

BBC Hands Airwaves Over to Israel's Minister for War

By [Amena Saleem](#)

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Moshe Yaalon poses for a photo with notorious racist blogger Pamela Geller. ([Wikipedia](#))

The writer and journalist, [Karl Sabbagh](#), posed an interesting question this month.

[Writing on the current affairs website, Al Araby](#), Sabbagh asked: "British journalists are among the best and most skeptical in the world. Why then, with a few honorable exceptions, do they fail to be skeptical when comes to Israel?"

The question was especially pertinent in light of [an egregious interview](#) conducted by senior BBC presenter, Sarah Montague, just two weeks earlier, with Israel's "defense" minister [Moshe Yaalon](#).

Montague was interviewing Yaalon on the BBC's flagship radio news program, *Today*, in the week of Benjamin Netanyahu's election victory, a victory which followed his very public [declaration that there would be no Palestinian state](#) if he was returned to power.

But Montague didn't probe and challenge Yaalon on whether his prime minister's declaration has highlighted Israel's contempt for international law, for the so-called peace process, and revealed a desire to remain indefinitely as an illegal occupier of Palestinian land. She didn't ask him if Netanyahu's admission means that Israel can no longer be viewed as a "partner for peace" by its Western allies.

Instead, this senior BBC presenter exhibited the precise behavior noted by Sabbagh, abandoned all her journalistic skepticism and allowed Yaalon to recite a series of lies and propaganda dispatches, uninterrupted and unchallenged.

Israeli lies unchallenged

She began the segment on Netanyahu's statement by asking Yaalon if the possibility of two states had "just gone." And for the next three minutes, the Israeli defense minister had control of the BBC airwaves.

With not a sound coming from Montague, not even small murmurs of acknowledgment to show she was still there, Yaalon told the following lies:

The Palestinians, he claimed, "enjoy already political independence ... And we are happy with it. We don't want to govern them whatsoever."

Having been allowed by Montague to overlook the existence of Israel's occupation, its [imprisonment without charge of Palestinian MPs](#) and [legislators](#), and its total control of everyday Palestinian life, Yaalon continued:

They decided to be divided into two principal entities, one in the West Bank, led by Mahmoud Abbas, Abu Mazen, the second is Hamastan in the Gaza Strip. It's up to them. Nevertheless, we are ready to co-operate with Abu Mazen, with Mahmoud Abbas, to have a more competent, responsible, accountable regime, living with us side by side.

Still nothing from Montague, when, as a responsible journalist, she should have halted his flow, at least to point out that it wasn't the Palestinians who "decided to be divided." Geographically, they were split by the UN's partition plan in 1947 and, politically, Israel has reacted with extreme measures - including violence - to stop Hamas and Fatah forming a unity government.

The Palestinians have no self-determination, no seat in the UN, no state, no army to counter Israel's assaults on them. Why did Montague not interrupt the Israeli government minister to shred his false assertions?

Instead, accepting what Yaalon said at face value, she then allowed him to position Israel as the "competent, responsible, accountable" side in this scenario. Listeners who hoped she might challenge Yaalon on Israel's wildly irresponsible annihilation of entire Palestinian families in Gaza last summer or its refusal to have its nuclear arsenal held to account were left disappointed.

Failing to address the occupation

The radio silence from Montague continued as Yaalon made a disingenuous plea to keep the illegal settlements - "If we are going to live together, why should we uproot Jews or transfer Jews from certain territories?" - and again spoke as if the occupation and the siege of Gaza aren't happening - "Let's live side by side, co-existence, for the benefit of the two sides."

Yaalon, like all of Israel's media-savvy representatives, clearly follows the doctrine of lying for the sake of Israel. But why is he allowed to get away with it on the BBC?

Montague's only contribution to what had all the features of an Israeli state radio broadcast was to ask one final question.

It was a question that didn't address Israel's brutal occupation and siege - Yaalon had been allowed to get away with that - or the reality of a situation where a nuclear-armed, western-funded state is relentlessly crushing an indigenous population.

There would be no such challenges from Montague. Free from skepticism, she showed her acceptance of everything Yaalon had just said and asked:

Ok, you paint this picture of these effectively two states but with no borders, but there are those who say that, as a result of that plan, that proposal, what you have is an Israel that is less safe, because you have Palestinians that have longed for a state that they would consider theirs, without Israeli government interference, and, as a result, the suggestion is that Israel is less safe. What do you say to that?

Collusion with Israel

Astonishingly, Montague had managed to reduce Israel's 48-year occupation of the West Bank (including Jerusalem) and Gaza, in which genocide is being committed against the Palestinian people, to mere "Israeli government interference."

And her question – about an Israel that is "less safe" – betrayed the colonialist's concern for the safety of the occupier, not for the colonized people.

Today's presenters are known for their ferocious questioning of government ministers, their constant interruptions, their sharp challenges and refusal to brook any nonsense.

On the very same program in which Yaalon spoke, the British chancellor George Osborne was interviewed by *Today* presenter, James Naughtie, and fearlessly asked if he was a moral failure.

But those standards of interviewing are inexplicably put to one side for Israeli government ministers. Yaalon was not only afforded absolute silence to tell his lies, he was allowed by the BBC to completely redefine the reality of what is happening in the West Bank and Gaza.

With the [US reacting with alarm](#) to Netanyahu's declaration that there would be no Palestinian state on his watch, it was almost as if the BBC decided to give Israel a helping hand to claw something back, to tell the world that there are already two states, but without borders, where the Palestinians have political independence and where the Israelis are happy to live side by side.

Montague's interviewing – if it can be called that – went beyond Sabbagh's pointed observation about journalists' lack of skepticism when confronted by Israel's spokespeople. This particular broadcast verged on complicity, on collusion, on a collaboration with Israel to put across its point of view when the chips were down.

Whatever you want to call it, you can't call this journalism. It was shameful, and it marked a new low for the BBC in its already sub-standard coverage of Israel and the occupation.

Sarah Montague's interview with Moshe Yaalon can be [heard on the BBC website](#) (time code 02:39:24) until April 17th. A transcription of the interview, with an analysis by the [Palestine Solidarity Campaign](#), is available [on our website](#).

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Articles by: [Amena Saleem](#)

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