i. Palestinian casualties are more often given a familial/age-related descriptive adjective than Israeli casualties.
- ii. The number of Palestinian deaths is usually (89%) described in a way that promotes inflation of those numbers, while not setting any upper boundary. By contrast, Israeli deaths are less likely (63%) to be described with 'inflationary' adjectives.

When combined, these results have the effect of evoking a greater sympathy for Palestinian deaths, further supporting the bias identified across the Report.

The above results contradict those of the previous work which triggered RIME's experiment.

## 12. TRENDS

As part of their review work, our human review team was asked to identify recurring themes or trends in the reporting which could reveal a lack of impartiality.

We have selected five trends, set out in the following table, and consider each separately, and in further detail, below.

Trend Category	Content	Quote
<p><b>Trend 1 –</b> Downplaying 7 October</p>	<p><u>The Conflict: Israel - Gaza. Israel's President Speaks</u> [Podcast]  31.10.2023</p>	<p><i>“People are now focused not on the event [Oct 7], but on the response to the event. Let us look at the numbers...”</i></p> <p>Downplays the impact of Oct 7 attacks suggesting the world has moved on from them and so should Israel. ‘Let us look at the numbers’ invites viewing the attack as a statistic, rather than as an extraordinary act and as a <i>causus belli</i>.</p>
<p><b>Trend 2 –</b> Israel depicted as overwhelmingly powerful and militaristic</p>	<p><u>Week 2: BBC correspondents answer your questions on the conflict between Israel and Hamas</u>  16.10.2023</p>	<p>In a Q&amp;A, when asked what Israel’s objective is, the response included:</p> <p><i>“Israel has the military might to smash Hamas's infrastructure, crush its tunnels, and cripple its command-and-control networks.”</i></p> <p>BBC reporting adopts such language frequently, apparently suggesting that Israel faces no significant threat.</p>
<p><b>Trend 3 –</b> Downplaying or excusing acts of terror</p>	<p><u>Hamas: Who are the group's most prominent leaders?</u>  19.03.2024</p>	<p>Description and background of key Hamas leaders which portrays them almost as elusive folk heroes and avoiding portraying them as terrorists.</p>

<p><b>Trend 4 –</b> Language tactics and literary devices</p>	<p><u>Omer and Omar: How two 4 year-olds were killed and social media denied it</u></p> <p>26.10.2024</p>	<p>This article appears to be a real attempt to strike a balance. Our reviewers marked it as 0/balanced. Yet even here the article uses a more emotive tone throughout when describing Omar, putting <i>more emphasis on the tragic nature of his death and the denial of it, using emotionally charged quotes like “the candle of my life”</i>. In contrast, the language used to describe Omer is flatter and less emotive <i>with a focus on the factual details of his death.</i></p>
<p><b>Trend 5 –</b> Reverence for Hamas</p>	<p><u>Did Iran support plan for attack on Israel?</u></p> <p>09.10.2023</p>	<p>Describes 7 October as ingenious and thus admirable.</p> <p>“Saturday's complex air, land and sea operation.”</p> <p>“The simultaneous use of rockets, drones, vehicles and powered hang-gliders suggested that the operation's planners had studied other recent examples of hybrid warfare...”</p>

### Trend 1 - Downplaying 7 October 2023

The Hamas attack on 7 October 2023 dwarfs all other mass murders of Israeli civilians.<sup>209</sup> It consisted of the invasion of Israel’s sovereign territory simultaneously

<sup>209</sup> ‘Hamas’s attack was the bloodiest in Israel’s history’, *The Economist*, 12 October 2023, <https://www.economist.com/briefing/2023/10/12/hamass-attack-was-the-bloodiest-in-israels-history>, last accessed on 29 August 2024.

through some 30<sup>210</sup> separate entry points along the border barrier by an army of some 3000<sup>211</sup> heavily armed terrorists.

The level of cruelty and violence displayed was extraordinary. The victims' ages ranged from babies to octogenarians; the roll-call of horrors included rape, torture, bodily mutilation, decapitation and burning people alive, as well as kidnapping. One perpetrator was filmed telephoning home, using the phone of a woman he had just killed, to gleefully boast to his parents about the number of Jews he had killed. "Mum", he said, "your son is a hero".<sup>212</sup>

It took Israel some three days to kill or repel the terrorists. By then more than 1,200 Israelis had been killed; more than 4,830 wounded – some later dying of their wounds<sup>213</sup> – and some 240 had been taken hostage.

In the eyes of many Israelis the 7 October attack constituted an existential threat and undermined the State's promise to its citizens to provide a safe haven for Jews.<sup>214</sup>

Through the qualitative review of our sympathy analysis, we find that the events of 7 October have been downplayed, trivialised and to some degree deliberately concealed by the BBC, leading to a position where the atrocity, the *casus belli*, has all but disappeared from view.

In the immediate aftermath of 7 October, the brutality of the massacre was portrayed by the BBC to some extent. But the language used even then tended to be muted, and low on descriptive adjectives as compared with the later description of Palestinian casualties. For example this quote, taken from an article on 7 October itself, which

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<sup>210</sup> 'How Hamas broke through Israel's border defences during Oct. 7 attack', *The Washington Post*, 27 October 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2023/10/27/hamas-attack-israel-october-7-hostages/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>211</sup> 'IDF Estimates 3,000 Hamas Terrorists Invaded Israel in Oct. 7 Onslaught', *The Times of Israel*, 29 October 2023, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/idf-estimates-3000-hamas-terrorists-invaded-israel-in-oct-7-onslaught/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>212</sup> 'In phone recording found after Hamas attack son tells parents he 'killed Jews'', *Global News*, 25 October 2023, <https://globalnews.ca/news/10046530/israel-call-your-son-killed-jews/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>213</sup> 'What happened on the 7th of October', *Info710*, <https://govextra.gov.il/mda/october-7/october-7/what-happened-on-the-7th-of-october/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>214</sup> See above s. 8 Omission .

already downplays Hamas' attack, glorifies their actions. The article fails to emphasise Hamas acts of violence, but rather shifts the emphasis onto Israeli militarism:

*"Israel was taken by surprise by the most ambitious operation Hamas has ever launched from Gaza. Within hours Israel was responding with air strikes into Gaza, killing many Palestinians. Its generals will be planning a ground operation next. No one expected Hamas to conceive and meticulously plan such a complex and coordinated operation out of Gaza."*<sup>215</sup>

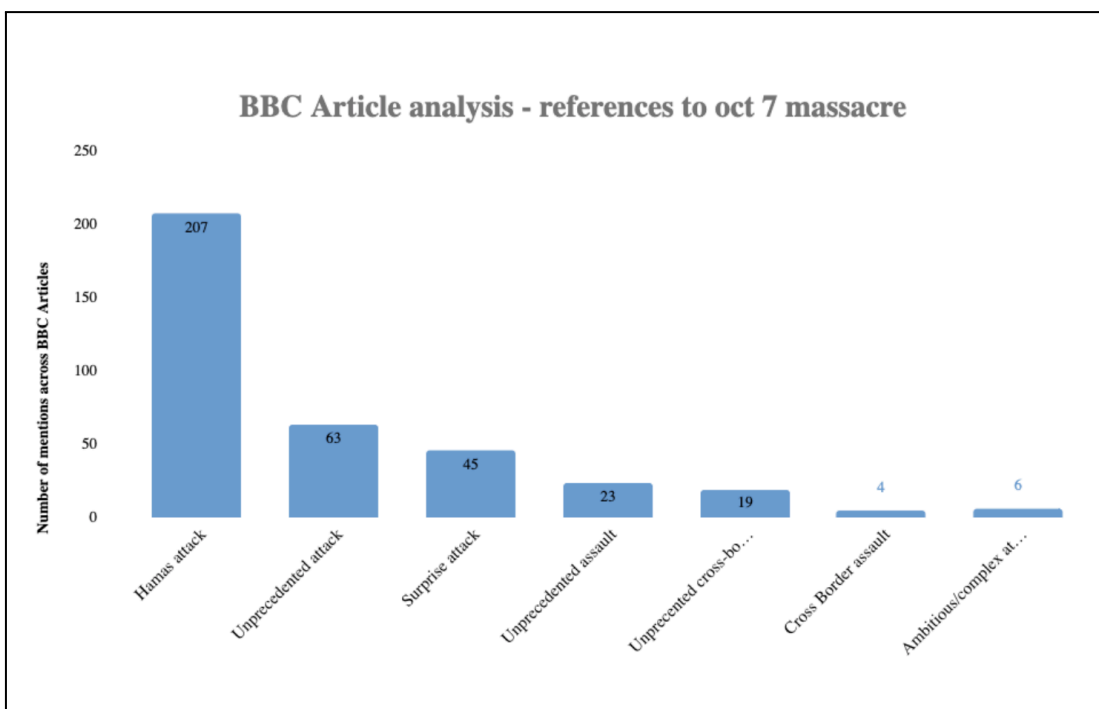
The phrases we identified to describe the attack of 7 October 2023 include:

- (a) Ambitious
- (b) Meticulous plan
- (c) Complex and coordinated operation
- (d) Lightning assault
- (e) Sophisticated operation
- (f) Unprecedented development; and
- (g) Surprise attack.

These adulatory phrases seem incongruous in light of the terrible reality of what is described. We sought to identify and number all the principal ways in which the attack is described by the BBC during our Reporting Timeframe.

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<sup>215</sup> ' Hamas blindsides Israel with most serious attack in a generation', *BBC News*, 7 October 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67041679>, last accessed 29 August 2024.



We also identified what appear to be deliberate efforts to conceal the worst of the brutalities. For example, one harrowing scene, shown by many television outlets, was a film of hostage Naama Levy, a young woman, being taken out of the back of a car, injured and bleeding, being pulled by her hair by a Hamas terrorist shouting ‘Allah Akbar.’ The BBC merely showed a part of the video after Naama had been pushed back into the car. One merely sees the car door closing.<sup>216</sup>

The first line of the article reads: *“Palestinian militants have taken dozens of Israelis captive, both military and civilian, in an unprecedented development.”*<sup>217</sup> This seems tame language for what has occurred.

On 23 October 2023, the Israeli Government issued a roughly 45 minute film of some of the worst atrocities, showing it to international journalists. With highly distressing and disturbing images and footage, almost all journalists who saw the film were visibly moved, making statements such as:

<sup>216</sup> ‘Moment after Israeli hostage pushed into car’, *BBC News*, 8 October 2023. <https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-middle-east-67046258>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>217</sup> *Ibid.*

*“The footage, captured by security cameras, body cameras worn by the Hamas attackers, vehicle dashboard cameras, social media accounts and videos from mobile phones, left some reporters in tears.”<sup>218</sup>*

*“The Worst 45 minute film you will ever see”<sup>219</sup>*

*“Even within the litany of horror I’ve witnessed in my career this is horrifically unsettling.”<sup>220</sup>*

The BBC response was far more muted. With one article entitled “Israel shows Hamas bodycam attack footage to journalists”,<sup>221</sup> the article, despite carrying a ‘Warning’ for “graphic descriptions of violence”, described only two scenes from the screening, with little emotive language.

For example they said that the film “showed one Hamas gunman shooting the apparently dead bodies of civilians inside a kibbutz in a celebratory manner”.<sup>222</sup> This would have been one of the tamer incidents depicted by the film, and entirely fails to communicate the level of brutality that was captured on the film.

