

How the Media Quarantined Evidence of Cancer in Iraq and the Role of B.P.

Wicked Leaks – Part 2

By [Media Lens](#)

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Read Part I:



[How the Media Quarantined Evidence on Nord Stream Sabotage](#)

By [Media Lens](#), October 31, 2022

In Part 1, we [described](#) how state-corporate media non-reporting of evidence relating to the sabotage of the Nord Stream natural gas pipelines on September 26 was an example of how the truth on key issues is increasingly being quarantined from public awareness by 'mainstream' media.

At first sight, our second example might appear to contradict this claim.

To its credit, in several news reports, and in an hour-long [film](#), 'Under Poisoned Skies', the BBC provided [news](#) from Iraq that will have shocked many readers and viewers (in truth, it is a shock to read *any* UK media news on life in Iraq):

'Communities living close to oil fields, where gas is openly burned, are at elevated risk of leukaemia, a BBC News Arabic investigation has revealed.'

By BBC standards, the report was absolutely damning:

'The UN told the BBC it considers these areas, in Iraq, to be "modern sacrifice zones" - where profit has been prioritised over human rights.'

'Gas flaring is [the "wasteful" burning of gas](#) released in oil drilling, which produces cancer-linked pollutants.'

Some of the worst 'modern sacrifice zones' are found on the outskirts of Basra, in the south-east of Iraq, 'some of the country's biggest oil exploration areas'. Flared gases from these sites are dangerous because they emit a mix of carbon dioxide, methane and black soot which is carcinogenic.

If this sounds bad, it gets worse when we consider just who has been subordinating Iraqi human welfare to profit in this way:

'BP and Eni are major oil companies we identified as working on these sites.'

Eni is an Italian multinational energy company. BP, of course, is one of the world's oil and gas 'supermajors', and is British.

In other words, these BBC reports highlighted the rarely discussed fact that a British oil giant is deeply involved in a country that was illegally invaded in 2003, at the cost of one million Iraqi lives, on a pack of bogus claims relating to 'national security' and 'human rights'. The 2003 war was, of course, waged by a coalition led by the United States and Britain. Italy was part of the coalition.

Not only did this US-UK war crime secure substantial quantities of Iraq's oil for US and UK corporations, but BP has now been accused of creating environmental mayhem in Iraq. The BBC reported:

'A leaked Iraq Health Ministry report, seen by BBC Arabic, blames air pollution for a 20% rise in cancer in Basra between 2015 and 2018.'

'As part of this investigation, the BBC undertook the first pollution monitoring testing amongst the exposed communities. The results indicated high levels of exposure to cancer-causing chemicals.'

'Using satellite data we found that the largest of Basra's oil fields, Rumaila, flares more gas than any other site in the world. The Iraqi government owns this field, and BP is the lead contractor.'

'On the field is a town called North Rumaila - which locals call "the cemetery". Teenagers coined the phrase after they observed high levels of leukaemia amongst their friends, which they suspect is from the flaring.'

'Prof Shukri Al Hassan, a local environmental scientist, told us that cancer here is so rife it is "like the flu".'

This was a truly shocking comment; no wonder the BBC initially used it as the [headline](#) for its report:

'BP in oil field where "cancer is like the flu"'

The News Sniffer website, which tracks edits made to media articles, found that this headline only lasted a few hours before being [toned down](#) to:

‘BP in oil field where “cancer is rife”’

Remarkably, the less dramatic headline and citation was actually fake. The relevant part of the text reads:

‘Prof Shukri Al Hassan, a local environmental scientist, told us that cancer here is so rife it is “like the flu”.’

Professor Al Hassan was *not* quoted as using the word ‘rife’, nor was anyone else quoted in the article. The edited headline was simply made up.

The BBC [quoted](#) Dr Manuela Orjuela-Grimm, professor of childhood cancer at Columbia University:

‘The children have strikingly high levels [of cancer-causing chemicals]... this is concerning for [their] health and suggests they should be monitored closely.’