Further evidence that we have found in support of this ongoing trend of downplaying the atrocities that took place are:

Date	Quote/Picture/ Video Link
<p><u>Gaza 'soon without fuel, medicine and food' - Israel authorities</u></p>	<p>The article, released 2 days after 7 October, highlights the plight of the Palestinians, without mentioning the reason why the response from Israel took place or providing details of the 7 October attack:</p>

<sup>218</sup> ‘Israel Shows Footage of Hamas Killings to Counter Denial of Atrocities,’ *The Guardian*, 23 October 2023. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/oct/23/israel-shows-footage-of-hamas-killings-to-counter-denial-of-atrocities>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>219</sup> ‘The worst 45 minute video you will ever see,’ *TIME*, 23 January 2024, <https://time.com/6565186/october-7-hamas-attack-footage-film/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>220</sup> ‘I Watched Hamas Unleash Hell,’ *UnHerd*, 24 October 2023, <https://unherd.com/2023/10/i-watched-hamas-unleash-hell/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>221</sup> ‘Israel shows Hamas bodycam attack footage to journalists,’ *BBC*, 23 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67198270#>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>222</sup> *Ibid.*

<p>09.10.2023</p>	<p>“BBC footage shows deserted streets covered with rubble from collapsed buildings following Israeli airstrikes.”</p> <p>“Israel has stopped all supplies entering Gaza, including food and medicine.”</p> <p>“Video shared online from Jabalia showed widespread chaos, including a body being carried away and a man covered in blood and dust.”</p> <p>“19 members of the same family were killed in a strike in Rafah, in the south of Gaza.”</p>
<p><u>Gaza surgeon: 'It broke me, not being able to save so many innocent lives'</u></p> <p>11.12.2023</p>	<p>The article discusses the experiences of a female Gazan surgeon, Sara, on 7 October:</p> <p>“When Sara checked her phone, she saw the news that Hamas had attacked Israel. Its gunmen killed 1,200 people and took about 240 hostages.”</p> <p>This is the only mention of Israeli distress in the article. The language is flat and unemotive. Not so when describing Palestinians:</p> <p>“Sara was immediately called in to work. When she arrived, she saw a massacre, with injured people pouring in”.</p> <p>“Severed limbs due to shrapnel and different types of injuries caused by intense burning.”</p> <p>“People were crammed into every available space, cooking bread in the corridors, sleeping on the floor and in cupboards and trying to distract their children with games.”</p> <p>“Something as small as being offered a piece of bread became a moment to rejoice.”</p> <p>“Like other Gazans, their hopes and dreams have been set aside in place of survival.”</p>



	Note the emotive language “massacre”, “injured pouring in”, “severed limbs” “crammed” “hopes and dreams”etc.
<p><u>The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Israel’s President Speaks</u></p> <p>31.10.2023</p>	<p>“I think we have to recognise that for journalists, the story has moved on. It’s moved on to not the event which was the Hamas atrocities in southern Israel on October the 7th... Israel is still focused on that, while the rest of the world is focusing on the response to those events, which is the pain of Gazans.” Lyse Doucet</p> <p>This downplays the differences between an unprecedented, unprovoked massacre and the response to that attack. The uncorroborated reference to what the ‘rest of the world’ thinks is a device to introduce expression of the journalist’s personal views.</p>
<p>Radio Today</p> <p>01.02.2024</p>	<p>Lyse Doucet downplays the reason for the start of the war, removing agency from Hamas, and saying that it just ‘erupted’:</p> <p>“And from the beginning of this Israel Gaza War, which erupted on October the 7th, it has been clear that both the United States and Iran do not want to be dragged into a direct confrontation.”</p>
<p>BBC Breakfast</p> <p>23.20.2023</p>	<p>“And every night, since this crisis erupted on October the 7th, they have been hitting hundreds, sometimes thousands of targets.”</p> <p>This also downplays the reason for the start of the war, removing agency from Hamas, and saying that the war just ‘erupted’.</p>

## Trend 2 - Israel depicted as overwhelmingly powerful and militaristic

Israel and its people are frequently described as militaristic and aggressive, cruel, vengeful and indifferent to Palestinian suffering. Israel is portrayed as having overwhelming strength and facing no substantial threat, thus delegitimising its decision to prosecute the war.

By comparison, the militaristic acts and strength of Hamas, are given far less weight, and Hamas tends to be described in heroic terms, excusing terrorist activity.

Date	Quote/Picture/ Video Link
<p><u>Israelis, united in shock, rally behind war to punish Hamas</u></p> <p>09.10.2023</p>	<p>“Israel’s military is powerful”</p> <p>“lavishly-funded and prestigious military”</p> <p>“intelligence establishment should have stopped a catastrophe and did not”</p> <p>[Previous Israeli attacks on Gaza] “felt at times like deadly rituals”</p>
<p><u>Entire streets destroyed in Gaza refugee camp</u></p> <p>16.10.2023</p>	<p>“Israel’s retaliatory bombardment”</p> <p>Caption to video depicting destruction in Gaza</p>
<p><u>Israel and Gaza on campus: Tumult at US colleges as two sides dig in</u></p> <p>16.10.2023</p>	<p>“Israel’s response in the days since was another example of its indifference to the suffering of the Palestinian people”</p>
<p><u>At least half of Gaza’s buildings damaged or destroyed new analysis shows</u></p> <p>30.01.2024</p>	<p>“the bombardment of southern and central Gaza has intensified since the start of December”</p> <p>“Once bustling high streets have been left derelict or destroyed.”</p> <p>“intense bombardment of the area.”</p> <p>“several parts of Gaza show the effects of Israeli incursions and bombardment.” there have been allegations of deliberate destruction levelled at the IDF.” -</p> <p>no reference saying who is making these allegations.</p>

<p><b><u>Disguised Israeli forces raid West Bank hospital, killing three Palestinian fighters</u></b></p> <p>30.01.2024</p>	<p>a "new massacre inside hospitals"</p> <p>"...Israeli forces had "executed three fighters""</p> <p>"...blood-spattered floors and walls with a bloodied, blue pillow with a bullet hole in it"</p>
<p><b><u>Israel-Gaza war: Counting the destruction of religious sites</u></b></p> <p>30.01.2024</p>	<p>"... the widespread destruction of Israel's military offensive."</p> <p>"Israeli soldiers disrespecting the sanctity of religious places and glorifying destruction."</p> <p>"an Israeli soldier posing in front of a fallen minaret which has been graffitied in Hebrew with the words "the temple will be rebuilt"</p>
<p><b><u>Dozens reported killed as battle rages in Gaza's Khan Younis</u></b></p> <p>22.01.2024</p>	<p>"Israeli troops had stormed the al-Khair Hospital"</p> <p>"tanks had surrounded a hospital and university where thousands of displaced people were sheltering."</p> <p>"Everyone who tries to move out or who goes out in the street is being targeted."</p>
<p><b><u>Gaza Strip in maps: How life has changed in three months</u></b></p> <p>15.01.2024</p>	<p>"Israel responded to the 7 October attacks by Hamas with an intense bombing campaign"</p>

This trend of depicting Israelis as militaristic, cruel, and vengeful is also heard in the Jeremy Bowen (JB) and Lyse Ducet (LD) podcast series, 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza', aired from 10 October 2023 until mid-December 2023.<sup>223</sup>

<sup>223</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza' [Podcast Series]. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0gkff2h/episodes/downloads>.

Podcast date	Quotation
10.10.2023	"Israelis [soldiers and police] ....were levelling their weapons at us" (JB)
10.10.2023	Israel's "highly professional generals"
10.10.2023	"The might of the Israeli army against sometimes ... Hamas far inferior military capacity..." (LD)
11.10.2023	"Israel has started taking its revenge. Israel killed an awful lot of civilians who aren't Hamas people.... They've killed an awful lot of civilians, an awful lot of children in Gaza"
12.10.2023	"hundreds and hundreds and hundreds, maybe in the thousands... of fully loaded combat soldiers in full battle gear. I saw in one field quite a large number of Israeli armoured bulldozers" (JB)
13.10.2023	"crude Qassam rockets ... would cause a little bit of damage... but they were nothing compared to the might of the Israeli army" (LD)

This trend of depicting Israelis as militaristic and cruel continues across the BBC Arabic output.

Date	Quote/Picture/ Video Link
<p><u>What's happening in the West Bank a day after Hamas attacks Israel?</u></p> <p>08.10.2023</p>	<p>This article, published a day after 7 October on BBC Arabic paid little attention to Hamas' attack, but concentrates on Israeli violence:</p> <p><i>"The Israeli forces killed seven Palestinians"</i></p> <p><i>"Our people in Gaza are being subjected to attacks and killing by the Israeli occupation forces"</i></p> <p><i>"...witnessing increasing Israeli raids and Jewish settler attacks on Palestinian villages..."</i></p>

As Hamas terrorists are still active in Israel, BBC Arabic concentrates on destruction in Gaza:



**What is the importance of the Rafah crossing and what is Egypt's position on IDPs from the Gaza Strip seeking refuge in its territory?**

11.10.2023

Four days after October 7th, BBC Arabic focused on Israel's strength:

*'Israel has been launching the most ferocious attacks on the Gaza Strip in its 75-year history'*

*'Israeli armoured vehicles lining up at border points with the besieged Strip in preparation for an attack'*

*'Egyptian aid convoy on its way to Gaza was turned back after Israel threatened to bomb'*

*'the fierce Israeli bombardment'*

*'Israel is an occupying state'*

<p><b><u>Why is the hostage crisis the most difficult task Israel has ever faced?</u></b></p> <p>12.10.2023</p>	<p>Five days after 7 October, BBC Arabic focuses on the IDF's military strength:</p> <p><i>"hundreds of thousands of regular and reserve troops"</i></p> <p><i>"enormous superiority in technology and firepower"</i></p>
<p><b><u>How do Israeli experts evaluate a possible ground attack on Gaza?</u></b></p> <p>14.10.2023</p>	<p><i>'air force has pounded Gaza'</i></p> <p><i>'invasion plans Israel has been preparing for years'</i></p>
<p><b><u>Five wars that Netanyahu has fought in Gaza since Israel's withdrawal from the Strip, so what do we know about them?</u></b></p> <p>04.12.2023</p>	<p>Discussing Israel's wars:</p> <p><i>'massive bombardment'</i></p> <p><i>'heavy shelling'</i></p> <p><i>'forcibly dispersed worshippers'</i></p> <p><i>'Israeli security forces stormed Al-Aqsa Mosque'</i></p>
<p><b><u>The Israeli army informs the United Nations that all residents of northern Gaza must move to its south within 24 hours</u></b></p> <p>13.10.2023</p>	<p>Hamas rockets fired at Israeli citizens are not mentioned. Instead Israeli militarism is emphasised.</p> <p><i>'intensive raids..destruction of entire residential neighbourhoods'</i></p> <p><i>'34 attacks on health care facilities in Gaza'</i></p> <p><i>'Israeli attempts to displace Palestinians from Gaza to Egypt.'</i></p>
	<p>This article examines the effects of Israeli shelling.</p> <p><i>'power outage in Gaza hospitals threatens to turn them into morgues.'</i></p>

<p><u>How was Gaza's infrastructure destroyed?</u></p> <p>13.10.2023</p>	<p><i>'destroying the Strip's civilian infrastructure'</i></p> <p><i>'International Eye Hospital was bombed... bombed the Al-Badrasawi commercial building...opposite Al-Shifa Hospital...was bombed...bombing targeted the Ministry of Health...the Israeli army bombed the Ministry of Communications...the [Rafah] crossing was bombed three times in two days'</i></p>
<p><u>Israeli police attack a BBC team in Tel Aviv</u></p> <p>14.10.2023</p>	<p>BBC Arabic characterises a standard stop-and-search as an <i>'attack'</i>.</p>
<p><u>Opinion poll shows a decline in Netanyahu's popularity since the start of the fighting - Israeli newspapers</u></p> <p>14.10.2023</p>	<p>BBC quoting from Israeli newspapers, selectively, to continue the militaristic theme, with militaristic pictures:</p> <p><i>'Don't hold back Israel while it crushes Hamas'</i></p> <p><i>'Let the IDF take over'</i></p> <p><i>'a severe attack on the terrorists that will make them unable to raise a finger against us again.'</i></p> 



**Al-Shifa Hospital:  
What is happening  
in the largest  
medical complex  
in the Gaza Strip?**

15.11.2023

This article describes the Israeli army taking of Al-Shifa Hospital:

a 'massacre'.

*a flagrant violation of international law'*

*'A crime against humanity'*

*'new levels of horror'*

*Starvation of 'entire populations'*

*'all the buildings around the hospital were completely obliterated'.*

**In Gaza "there is  
no water, no food,  
no medicine, no  
fuel... and money  
is meaningless"**

15.11.2023

Another newspaper round-up describing Gazans as:

*'surrounded by death'.*

The article juxtaposes a picture of a Gazan girl cradled in an adult's arms with a picture of an ultra-orthodox Jew carrying a machine gun, suggesting Jewish civilian violence.





The bottom image has the caption “Settlers tighten their control over the West Bank”.

The picture depicts a man in October 2000 returning from the funeral of a friend murdered by a Palestinian, following destruction of his place of study, also by Palestinians.<sup>224</sup> Using the picture in this context is dishonest.

**“Israel must change its relationship with the Palestinians if**

A further newspaper round-up:

‘Israel's attacks on Hamas have reached *‘unprecedented levels of bloodshed’*.

<sup>224</sup> See

<https://www.gettyimages.com/detail/news-photo/an-armed-ultra-orthodox-jewish-settler-walks-in-the-news-photo/1609023462?adppopup=true>.

<p><b><u>it wants to live” - Haaretz</u></b></p> <p><b>16.11.2023</b></p>	
<p><b><u>World Health: Al-Shifa Hospital in Gaza is a “death zone”</u></b></p> <p><b>19.11.2023</b></p>	<p>This article focuses on Al-Shifa hospital. The title describes a ‘<i>death zone</i>’ complete with ‘<i>mass graves</i>’. The <u>video clip</u> presents a similar perspective:</p> 
<p><b><u>Israel has long wanted to remove the Palestinians from Gaza</u></b></p> <p><b>20.11.2023</b></p>	<p>Israel’s ‘<i>brutal assault</i>’ is evidence of ‘<i>ethnic cleansing</i>’.</p> <p>‘<i>Israel’s ambitions now focus on retaining as much territory as possible and getting rid of as many Palestinians as possible.</i>’</p> <p>‘<i>failed efforts to persuade the Israeli government to make peace with the Palestinians</i>’</p> <p>‘<i>illusion that war and violence against the Palestinians and its overwhelming military power would give it peace and security</i>’</p> <p>‘<i>Ruling with an iron fist</i>’...encouraging ‘<i>migration to Jordan or Latin American countries, Canada, and Australia.</i>’</p>

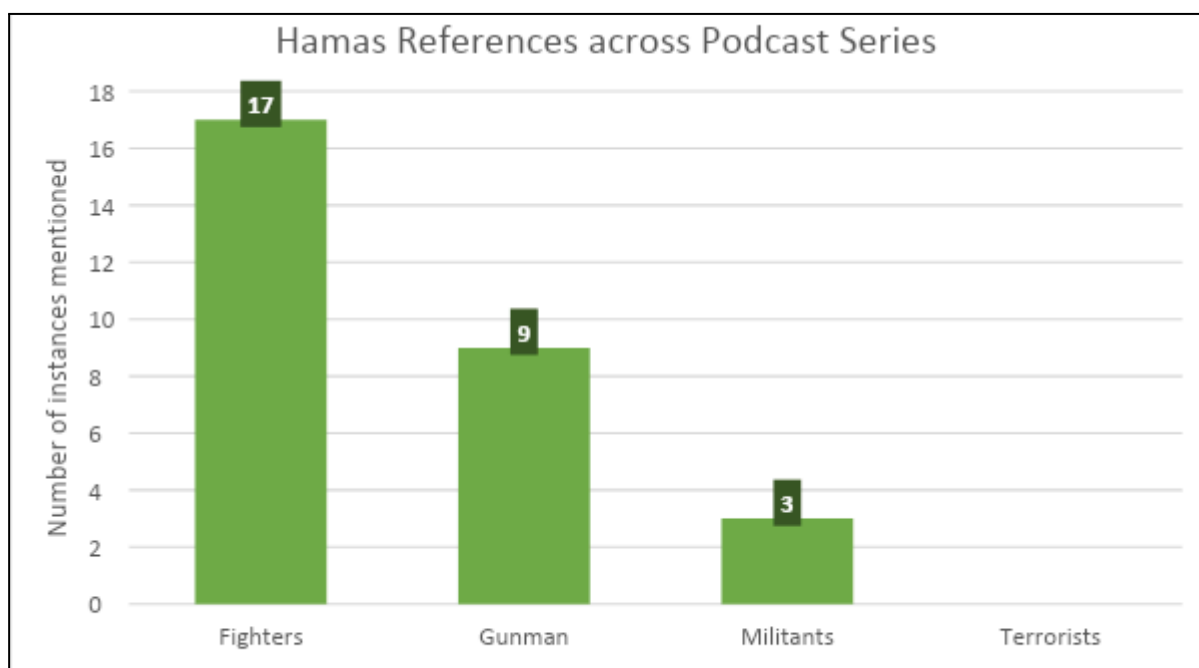
### Trend 3 - Downplaying or excusing acts of terror

The BBC tends to downplay or even to excuse acts of terror by Hamas and its affiliates, suggesting that terror is a legitimate tactic against a stronger foe.

Date	Quote/Picture/ Video Link
<p><u>Israel and Gaza on campus: Tumult at US colleges as two sides dig in</u></p> <p>16.10.2023</p>	<p>Quoting a pro-Palestine student:</p> <p><i>"The attack was a historic moment for the Palestinians of Gaza, who tore through the wall that has been suffocating them in one of the most densely populated areas on Earth."</i></p> <p><i>"Palestinians launched a counter-offensive against their settler-colonial oppressor."</i></p>
<p><u>Week 2: BBC correspondents answer your questions on the conflict between Israel and Hamas</u></p> <p>16.10.2023</p>	<p><i>"A military onslaught can destroy its [Hamas'] metal and concrete but not the mettle of the people whose resolve to die for their cause will only harden."</i></p>
<p><u>Hamas says it is studying proposal for new pause in Gaza fighting</u></p> <p>30.01.2024</p>	<p><i>"During a week-long ceasefire in late November, 105 Israeli and foreign hostages were freed in exchange for 240 Palestinians held in Israeli jails."</i></p> <p>Note moral equivalence of hostages and Palestinian, not mentioning they are either convicted or awaiting trial for alleged serious crimes.</p>

Additionally, through analysis of the BBC 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza' podcast series we have discerned that the BBC correspondents have a tendency to downplay terror. They do this in various ways:

- a. By deciding not to call Hamas terrorists, substituting this description with milder words such as 'gunmen', 'fighters' or 'militants'.
- b. By suggesting that terrorism may be justified by reason of the actions of Israel.
- c. By alleging that Israel is a terrorist state.
- d. By failing to mention the role terrorism has played in causing the Israel-Hamas War.
- e. By downplaying the massacre of October 7 (see Trend 1 above).



Trend	Date of podcast	Quotes/Notes
Failing to refer to Hamas as terrorists	The Conflict erupts into War 10.10.2023	“now on the use of that word ‘terrorist’, it’s not banned by the BBC... I think because it is such a loaded word, and because, as you've said, there are plenty of people in the world who would accuse Israel of state terrorism for all the things that it has done...” (JB)
Hamas as a ‘resistance’ organisation	‘The Kibbutz Killings’ 11.10.2023	“Because apart from anything else, blockading civilians, imposing collective punishments, not treating them as protected people under international humanitarian law, all that is also an abuse and a war crime, according to a reading of the law...”(JB)
Hamas as a ‘resistance’ organisation	The Israel Hostage crisis 13.10.2023	JB explaining the origins of the Israel-Hamas War:  “But I think predominantly, this is an issue about the ever more difficult impoverished conditions in Gaza, the conditions in the occupied West Bank, that fact that Israel continues to exercise control over people’s lives.”
Failing to refer to Hamas as terrorists	Aid and Air raids 19.10.2023	Report on Rishi Sunak’s visit to Israel:  “what he called the horrific acts of terrorism”
Hamas as a ‘resistance’ organisation	The Conflict x Global News Podcast: Two Hostages Released 20.10.2023	JB responds to a listener question re support for Hamas:  “I think Palestinians see it against the backdrop of a long history, a history of occupation, a history they look back to. They...what they call the Nakba, the catastrophe when Israel was created in 1948 and more than 750,000 people became refugees and their...many of their descendants are in Gaza. So it's against that wider context.”

<p><b>Role of terrorism in conflict</b></p>	<p>The Conflict x Global News Podcast: Two Hostages Released</p> <p>20.10.2023</p>	<p>“Rabin... Many believe that the peace process, the hopes for peace, died with him when he was assassinated by a Jewish extremist who didn't like his peace-making” (LD)</p>
<p><b>Hamas as a 'resistance' organisation</b></p>	<p>Inside Gaza: Rushdi Abualouf on reporting in a warzone</p> <p>24.10.2023</p>	<p>“They [Hamas] have big supporters in Gaza. ...they believe Hamas is revenging what Israel has been doing”</p> <p>Abualouf (BBC Journalist)</p>

### Trend 4 - Language tactics and literary devices

Throughout our Reporting Timeframe, we have found that the BBC's use of language in articles and other media uses markedly different language and tone when reporting on Israel/Israelis, than when reporting on Gaza/Palestinians. This has been highlighted in our experiment in Section 11 (Analysis of Description of Casualties) which explores the use of words when describing both the numbers of casualties, and the casualties themselves (e.g. person, as opposed to wife.)

The tendency towards bias across linguistics can be subtle, subjective, and thus difficult to quantify<sup>225</sup>. However we have selected some illustrative quotes.



- i. **Language tactic 1 - Flat, cold or muted language towards Israelis as compared with emotive language for Palestinians**

<sup>225</sup> 'Biased News Media or Biased Readers? An Experiment on Trust', *The New York Times*, 26 September 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/26/upshot/biased-news-media-or-biased-readers-an-experiment-on-trust.html>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

Date	Quotes
News at Ten 01.11.2023	<p><i>"Gaza civilians were being starved, traumatised and bombed to death on the other side of the border wire."</i></p> <p><i>"Israelis are still in shock over the 7th of October attacks."</i></p>
BBC Breakfast 09.11.2023	<p><i>"Israel says military necessity, self-defence. Abeer's view was different, She said it was because of Israel's bombardment, because nowhere was safe, because there was no food or drinking water for the children"</i></p>
BBC Breakfast 09.11.2023	<p><i>"Israel's strategic equation measures the destruction and death it's brought to Palestinians in Gaza, civilians as well as Hamas, against the pain of its own people and the importance of making them feel safe again."</i></p>

Date	Quote/Picture/ Video Link
<p><u>Israel evacuates communities near Lebanon border amid fears of escalation</u></p> <p>16.10.2023</p>	<p>Note Israeli casualties described in flat, non-emotive language:</p> <p><i>"An Israeli civilian and a soldier were killed on Sunday, when anti-tank missiles fired from Lebanon hit one of the villages and a military post."</i></p> <p><i>"A man in his 40s was killed in an anti-tank missile attack on the border village of Shtula."</i></p> <p>Palestinian casualties are described with names and emotive photos:</p> <p><i>"a Reuters news agency cameraman, Issam Abdallah, was killed by shellfire while reporting near the Lebanese village of Alma al-Shaab."</i></p>
<p><u>Israel-Gaza war: Unknown fate of six-year-old Hind Rajab trapped under fire</u></p>	<p><i>"Six-year-old Hind Rajab was trapped under fire in Gaza City and begging for help, hiding inside her uncle's car, surrounded by the bodies of her relatives."</i></p>



05.02.2024	
<p><u>Israel Gaza war: Hamas video claims to show dead hostages</u></p> <p>15.01.2024</p>	<p>Noa, taken hostage, is depicted with a pre-hostage photo, instead of the distressing pictures of her being dragged away.</p> <p>Palestinian victims are depicted with evocative pictures.</p>  <p>226</p> 
<p><u>Israel says war in Gaza expected to continue throughout 2024</u></p> <p>01.01.2024</p>	<p>The article reports about what the future holds, on New Year's Day.</p> <p><i>"Israel continued its bombardment of Gaza up until the end of what has been a dark year in the region"</i></p> <p><i>"The Gaza health ministry reported at least 48 deaths in overnight bombing in Gaza City."</i></p>

<sup>226</sup> Screenshot at 00:41 from video in article illustrating civilians among destruction.



*"In Gaza our skies are now filled with Israeli missiles and tank shells that land on innocent, homeless civilians."*

*"85% of Gaza's 2.4 million people - almost two million - have now been displaced."*

Emotive picture of Palestinian child before a ruined building.



Israelis are described in more militaristic and bombastic fashion:

*"We are fighting on all of the fronts..."*

*"...the war will continue for many more months."*

Bezalel Smotrich is reported to have "called for Palestinians to leave Gaza and make way for Israelis who could "make the desert bloom."

Emotive language to describe Palestinians as "devastated", supported by emotive pictures.

*"Gaza has been devastated by 10 weeks of war"*



**Gaza health ministry says Israeli strikes kill 110 in Jabalia**

**18.12.2023**

ii. Language tactic 2 – Overly inflammatory language used when describing Israel/Israelis

Another literary device noted is the use of inflammatory language critical of Israel.

On 10 November 2023 Macron met Netanyahu. The BBC headline is: ‘Macron calls on Israel to stop killing Gaza’s women and babies’. This suggests that Israel is deliberately targeting civilians, whereas President Macron expressly refused to condemn Israel of war crimes.

The headlines of other publications, including e.g. Al Jazeera, the Guardian and Reuters, are more measured, and less misleading.

Publication	Headline	Strapline
BBC	<u>BBC News: Macron calls on Israel to stop killing Gaza's women and babies</u>	Israel must stop killing babies and women in Gaza, French President Emmanuel Macron has told the BBC.
Al Jazeera	<u>France’s Macron urges Israel to stop bombing and killing civilians in Gaza</u>	The French president says he hopes other leaders, including those in Washington, will join him in his call for a ceasefire.
The Guardian	<u>Macron calls for end to killing of civilians in Gaza as international pressure on Israel grows</u>	French president’s comments come as aid agency Doctors Without Borders says situation at main Gaza hospital ‘catastrophic’
Reuters	<u>France's Macron urges Israel to stop bombing Gaza.</u>	Israel must stop bombing Gaza and killing civilians, French President Emmanuel Macron told the BBC in an interview published late on Friday.

### iii. Language tactic 3 – Hostile questioning and Interruptions

Throughout interviews across TV and radio our human review team highlighted a clear trend where pro-Israel interviewees are interrupted significantly more frequently than pro-Palestinian interviewees.

This Report has not been able to measure the comparative frequency of interruptions across the full Dataset, since we could not identify a programme which could do this reliably. However the following example is, we believe, representative of a trend seen widely.

Taken from BBC's Newsnight programme on 25 October 2023, there was a focus piece with three interviewees: Frances 'Frankie' Leach (Humanitarian Communications Lead, ActionAid), Dan Gillerman (former Israeli ambassador to the United Nations) and Jasmine Al Gamal (former Pentagon advisor).<sup>227</sup> Only Dan Gillerman was favourably disposed towards Israel.

Presenter Mark Urban asks Jasmine and Frankie open questions, for example "how are they working around the conditions that you heard Emma describing in the report there?"

In their first statements, Frankie is interrupted once where the presenter assists her in making her point about Gazan hospitals' use of fuel and generators. Jasmine is interrupted at the end of her statement with the presenter agreeing with her point about aid organisations having to cease their operations due to lack of fuel.

In contrast, Dan is asked an aggressive, closed question - "Dan Gillerman. Let the fuel through. Is it so hard?" The presenter then interrupts Dan eight times, making it clear through his facial expressions, tone of voice and the nature of his frequent interruptions that he disagrees with what Dan is saying.

A second example of hostile questioning and interruptions of a pro-Israel interviewee is found on BBC's Newsnight programme on 11 January 2024.<sup>228</sup> Presenter Victoria Derbyshire begins her interview with Israeli spokesman Eylon Levy by playing a video of South Africa's lawyer at the ICC who claims that Israel is committing genocide. Her

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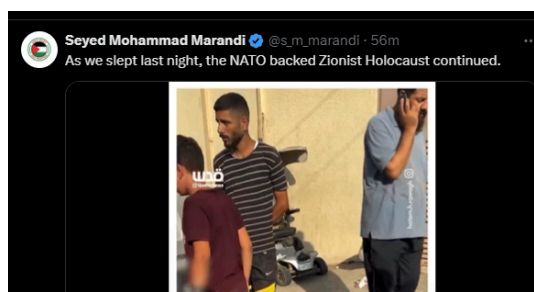
<sup>227</sup> 'Will Fuel Shortage Stop Aid in Gaza?', *BBC TWO & BBC NEWS*, 25 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001rsdz>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>228</sup> 'Will UK and America bomb Yemen?', *BBC TWO & BBC NEWS*, 11 January 2024, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001v65v>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

opening question to Eylon Levy is “...all of that is true, isn't it?” She then interrupts him 11 times during the interview.

This can be contrasted with an interview on the BBC's Radio Today programme on 3 February 2024. This took place with Mohammad Marandi - Iranian government media advisor and professor at the University of Tehran. Mr. Marandi is a controversial figure. He appeared to endorse the stabbing of Salman Rushdie in 2022<sup>229</sup> and holds extreme anti-Israel and anti-western views,<sup>230</sup> including referring to the democratically elected Ukrainian government as “the Kiev-based coup regime”<sup>231</sup>. Yet he is interviewed in two BBC articles and in these articles he is simply described as a Professor at the University of Tehran.<sup>232</sup>

His affiliation with the Iranian government and anti-Western views are not mentioned. Nor his tasteless likening of Israelis to Nazis:



Presenter Amol Rajan's opening question is neutral: “Professor, what do you think the Iranian response will be to what has happened in the last 24 hours?” Marandi is interrupted four times across an interview of 5.5 minutes and in a non-hostile way. This

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<sup>229</sup> 'Marandi: Claims on Bolton assassination, Rushdie attack before nuclear agreement odd news', *Islamic Republic News Agency*, 13 August 2022, <https://en.irna.ir/news/84851460/Marandi-Claims-on-Bolton-assassination-Rushdie-attack-before>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>230</sup> 'Why Trump's small-handed plan to strangle Iran will fail', *Middle East Eye*, 25 May 2018, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/opinion/why-trumps-small-handed-plan-strangle-iran-will-fail>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>231</sup> 'China, Iran and Russia: Restructuring the Global Order', *Al Jazeera*, 20 May 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.com/opinions/2014/5/20/china-iran-and-russia-restructuring-the-global-order>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>232</sup> 'Iran's sudden strikes show just how perilous region has become', *BBC*, 20 January 2024 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68017444>, last accessed 29 August 2024; 'What are routes of out of this 'dangerous Moment' in Middle East?', *BBC*, 3 February 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68167920>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

includes asking him to clarify a question which Marandi didn't answer directly and to ask a new question.

Marandi makes two highly controversial statements. Firstly, regarding the "genocide in Gaza", which the presenter does not challenge, even though the president of the ICJ has publicly confirmed that she made no findings of Genocide.

Secondly, Marandi refers to "10,000 Palestinians hostages in Israeli prisons" and argues that the Israeli hostages should really be seen as prisoners.

This table sets out the contrast between the interviewees, as described above.

<b>Interviewee</b>	<b>Affiliation</b>	<b>Program and Presenter</b>	<b>Nature of questioning</b>	<b>Interruptions</b>
<b>Frankie Leach</b>	Pro-Palestinian	Mark Urban, Newsnight 25.10.2023	Neutral opening question: "how are they working around the conditions that you heard Emma describing in the report there?"	1, where the presenter assists her in making her point
<b>Jasmine Al Gamal</b>	Pro-Palestinian	Mark Urban, Newsnight 25.10.2023	Neutral opening: "Jasmine look Rafah is a crossing point between Egypt and the Gaza Strip. But there seem to be many other people now exerting influence over what and who goes through."	1, presenter agreeing with her point

<p><b>Dan Gillerman</b></p>	<p>Pro-Israel</p>	<p>Mark Urban, Newsnight 25.10.2023</p>	<p>Hostile opening question: "Dan Gillerman. Let the fuel through. Is it so hard?"</p>	<p>8 times, in a hostile manner</p>
<p><b>Eylon Levy</b></p>	<p>Pro-Israel</p>	<p>Victoria Derbyshire, Newsnight 11.01.2024</p>	<p>Hostile opening question: plays video of South Africa's lawyer at the ICC who claims that Israel is committing genocide. Her opening question is: "...all of that is true, isn't it?"</p>	<p>11 times, hostile</p>
<p><b>Mohammad Marandi</b></p>	<p>Pro-Palestinian</p>	<p>Amol Rajan, BBC Radio Today, 03.02.2024</p>	<p>Neutral opening question: "Professor, what do you think the Iranian response will be to what has happened in the last 24 hours?"</p>	<p>4 times, not in a hostile manner</p>

iv. Language tactic 4 – Changing the ‘speaker position’ during reporting

On 25 October 2023, the BBC stated their commitment to:

*“wherever possible, starting an alert, strapline or headline with the source of the claim, rather than the claim itself, especially on contentious claims or reports of deaths. So, instead of ‘Hundreds killed, X claims, we will start ‘X claims hundreds killed.’”<sup>233</sup>*

We ran a search across all headlines for the words kill\* and Gaza. Below are all references we identified of reports of people being killed in Gaza, excluding those referring to a named person or their relatives.

Headline	Speaker Attribution	Speaker Position
Dozens killed as Israeli strikes hit southern Gaza refugee areas	None	n/a
Hospital blast in Gaza City kills hundreds - health officials	Health officials	End
Gaza strikes: Hamas-run health ministry says 700 killed in 24 hours	Hamas-run health ministry	Beginning
Jabalia: Israel air strike reportedly kills dozens at Gaza refugee camp	None	n/a
Red Crescent says 15 killed in strike on Gaza ambulance outside Al-Shifa hospital	Red crescent	Beginning
Gaza health ministry says Israeli strikes kill 110 in Jabalia	Gaza health ministry	Beginning
Israel Gaza: At least 70 reported dead in Israeli strike on Gaza refugee camp	None	n/a
Israel Gaza war: Hamas says 70 killed in Israeli air strike on camp	Hamas	Beginning

<sup>233</sup>How the BBC is covering Israel-Gaza, BBC Media Centre, 25 October 2023.

<https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/articles/2023/how-bbc-is-covering-israel-gaza>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

More than 25,000 now killed in Gaza since Israel offensive began, Hamas-run health ministry says	Hamas-run health ministry	End
Dozens reported killed as battle rages in Gaza's Khan Younis	None	n/a
Israel-Gaza war: IDF says 24 soldiers killed in Gaza in one day	IDF	Beginning
Khan Younis: UN says 12 killed at Gaza shelter as fighting rages	UN	Beginning

In 5/11 cases the BBC follows its own rules; in the other 6 it either breaks its rule - twice - or fails to attribute the story at all - four times. The two breaches both place Hamas at the end.

It is implicit that the BBC accepts the sensitivity of placing the authority for a statement before the statement itself, to enable the reader/listener to evaluate the plausibility of what follows.

### Trend 5 - Reverence for Hamas

The glorification and glamorisation of Hamas is a theme which our BBC review team noticed throughout their human review. The following quotes are taken from BBC English Language Web Articles:

Headline	Speaker Position
<p><u><a href="#">Week 2: BBC correspondents answer your questions on the conflict between Israel and Hamas</a></u></p> <p>16.10.2023</p>	<p>“Hamas's military prowess, including an astonishingly granular understanding of Israeli security that enabled it to outsmart its formidable defences, has shocked Israelis. Hamas is likely to possess the same sophistication when it confronts what it knows will be a ferocious Israeli response.”</p>



UK officials probe Iran generals' anti-Semitic talks to students

22.02.2024



Israel Gaza war: Hamas video claims to show dead hostages

15.01.2024

Discussing returned hostage Noa Argamani, the article seems to praise Hamas, quoting Noa saying:

[Hamas fighters had] 'succeeded in saving my life'.

The possibility that she was forced to say this by Hamas is not raised.

In BBC Arabic, Hamas is regularly depicted as 'Robin Hood' style heroes, with the best interests of the people at heart:

Headline	Speaker Position
<p><u><a href="#">What are the most important developments since the Qassam attack on Saturday and the Israeli bombing of the Gaza Strip?</a></u></p> <p>07.10.2023</p>	<p>On 7 October, the BBC glorifies the achievements of Hamas by reproducing a dramatic Hamas propaganda film, appearing to celebrate the 7th October attack under the heading:</p> <p><u><a href="#">Gaza war What have been the highlights since Hamas launched its attacks</a></u></p>

[What's happening in the West bank a day after Hamas attacks Israel?](#)

08.10.2023

On 8th October, BBC Arabic reports on the celebration of Hamas' achievements, showing street scenes in Ramallah, the West Bank, with celebratory sweets being handed out to passing motorists.

[BBC broadcast a pro-Hamas rally in Ramallah](#)

[This is how social media users reacted to operation 'Noah's flood'](#)

08.10.2023

Also on 8th October, BBC Arabic provided its audience with a range of social media commentary, glorifying the achievements of Hamas and disparaging the anticipated cruelty of Israel. Nothing in the article suggested criticism of Hamas, other than suggesting that Hamas' actions would expose Palestinians to a cruel Israeli retaliation. Quotations include:

*"Oh God, guide their aim and make their feet firm"*

*'There is overwhelming joy and sweets are being distributed'*

*'in support of the Palestinian resistance and in celebration of the settlement conquest'*

*'feelings of joy'*

*'video [clip](#) of a group of students at Qatar Academy performing the Qunut prayer in support of the Palestinian resistance'*

*'the Israeli army will deal with unarmed Palestinians with excessive cruelty and brutality'*

*'Israel's response to #Hamas' adventure will be harsh and painful'*

The piece includes a Hamas propaganda photo:



[What is Hamas and what is happening in Israel and the Gaza Strip?](#)

10.10.2023

Three days after the October 7th attack, the BBC published an information article about Hamas. Their journalist praised the movement, and the work it had carried out three days previously:

*'a spectacular attack'*

*'the most ambitious operation Hamas has ever launched'*

*'it was frankly astonishing'*

The article's visual element primarily consisted of Hamas propaganda images, with 'Hamas' branding.





[What does the release of three hostages by the Qassam Brigades tell us amid the ongoing Israeli military campaign?](#)

12.10.2023



This article includes a picture of Hamas leaders in an apparent moment of triumph. October 7th is described as 'fierce battles' and a 'highly organised operation'.

[How do Israeli experts assess a possible ground attack on Gaza?](#)

14.10.2023

Here Hamas militants are referred to by the BBC as 'soldiers'.

The article carries a further Hamas propaganda picture:



[Gaza is the key to regional developments in the region - Palestinian Days](#)

21.12.2023

This recent newspaper articles selection characterises Hamas as

'resistance fighters'

[Hamas faces] 'invading occupation forces'.

[Gaza War: What Weapons does Hamas have that enable it to confront Israel so far?](#)

26.12.2023

This video from BBC refers to Hamas as an 'army' and commends the 'high capability' of Hamas' weaponry.

[https://drive.google.com/file/d/15HI2KG0ZBE3k8m08AtRwwfpxlMj-b3E/view?usp=drive link](https://drive.google.com/file/d/15HI2KG0ZBE3k8m08AtRwwfpxlMj-b3E/view?usp=drive_link)

[We are the resistance: 'Hamas](#)

This newspaper round-up, whilst outside of our Reporting Timeframe, is cited for its strong admiration of Hamas and alignment with its goal to uproot Israel in its entirety:



[declares defiance' - in the Observer](#)

12.11.2023

'We are the resistance: Hamas declares defiance'



'His eyes **shining** behind the cloth mask he wears on his face...' "We are the resistance to the occupation everywhere."

[Netanyahu has fought five wars in Gaza since Israel's withdrawal from the Strip. What do we know about them?](#)

04.12.2023

This BBC article refers to Hamas and Islamic Jihad as 'resistance movements'.

The lead picture shows Palestinians donning balaclavas, keffiyehs and headbands whilst brandishing guns. Underneath these masked men reads a caption: 'Palestinian fighters captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit...' indicating that the picture is probably from 2006. This seems to be a dishonest use of the picture.



## 13. BBC REPORTERS

### A. Journalist affiliations

**Accuracy Principle 15** – Material supplied by third parties, including news providers, must be treated by the BBC with appropriate caution, taking account of the reputation of the source.

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**Accuracy Principle 16** – the BBC should only use other material supplied by third parties if it is credible and reliable.

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**Accuracy Principle 17** – the BBC should only broadcast material from third parties who may have a personal or professional interest in its subject matter if there is an editorial justification.

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**Accuracy Principle 18** – the BBC should be reluctant to use video and audio or other similar material from third parties.

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**Accuracy Principle 19** – the BBC should normally identify on-air and online sources of information and significant contributors and provide their credentials, so that its audiences can judge their status.

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**Impartiality Principle 26** – BBC presenters, reporters and correspondents may not express personal views on matters of public policy, political or industrial controversy, or on ‘controversial subjects’ in any other area publicly, including in any BBC-branded output or on personal blogs and social media.

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**Impartiality Principle 27** – Appropriate information about the affiliations, funding and particular viewpoints of contributors from other organisations, should be made available to the audience, when relevant to the context.

We have identified various instances of BBC journalists expressing their personal opinions, both during their role as BBC reporters, or in their personal capacity.

We have not found a programme that can analyse each statement by reporters, but provide a selection of examples. Our further analysis of the work of one prominent journalist, Jeremy Bowen, is attached in Schedule 15.

Date	Journalist(s)
16 October 2023	Six BBC Arabic News Reporters were taken off air following social media posts that supported Hamas, including likening Hamas to freedom fighters and describing October 7 as a ‘morning of hope’. <sup>234</sup>
1 March 2024	A BBC Verify piece carried eyewitness testimony from “journalist at the scene” Mahmoud Awadayah, who said to the BBC that “Israelis purposefully fired at the men” (Palestinian civilians). <sup>235</sup> It later transpired that Mr Awadayah has dined with senior Hamas figures, was backed by Iran and was shown celebrating the October 7 massacre. <sup>236</sup>
12 March 2024	<p>Three reporters contributed to a BBC article which detailed how Gaza medics were “beat and humiliated...after hospital raid”.<sup>237</sup></p> <p>The three reporters who contributed to it each had strong personal views which were not revealed by the BBC:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a. Soha Ibrahim - who recently liked a video of Palestine Action activists slashing an oil painting of former British PM Arther Balfour. She also liked a post on October 7 which celebrated ‘the first of the martyrs of the operation’.<sup>238</sup></li> </ol>

<sup>234</sup> ‘BBC Takes Six Reporters Off Air Amid Investigation Into Anti-Israeli Tweets’, *Deadline*, 16 October 2023, <https://deadline.com/2023/10/bbc-reporters-pro-palestine-investigation-1235574551/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>235</sup> ‘What video and eyewitness accounts tell us about Gazans killed around aid convoy’, *BBC Verify*, 1 March 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68445973>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>236</sup> ‘BBC uses account of journalist working for Iran-backed news agency in Palestine deaths article’, *The Telegraph*, 4 March 2024, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/business/2024/03/04/bbc-journalist-working-iran-backed-news-palestine-article/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>237</sup> ‘Gaza medics tell BBC that Israeli troops beat and humiliated them after hospital raid’, *BBC*, 12 March 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-68513408>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>238</sup> ‘BBC to investigate after reporter ‘liked’ pro-Hamas posts’, *The Telegraph*, 17 March 2024, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2024/03/17/bbc-to-investigate-after-reporter-liked-pro-hamas-posts/>, last accessed 29 August 2024.



	<p>b. Marie-Jose Al Azzi – who described Israel as a ‘terrorist apartheid state’ in a post which was subsequently deleted.<sup>239</sup></p> <p>c. Muath Al Khatib - an anti-Israel activist who posted on Facebook (in reference to his holiday in Thailand) “I’m fleeing from the city to the Far East, and I find more Jews than locals on the Island of Ko Pha Ngan.”<sup>240</sup></p>
<p>4 July 2024</p>	<p>BBC Contributor Mayssaa Abdul Khalek, appears on BBC Arabic despite previously calling for “death to Israel”.<sup>241</sup></p> <p>As a story that was previously unveiled in January 2024, where questions were put directly to the BBC about her commentary, Ms. Khalek still appears on BBC Arabic<sup>242</sup>, calling on Arab states to attack Israel and referring to the country as “occupied Palestine”. She publicly defended a fellow journalist colleague who tweeted “if only Hitler was Lebanese,” and “rise, Sir Hitler, rise, there are a few people that need to be burned”.<sup>243</sup></p>

## Conclusions

The BBC turns to a number of freelance journalists and contributors who are locally based in Gaza. In doing this, and as per their BBC Guidelines laid out above, any

<sup>239</sup> ‘BBC plunged into new bias row after journalists behind damning report accusing Israeli soldiers of beating and humiliating medics ‘like’ videos celebrating Hamas terror attacks’, *The Daily Mail*, 16 March 2024, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-13205515/BBC-plunged-new-bias-row-journalists-damning-report-accusing-Israeli-soldiers-beating-humiliating-medics-like-videos-celebrating-Hamas-terror-attacks.html>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>240</sup> Ibid.

<sup>241</sup> ‘Death to Israel’ journalist still used by BBC’, *The Jewish Chronicle*, 4 July 2024, <https://www.thejc.com/news/uk/death-to-israel-journalist-still-employed-by-bbc-mlxkvh1y>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>242</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=33uv6qEkLsQ&t=1037s>

<sup>243</sup> Ibid.

affiliations and/or viewpoints should be disclosed to the public, especially when the subject is controversial or the matter is major. The above is not an exhaustive list.

If the BBC had completed due diligence checks, before associating these 'journalists' with the BBC brand, they may have not given them a platform or at least would have warned their audience of the affiliations.

### B. Journalist personal opinions – Jeremy Bowen

Jeremy Bowen is the International Editor at the BBC. Formerly he was Middle East Editor. He has published books on the Middle East and is an influential journalist of the Middle East at the BBC.<sup>244</sup> Expression by Bowen of his personal views is therefore relevant to the BBC's compliance with its obligation of impartiality.

Bowen's books include 'The Making of the Modern Middle East (2022)' and 'Six Days (2003)'. Bowen will refer audiences to The Making of the Modern Middle East where they seek a detailed understanding of the issues.<sup>245</sup>

#### i. The Making of the Modern Middle East

The Making of the Modern Middle East is a book which provides a partial, biased and one-sided picture. It suggests that Bowen has certain settled and partial views about Israelis and Palestinians, namely:

1. Civil Violence by Palestinians is to be excused and explained, but Civil Violence by Israelis is not;
2. Human suffering by Palestinians is to be described emotively and often; that of Israelis is to be given little space, and described without emotion;
3. Palestinian leaders are to be treated as heroes; Israeli leaders as cruel;
4. Palestinians want to make peace; Israelis do not;

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<sup>244</sup> 'Jeremy Bowen', *Wikipedia The Free Encyclopedia*, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremy\\_Bowen](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jeremy_Bowen) last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>245</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Jeremy Bowen: Inside Gaza' [Podcast], BBC, 9 November 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0grtb2b>.

- 5. Examples of Israeli militarism and attacks deserve mention, those of Palestinians rarely deserve mention;
- 6. Palestinians should not be described as terrorists.

Our comprehensive analysis of *The Making of the Modern Middle East* is contained in Schedule 15. Appendix 6 contains a detailed categorising of quotations from the book, broken down by theme.

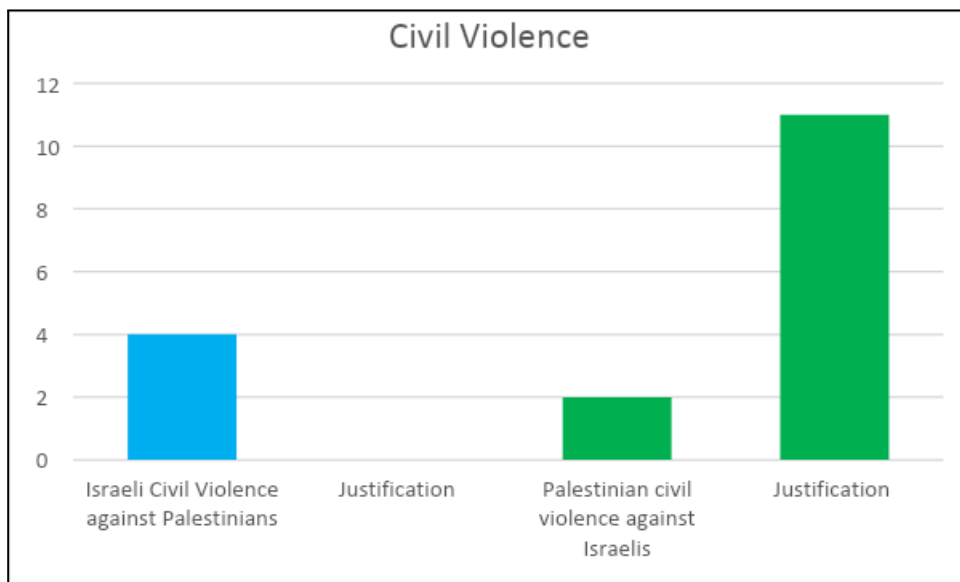
Here we mention a few highlights from that analysis:

**Theme 1 - Civil Violence**

Bowen frequently refers to violence of Israeli civilians against Palestinians and vice versa. We refer to these as references to 'Civil Violence'. The following trends are noted:

- a) There is a higher number of accounts of Israeli Civil Violence against Palestinians. Some accounts of Palestinian Civil Violence have been categorised under 'acts of terrorism'.
- b) There are many instances where Palestinian Civil Violence is justified. Bowen does not seek to justify Israeli Civil Violence.

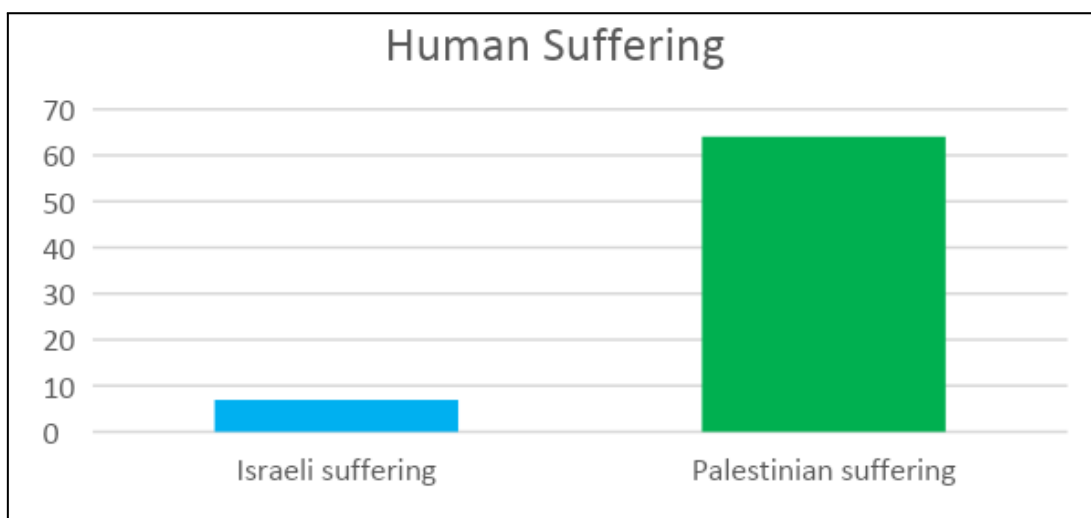
The following graph enumerates all the examples we identified in the book both of mentioning Civil Violence by each side, and of justification for it.



### Theme 2 - Human Suffering

Bowen frequently describes, often in graphic detail, the human suffering caused by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We have noticed the following trends:

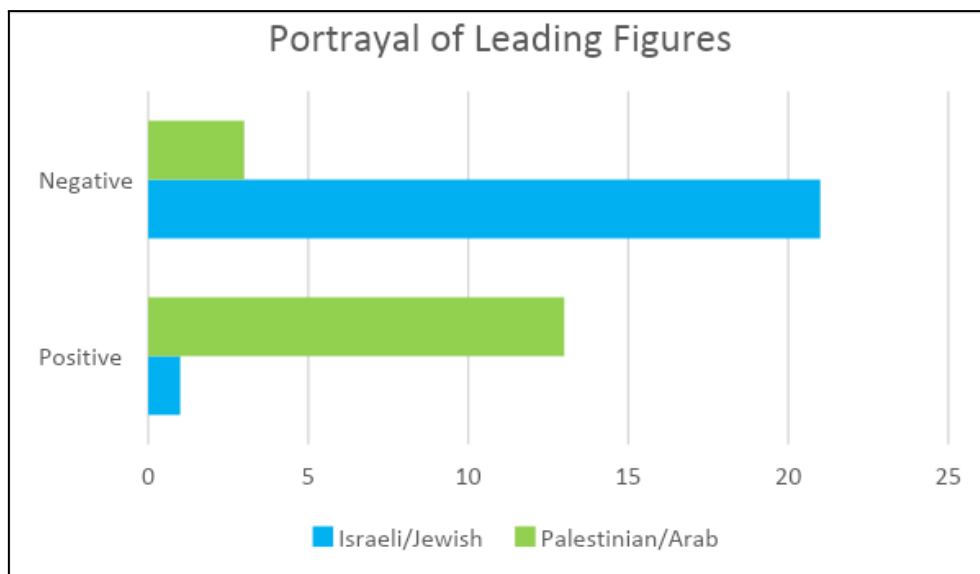
- a) Palestinian suffering is mentioned far more frequently than Israeli suffering. Of those we identified, 90% are Palestinian and only 10% Israeli.
- b) Palestinian suffering is frequently described with emotive language; Israeli suffering is not. There is no description of their lives; how they have been killed; or how their families suffered. These descriptions are reserved for Palestinians.



### Theme 3 - Portrayal of Leading Figures

Bowen frequently describes military, political and civilian leaders from both sides of the conflict. Trends we have noticed include:

- a) Palestinian/Arab leaders are almost invariably described in a positive manner.
- b) Israeli/Jewish leaders are almost always portrayed in a negative way. We identified only one occasion in the book where an Israeli leader was described in a mildly positive way.



### Tendentious History

Generally, as one might expect from an author who appears to reveal a strong personal bias, the historical account which Bowen produces is tendentious and thus unconvincing. For example the fact that Hamas has fired tens of thousands of rockets at Israeli civilians since Israel left Gaza in 2005, is barely mentioned. Many would say that omission or downplaying of such a central fact can turn history into polemic.

It is not the task of this report to seek to argue historical facts with Bowen, however, but merely to note indications of lack of impartiality.

### ii. Bowen’s reporting on the Israel-Hamas War

We present a few key examples of Bowen sharing his own personal opinions with BBC listeners, and then develop those themes.

#### Personal Opinions

Bowen uses expressions such as “many people will say” to express a personal view. On other occasions he will expressly state that he is giving a personal view.

*"Israel has started taking its revenge"*<sup>246</sup>

Bowen quotes no source for suggesting that Israel is seeking revenge'. He appears to be expressing his personal view.

*"But I think those voices of criticism about this [sanctions on Gaza] and accusations of war crimes will get louder."*<sup>247</sup>

Bowen quotes no source. He appears to be expressing a personal view.

*"While Israel can be criticised quite heavily, and many people would say quite reasonably, for breaking international law, ... they would deny it, but many people would say [Israel is] not trying hard enough to fulfil their obligations or international law to preserve the lives of Palestinian civilians as they go about their military business."*<sup>248</sup>

*"So that also adds to the accusation that... Israel itself is not respecting, many people would say, the laws of war."*<sup>249</sup>

Bowen has no source for what he says "many people would say". He again appears to be expressing his personal view.

*"So you know I think the Israelis have decided this is the way they're going to do it and they will continue."*<sup>250</sup>

Bowen expressly states that he is giving his personal opinion.

We now look at other themes within Bowen's work.

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<sup>246</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Kibbutz Killings' [Podcast], BBC, 11 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0gkpgw7>.

<sup>247</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Gaza without Power' [Podcast], BBC, 12 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0gkyxmm>.

<sup>248</sup> 'The Conflict x Global News Podcast: Two Hostages Released', BBC, 20 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gmx2ps>.

<sup>249</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Kibbutz Killings' [Podcast], BBC, 11 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0gkpgw7>.

<sup>250</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Israel-Gaza War intensifies' [Podcast], BBC, 6 December 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gy3n40>.

### Theme 1 - Coverage of 7 October Attack

We start with an analysis of Bowen's broadcast on 7 October 2023 as the Hamas attack was still being brought under control by the IDF.

On 7 October, Bowen publishes an article that describes the Hamas attack in almost glowing terms:

*"Hamas blindsides Israel... the most ambitious operation Hamas has ever launched.... Serious cross-border attack ... The complexity of the Hamas operation ... No one expected Hamas to conceive and meticulously plan such a complex and coordinated operation out of Gaza..... Israeli intelligence was blindsided by the Hamas operation."*<sup>251</sup>

Bowen's 7 October article fails to unambiguously report that Hamas killed any Israelis and omits any mention of the brutality of the Hamas attack. Bowen reports that there are videos of dead Israelis, without explaining if the videos are true, or how these Israelis came to be dead:

*"Videos and photos of dead Israelis, civilians as well as soldiers, are all over social media."*<sup>252</sup>

In contrast, Israel's airstrikes on Gaza are described in clearer terms:

*"Within hours Israel was responding with air strikes into Gaza, killing many Palestinians."*<sup>253</sup>

The fact that 240 hostages were taken to Gaza is not clearly stated, but implied in the context of describing Israelis as 'enraged':

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<sup>251</sup> 'Hamas blindsides Israel with most serious attack in a generation', BBC News, 7 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67041679>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>252</sup> Ibid.

<sup>253</sup> Ibid.

*"Other videos of armed men from Hamas hauling soldiers and civilians into captivity in Gaza have enraged and alarmed Israelis."*<sup>254</sup>

In the same article on the 7th October, Bowen did not describe Hamas' brutality. But deaths and violence caused by Israeli civilians were described and criticised:

*"Armed settlers have taken the law into their own hands, with reprisals against Palestinian villages."*<sup>255</sup>

*"Israel was responding with air strikes into Gaza, killing many Palestinians."*<sup>256</sup>

Israeli violence is depicted with a picture of weeping Palestinians looking at a destroyed building. Hamas' as yet unmentioned brutality is nevertheless explained away:

*" Hamas has said it acted because of threats to Jerusalem's mosques" [excusing the 7 October attack].*<sup>257</sup>

Three days later Bowen stresses the callousness of Israelis:

*"The bodies of dead Hamas gunmen who killed so many of them have been left rotting in the sun, lying uncovered where they were killed in bushes and ditches and the broad lawns of the kibbutz."*<sup>258</sup>

Bowen generally excuses Hamas terrorist activities:

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<sup>254</sup> Ibid.

<sup>255</sup> Ibid.

<sup>256</sup> Ibid.

<sup>257</sup> Ibid.

<sup>258</sup> 'Inside Kfar Aza where Hamas militants killed families in their homes', BBC News, 11 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67065205>, last accessed 29 August 2024.



*" Hamas will try to use hit-and run-guerrilla tactics against a much more powerful army."<sup>259</sup>*

*"The essence of asymmetric warfare, the weak against the strong, a small organisation like Hamas against a great big standing army like Israel's, is that they have to leverage the things that they can leverage in terms of trying to get an edge."<sup>260</sup>*

[Explaining use of schools and hospitals as command centres].

*"For Hamas, it is the fight to survive. As long as a Hamas gunman can pull a trigger or launch a rocket into Israel it will claim to be undefeated."<sup>261</sup>*

*"They've [Israel] killed an awful lot of civilians who aren't Hamas people, probably killed Hamas people too .... But you can see from the rapidly rising death toll that they [Israel] are killing a lot of people who are not Hamas types."<sup>262</sup>*

*" Hamas released a video of their men fighting in the streets of Gaza. They know they can't win a pitched battle, so they're using hit and run tactics"<sup>263</sup>*

### Theme 2 - Civil Violence - Glorifying/Excusing Terror

There are many instances where Palestinian violence is justified or even glorified by Bowen. We have not identified any occasion when Bowen seeks to justify violence by Israelis.

Hamas is admired as an underdog:

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<sup>259</sup> 'BBC News at Ten', BBC One, 31 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001s0sm>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>260</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Jeremy Bowen: Inside Gaza' [Podcast], BBC, 9 November 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0grtb2b>.

<sup>261</sup> 'Bowen: US sets clearer red lines for Israel as ceasefire ends', BBC, 2 December 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67579364>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>262</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Kibbutz Killings' [Podcast], BBC, 11 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0gkpw7>.

<sup>263</sup> 'BBC News at Ten', BBC One, 7 November 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001f0q5>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

*"I saw the huge amount of force that they [Israel] have there and the massive amount of physical damage they've done, not to mention the loss of life. But despite all of that, Hamas are still fighting."*<sup>264</sup>

Hamas is compared with the underdog in the Ukraine/Russia war, describing Hamas bomb factories as:

*"Hamas will try to use hit and run guerrilla tactics against a much more powerful army"*<sup>265</sup>

*"taking a leaf out of where you see videos from Ukraine"*<sup>266</sup>

### Theme 3 - Human Suffering

Bowen frequently describes in graphic detail the human suffering caused by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We note the following trends:

- a. Palestinian suffering is mentioned far more frequently than Israeli suffering. Of those references to suffering we identified, 90% are Palestinian and only 10% Israeli.
- b. Palestinian suffering is often described with emotive language; Israeli suffering is downplayed.
- c. Israelis are depicted as cruel or callous.

*"Since Israel went on the offensive, they've killed an awful lot of civilians who aren't Hamas people... an awful lot of children in Gaza"*<sup>267</sup>

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<sup>264</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Israel-Gaza War intensifies' [Podcast], BBC, 6 December 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gy3n40>.

<sup>265</sup> 'BBC News at Ten', BBC One, 31 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001s0sm>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>266</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Jeremy Bowen: Inside Gaza' [Podcast], 9 November 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0grtb2b>.

<sup>267</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Kibbutz Killings' [Podcast], BBC, 11 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0gkpw7>.

*"Because apart from anything else, blockading civilians, imposing collective punishments, not treating them as protected people under international humanitarian law, all that is also an abuse and a war crime, according to a reading of the law."<sup>268</sup>*

*"And it has to be said too that imposing sanctions like this on a civilian population, causing them strong levels of suffering. Now that's something that international law has something to say about. You're not meant to do it."<sup>269</sup>*

*"Gaza civilians were being starved, traumatised and bombed to death on the other side of the border wire."<sup>270</sup>*

*"They [Israeli soldiers] were pretty excited, these young guys, about what they were going into, I think. You see, there was a lot of bravado."<sup>271</sup>*

*"Israel is on holiday. Schools are out, and away from the frontline areas the shopping centres are full. Cake shops are bursting with the doughnuts that Jews like to eat during Hanukkah, the current religious festival."<sup>272</sup>*

### Theme 4 - Portrayal of Leading Figures

Israeli leaders are described as vengeful and violent and Israelis disliking peace. Hamas leaders are praised as peace-loving.

*"At the very beginning of all this Benjamin Netanyahu talked about a mighty vengeance. I think that was the phrase he used. And now he's talking about using overwhelming force."<sup>273</sup>*

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<sup>268</sup> Ibid.

<sup>269</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Gaza without Power' [Podcast], BBC, 12 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0gkyxmm>.

<sup>270</sup> 'BBC News at Ten', BBC One, 1 November 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001s15z>, last accessed 2 September 2024.

<sup>271</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Jeremy Bowen: Inside Gaza' [Podcast], BBC, 9 November 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0grtb2b>.

<sup>272</sup> 'Israel determined to finish Gaza operation despite civilian suffering', BBC, 12 December 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67691219>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>273</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Israel-Gaza War intensifies' [Podcast], BBC, 6 December 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gy3n40>.

*"Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin was assassinated by a Jewish extremist in 1995 when he tried to make peace with the Palestinians."<sup>274</sup>*

### Theme 5 - Attitudes to peace

Bowen tends to see Palestinians as seeking peace, and Israelis rejecting it:

*"Palestinians talk about a rerun of the Nakba...they're saying it's all the Israelis want to have it happen again. And you look around there and whatever Israel says, you can see why they think like that, because the areas where they lived are absolutely in ruins."<sup>275</sup>*

*"So the two sides could not be further apart. And you know, that's a recipe for years of crisis after this if there is no political solution, which is of course what the Americans want and which, for the time being anyway, Netanyahu said. Absolutely not."<sup>276</sup>*

*"The only way out of this for the US/UK and others is an independent Palestine alongside Israel, an old idea that two decades of talks could not deliver. The horrors of the last month and those to come will make it even harder to achieve."<sup>277</sup>*

*"Israelis even talk about in the future once they've defeated Hamas, a deradicalization phase in which they will deradicalise the Gaza Strip. They're making an awful lot of enemies."<sup>278</sup>*

### Theme 6 - Military strength

Bowen stresses Israel's overwhelming military strength and portrays it as uncaring, callous, cruel and genocidal. Palestinians are the plucky and clever if weaker opponents.

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<sup>274</sup> 'Israel-Gaza war: What is the price of peace?', *BBC News*, 14 December 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67701700>, last accessed 2 September 2024.

<sup>275</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Jeremy Bowen: Inside Gaza' [Podcast], *BBC*, 9 November 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0grtb2b>.

<sup>276</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Israel-Gaza War intensifies' [Podcast], *BBC*, 6 December 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gy3n40>.

<sup>277</sup> 'BBC News at Ten', *BBC One*, 6 November 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001s752>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>278</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Israel-Gaza War intensifies' [Podcast], *BBC*, 6 December 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gy3n40>.

*"...blockading civilians, imposing collective punishments, not treating them as protected people".<sup>279</sup>*

*"Israeli soldiers – dealing with the Western media... they were levelling their weapons at us"<sup>280</sup>*

*'Plenty of people in the world who would accuse Israel of state terrorism'<sup>281</sup>*

*Gaza is "really being hammered tonight"<sup>282</sup>*

*"Some of the Palestinian dead would have been part of Hamas. But even if that proportion is as high as 10%, which is unlikely, it means that Israel is on course to have killed as many Palestinian civilians in just over a month as Russia has killed in Ukraine since February 2022"<sup>283</sup>*

*"...that the essence of asymmetric warfare, the weak against the strong, a small organisation like Hamas against a great big standing army like Israel's, is that they have to leverage the things that they can leverage in terms of trying to get an edge."<sup>284</sup>*

*"I think they have gone in - as we can see from the levels of casualties in Gaza - using a great deal of force."<sup>285</sup>*

*"It was like stepping into a wasteland. No civilians, massive damage... roads torn up.. it had all been smashed away... burnt out. Smashed, I'd say probably never again habitable...I've seen a lot of destruction in a lot of countries. And this is right up with some of the most destroyed places....the Israelis have done it in what, just over a month".<sup>286</sup>*

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<sup>279</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Kibbutz Killings' [Podcast], BBC, 11 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0gkpw7>.

<sup>280</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Conflict erupts into War' [Podcast], BBC, 10 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gkhg3w>.

<sup>281</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Conflict erupts into War' [Podcast], BBC, 10 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gkhg3w>.

<sup>282</sup> 'BBC News at Ten', BBC One, 25 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001rsr4>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>283</sup> 'Bowen: Five new realities after four weeks of Israel-Gaza war', BBC News, 3 November 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67306902>, last accessed 2 September 2024.

<sup>284</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Jeremy Bowen: Inside Gaza' [Podcast], BBC, 9 November 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0grtb2b>.

<sup>285</sup> 'Bowen: Al-Shifa Hospital raid comes as tone shifts on Israel', BBC News, 15 November 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67426546>, last accessed 2 September 2024.

<sup>286</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Jeremy Bowen: Inside Gaza' [Podcast], BBC, 9 November 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0grtb2b>.

*"For Hamas, it is the fight to survive. As long as a Hamas gunman can pull a trigger or launch a rocket into Israel it will claim to be undefeated."*<sup>287</sup>

*"Now they believe ... that these are genocidal attacks, that's the word they use, by Israel, and that they're trying to recreate a second Nakba"*<sup>288</sup>

*"Israel determined to finish Gaza operation despite civilian suffering."*<sup>289</sup>

*"This is the thing about this military operation [of] the Israelis...it's going to be very nasty."*<sup>290</sup>

### Theme 7 - Revenge

Bowen ascribes a motive of 'revenge' and 'rage' to Israelis suggesting that Israel is motivated by uncontrolled emotions rather than considered war aims.

*"Though of course now Israel has started taking its revenge"*<sup>291</sup>

*"You can see from the rapidly rising death toll that they are killing a lot of people who are not Hamas types...."*<sup>292</sup>

*"...blockading civilians, imposing collective punishments, not treating them as protected people"*<sup>293</sup>

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<sup>287</sup> 'Bowen: US sets clearer red lines for Israel as ceasefire ends', *BBC News*, 2 December 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67579364>, last accessed 2 September 2024.

<sup>288</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Israel-Gaza War intensifies' [Podcast], *BBC*, 6 December 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gy3n40>.

<sup>289</sup> 'Israel determined to finish Gaza operation despite civilian suffering', *BBC*, 12 December 2023, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-67691219>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>290</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Confusion at the Rafah Crossing' [Podcast], *BBC*, 16 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0glxh5j>.

<sup>291</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Kibbutz Killings' [Podcast], *BBC*, 11 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p0gkpw7>.

<sup>292</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>293</sup> *Ibid.*

*"The dead man's friends and family feared Israel's rage and revenge."*<sup>294</sup>

*"Israel's pounding of Gaza has not stopped, neither has its rage diminished."*<sup>295</sup>

### Theme 8 – Hamas' use of human shields

Bowen goes to some lengths to argue away evidence that Hamas uses human shields:<sup>296</sup>

*"it's not a convincing story", [because the] "huge numbers of [killed] civilians...they can't all have been human shields!" "we don't know anything about the family." ... "three small pink beds .... three little girls .... maybe he [the Gazan civilian] wasn't an entirely willing resident of that building."*<sup>297</sup> [about a rocket launcher found in a child's bedroom]

*"[I am] not trying to defend Hamas" .... "a small organisation like Hamas against a great big standing army like Israel's have to leverage the things that they can leverage in terms of trying to get an edge."*<sup>298</sup>

Bowen seeks to explain his scepticism:

*"In this war, when you deal with the claims of any side, you have to approach it with massive scepticism in terms of the things that they're trying to say because they are trying to make political points constantly."*<sup>299</sup>

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<sup>294</sup> 'BBC News at Ten', BBC One, 24 October 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001rsw7>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>295</sup> 'BBC News at Ten', BBC One, 7 November 2023, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/m001s7s1>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>296</sup> Jeremy Bowen's Gaza notebook: I saw no evidence of Hamas using Palestinians as human shields', *The New Statesman*, 24 July 2014.

<https://www.newstatesman.com/world/2014/07/jeremy-bowens-gaza-notebook-i-saw-no-evidence-hamas-using-palestinians-human>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>297</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. Jeremy Bowen: Inside Gaza' [Podcast], BBC, 9 November 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0grtb2b>.

<sup>298</sup> Ibid.

<sup>299</sup> Ibid.



### Bowen's view of Impartiality

Bowen appears to believe that it is not necessary to set out both sides of an argument. Rather, he believes that if he reports what he considers to be the truth, then he has fulfilled his obligation to report impartially.

*"impartial reporting means you do not say on the one hand, on the other hand, and the truth lies somewhere in between. You work out what's going on and for me impartiality equals truthful reporting."*<sup>300</sup>

*"And the evidence up until now – those piles of Kalashnikovs and so on – frankly is not convincing. The Middle East...wherever you go in the Middle East you see an awful lot of Kalashnikovs and it's not inconceivable that...I don't know ...perhaps the security department of the hospital might have them; certainly the police do. And so the Israelis may get the proof that they want – they've found this tunnel entrance – but so far they haven't." [JB commenting on the discovery of weapons at Al Shifa hospital.]*<sup>301</sup>

### Jeremy Bowen - Concluding Remarks

On the basis of the above quotations both from his BBC reporting and from his book *The Making of the Modern Middle East* (see Schedule 15 and Appendix 6), Bowen gives the impression of being materially partial towards Palestinians and materially antithetical towards Israelis,

We do not challenge Bowen's right to hold such views. But the BBC Guidelines prohibit him from expressing them as part of his BBC reporting, or even in other public works: "All individuals involved in the production or presentation of editorial output for the BBC may wish to undertake external work, including writing articles, or books, or for publications on websites. Such activity should not risk compromising the impartiality or integrity of the BBC or its content or risk damaging the reputation of the BBC."<sup>302</sup>

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<sup>300</sup> 'The Conflict: Israel-Gaza. The Conflict erupts into War' [Podcast], BBC, 10 October 2023. Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/sounds/play/p0gkhg3w>.

<sup>301</sup> BBC News, 17 November 2023, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EDsy-83rgdE&t=56s>, last accessed 29 August 2024.

<sup>302</sup> BBC Guidelines 15.3.26. See also BBC Guidelines 15.3.27.



We consider that Bowen is in frequent and clear breach of the BBC Guidelines, and in fact freely expresses his personal opinions both directly and by selection of what he chooses to praise and what he chooses to criticise.

Given his seniority, it is reasonable to assume that Bowen sets an example and has considerable influence on other junior and less experienced BBC reporters on the Middle East. It is hard to see how the BBC can expect to comply with its obligations of impartiality while Bowen expresses his apparent bias so clearly, freely and frequently.

## 14. BBC COMPLAINTS FRAMEWORK

### i. Complaints are Almost Always Rejected

The BBC boasts, of its Complaints Procedure, that *“We greatly value this feedback about our work and use it to help make our services better.”*<sup>303</sup>

In reality few complaints are accepted. In the five-year period between 2018 and 2022, there were 1.7 million complaints received by the BBC. Ofcom research in 2022 found that 39% of complaints were about bias. Extrapolating this number, over 5 years there were c.663,000 individual complaints about bias. Of these, just 25 were upheld.<sup>304</sup> This is a rate of 0.00377%.

According to the BBC Group Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24, of 594 editorial complaints made to the BBC’s Executive Complaints Unit (ECU), the ECU found the BBC to be in breach of the BBC Guidelines on 35 occasions.<sup>305</sup> This is a rate of 5.89%.

A complaint about bias or accuracy is close to pointless.

By rejecting almost all complaints, the BBC Complaints Procedure provides little remedy for aggrieved audience members. This encourages complacency about its own shortcomings.<sup>306</sup>

Additionally, while Ofcom has supervisory and enforcement powers over BBC radio and television output, it has no enforcement authority over online material.

In Schedule 3, we set out a short note on some of the defects within the BBC Complaints Procedure showing how it breaches the rules of natural justice and is generally unfit for purpose.

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<sup>303</sup> ‘BBC Complaints Framework and Procedures’, BBC, June 2020, available at [https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/sites/default/files/2020-06/BBC\\_Complaints\\_Framework.pdf](https://www.bbc.co.uk/contact/sites/default/files/2020-06/BBC_Complaints_Framework.pdf).

<sup>304</sup> ‘BBC upheld just 25 complaints of bias in five years’, *The Telegraph*, 5 June 2023, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2023/06/05/bbc-coimplaints-bias-25-upheld-out-of-17m-report/>

<sup>305</sup> ‘BBC Group Annual Report and Accounts 2023/24’, 24 July 2024, available at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/bbc-group-annual-report-and-accounts-for-2023-to-2024>.

<sup>306</sup> [Complaints Procedure](#)

## 15. RECOMMENDATIONS

### 1. Previous Reports re Impartiality at the BBC

This Report is not the first time that the BBC has been criticised for serious breaches of its obligations to broadcast in an impartial manner, breaches which we believe lead to systemic bias.

The Thomas Report in 2005 listed numerous management failures which led to “*imbalances in coverage*”.<sup>307</sup> More recently the Serota Review of 2021<sup>308</sup> found that “*individuals, including high profile and senior staff, have not always been held to account for breaching editorial standards.*”<sup>309</sup>

This Report into the BBC’s coverage of the Israel-Hamas War likewise finds numerous breaches of the BBC’s Editorial Guidelines and a systemic failure to comply with the obligation of impartiality.

### 2. Systematic Failure

The BBC Editorial Guidelines demand that the BBC produce duly accurate and impartial reporting. We believe that, what lies at the heart of the findings of this Report is a failure by BBC management, editorial staff and journalists, to absorb, apply, monitor and enforce the Editorial Guidelines in a systematic manner.

The lack of systematic monitoring and application of the BBC Editorial Guidelines was identified by the Thomas Report, which found:

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<sup>307</sup> Sir Quentin Thomas et al., ‘Report of the Independent Panel for the BBC Governors on Impartiality of BBC Coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict’, BBC, April 2006, Paragraph 1.10 (b). Available at [https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our\\_work/governors\\_archive/impartiality.html](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our_work/governors_archive/impartiality.html).

<sup>308</sup> ‘The Serota Review – BBC editorial processes, governance, and culture’ [Report], BBC, October 2021, Paragraph 9. Available at <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/reports/the-serota-review.pdf>.

<sup>309</sup> The Balen Report in 2004 is widely understood to have revealed anti-Israel bias but was never published. BBC senior management has also been criticised for failing to enforce the Editorial Guidelines in both the Hutton Report in 2003 and again in the Dyson Report in 2021. But these reports, whilst highlighting serious management failures, were not principally concerned with issues of impartiality.

*“5.17 The BBC's culture is deeply committed to the attainment of the objectives of the accurate, impartial, fair and balanced representation of news....[however] it has undeveloped systems to manage and monitor its performance in this respect.”*

*“5.18 ...there seems to be, for example, no clear policy on how news frames are selected, and no mechanism to monitor the results; there is no systematic way of monitoring the balance achieved by documentaries across the full range of BBC output; and there is no central log of the external experts deployed in programmes, and no coherent effort to ensure that their qualifications and antecedents are properly exposed to the audience.”<sup>310</sup>*

We have detected no evidence that these lessons have been adequately taken on board by the BBC and believe that the concomitant results of this lack of oversight are responsible for many of the failings which we have identified.

### 3. Thematic Review re Israel-Palestine and the Middle East

The Serota Review recommended thematic reviews in key areas:

*“Recommendation 2 – The BBC Board should commission regular thematic reviews in key areas of public debate to assess whether the BBC has met its editorial standards, and should publish its findings.”<sup>311</sup>*

In response, in October 2021, the BBC unveiled its “10 Point Impartiality Action Plan”,<sup>312</sup> adopting the recommendations of the Serota Review.

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<sup>310</sup> Sir Quentin Thomas et al., ‘Report of the Independent Panel for the BBC Governors on Impartiality of BBC Coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict’, BBC, April 2006, Paragraphs 5.17, 5.18. Available at [https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our\\_work/governors\\_archive/impartiality.html](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our_work/governors_archive/impartiality.html).

<sup>311</sup> ‘The Serota Review – BBC editorial processes, governance, and culture’ [Report], BBC, October 2021, Paragraph 10. Available at <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/reports/the-serota-review.pdf>.

<sup>312</sup> ‘BBC unveils ‘significant’ 10-point impartiality plan’, BBC, 29 October 2021. <https://www.bbc.com/news/entertainment-arts-59088800>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

To date it has conducted two thematic reviews. The Review into “taxation, public spending, government borrowing and debt” in January 2023<sup>313</sup> and a review on the subject of “migration” in May 2023.<sup>314</sup>

We believe that a thematic review on the handling of the Israeli-Palestine conflict and reporting on the Middle East is now urgently needed.

#### 4. The Need for Key Performance Indicators

The BBC has set key performance indicators (KPIs) around achieving diversity objectives, in relation to which it has issued reports.<sup>315</sup> BBC producers and editors have detailed KPIs to encourage them and to reward them for putting diversity high on their priority list. We have not found evidence of systems in place to ensure appropriate diversity of political views within the BBC.

We believe that KPIs should also now be set for meeting the BBC Editorial Guidelines generally, and in particular when reporting on controversial and major matters such as the Israel-Palestine conflict. Quantitative and qualitative language analysis tools are widely available and can produce results in real-time.

The mere setting of KPIs is of course insufficient. Flexible and appropriate systems need to be devised to monitor the meeting of KPIs, and to render employees accountable. Persistent failure to meet KPIs must have consequences for staff at all levels and be career limiting.

This recommendation was hinted at in the Thomas Report:

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<sup>313</sup> ‘BBC publishes thematic review into taxation, public spending, government borrowing and debt output’, *BBC Media Centre*, 30 January 2023. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/mediacentre/2023/thematic-review-taxation-public-spending-govt-borrowing-debt-output>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>314</sup> ‘BBC confirms thematic review into migration output’, *BBC Media Centre*. Available at <https://www.bbc.com/mediacentre/2023/bbc-confirms-thematic-review-migration-output>, last accessed 1 September 2024.

<sup>315</sup> See *Workforce Diversity & Inclusion Reports*, available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/diversity/reports/>.

*"5.21 ... our recommendation... [is]... for more secure editorial planning, grip and oversight."<sup>316</sup>*

The Serota Review made a similar recommendation in more robust and concrete terms:

*"... the BBC should monitor performance and acknowledge best practice through the staff survey, the Senior Leadership Index or other appraisal systems. The BBC should give editorial values greater prominence in corporate communications, recruitment, and training and make it clear that deliberate or negligent breaches of a serious nature, or attempts to conceal them, will result in disciplinary action or dismissal."<sup>317</sup>*

We believe that our Report has demonstrated the urgency of dealing with this systemic failure and the need for the BBC to develop and apply robust management tools which can ensure compliance with the BBC Editorial Guidelines.

### 5. The Editorial Complaints Unit (ECU)

One important management tool should be feedback from the public. But many viewers we have spoken with have been frustrated at the BBC's lack of transparency and unwillingness to accept allegations of bias. The Editorial Complaints Unit (ECU) is opaque in its workings and we believe that it is unfit for purpose.

At present the ECU is ultimately answerable to the Director-General, who is the Editor-in-Chief of the BBC. The very structure is liable to create the appearance of bias, and we believe the output tends to support that. If the ECU is to provide helpful feedback to the BBC, and also to increase public confidence in its operation, it needs to be physically and structurally taken outside the control of the BBC editorial system and be given real independence. Only then can the ECU start to regain the trust of audiences.

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<sup>316</sup> Sir Quentin Thomas et al., 'Report of the Independent Panel for the BBC Governors on Impartiality of BBC Coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict', BBC, April 2006, Paragraphs 1.14, 5.21. Available at [https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our\\_work/governors\\_archive/impartiality.html](https://www.bbc.co.uk/bbctrust/our_work/governors_archive/impartiality.html).

<sup>317</sup> 'The Serota Review – BBC editorial processes, governance, and culture' [Report], BBC, October 2021, Paragraph 9, Recommendation 1. Available at <https://downloads.bbc.co.uk/aboutthebbc/reports/rports/the-serota-review.pdf>.

## 6. Why does the BBC Exist

We have devoted this study to BBC coverage of the Israel-Hamas War. But we strongly suspect that the problems we have highlighted are present in the way the BBC covers other controversial and important topics.

If, as we posit, the BBC lacks the management tools and systems to monitor its adherence to its own Editorial Guidelines, then it is most improbable that the BBC is meeting those standards consistently in any field. Where it does meet them, it will be by mere happenstance. That is no way to run a serious news organisation.

The BBC receives nearly £4bn annually from the British public through the license fee. This can only be justified if the BBC is truly impartial and if its reporting is not captured by either side of an argument.

If the BBC is to continue to justify its existence, we believe that it must take material steps to address the shortcomings highlighted by this Report.

[TREVOR ASSERSON](#)

September 2024

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A list of other contributors to the project appears at Schedule 1.

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