The BBC report also gave us an idea of the nature of the ‘democracy’ installed in Iraq by the 2003 US-UK invasion and occupation. The leaked Iraqi health ministry report shows the government is aware of the region’s health issues:

‘But Iraq’s own prime minister issued a confidential order – which was also seen by BBC Arabic – banning its employees from speaking about health damage caused by pollution.’

David Boyd, UN Special Rapporteur on human rights and the environment, told the BBC that people living near oil fields are ‘the victims of state-business collusion, and lack the political power in most cases to achieve change’.

Ali Hussein, a 19-year-old childhood leukaemia survivor, from North Rumaila, said:

‘Here in Rumaila nobody speaks out, they say they’re scared to speak in case they get removed.’

Indeed, the BBC reported:

‘Until now health researchers have been prevented from entering the oil fields to carry out air quality tests.’

As the BBC [noted](#), their reports also revealed ‘millions of tonnes of undeclared emissions from gas flaring at oil fields where BP, Eni, ExxonMobil, Chevron and Shell work’. Major oil companies are not declaring this significant source of greenhouse gas emissions.

These were important exposés by the BBC, but what is simultaneously so shocking, and yet so normal for the media strategy of quarantine over inoculation, is that our search of the ProQuest media database for terms like ‘Iraq’ and ‘cancer’ found *no* articles mentioning or following-up the BBC reports in any UK national newspaper. This important story involving harm caused by powerful British interests was deemed unworthy even of mention.

In a free media environment, the report would have triggered serious reflection on whether

the Iraq war really was, in fact, about oil, as honest commentators have long claimed, albeit at the margins of 'respectable' discourse. What does it say about Western 'civilisation' and its 'rules-based order' that UK and US oil companies like BP and Exxon have been able to profit from the vast crimes of their governments in Iraq? And what does it say that they're able to do so without any state-corporate journalists noticing any controversy, or feeling any need to comment at all?

In a recent alert, we [described](#) how the Al Jazeera documentary series, 'The Labour Files', has been effectively quarantined by 'mainstream' media. The ban on discussion is so extreme that a caller to journalist Matt Frei's talk show on LBC was simply [cut off](#) when he mentioned the series. More than 1,200 people supported our polite [request](#) for an explanation from Frei on Twitter, but he simply ignored them and us.

In previous alerts, we have described how whistle-blowers from within the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) challenging claims of chemical weapons attacks allegedly committed by Assad's forces in Syria have been [quarantined](#) by 'mainstream' media. The silence has been overwhelming. News on the grim fate of Wikileaks' Julian Assange, imprisoned in Belmarsh maximum security prison, has been similarly [quarantined](#). Other examples abound.

Agony is piled on agony for anyone who knows and cares about the torment inflicted by the West on Iraq over the last 30 years, when we recognise the strong echoes in the latest devastation of earlier horrors inflicted in the process of conquering Iraq.

In 2010, the International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health, a leading medical journal, published a [study](#), 'Cancer, Infant Mortality and Birth Sex-Ratio in Fallujah, Iraq 2005-2009'. Noam Chomsky described the study's findings as 'vastly more significant' than the Wikileaks Afghan 'War Diary' leaks.

The survey of 4,800 individuals in Fallujah showed a four-fold increase in all cancers and a 12-fold increase in childhood cancer in under-14s. It found a 10-fold increase in female breast cancer and significant increases in lymphoma and brain tumours in adults. Researchers found a 38-fold increase in leukaemia. By contrast, Hiroshima survivors showed a 17-fold increase in leukaemia. According to the study, the types of cancer are 'similar to that in the Hiroshima survivors who were exposed to ionising radiation from the bomb and uranium in the fallout'.

The extent of genetic damage suffered by residents in Fallujah suggested the use of uranium in some form. Dr Chris Busby, a visiting professor at the University of Ulster and one of the authors of the survey, [said](#):

'My guess is that they used a new weapon against buildings to break through walls and kill those inside.'

The truth on Nord Stream and on cancer in Iraq has been effectively quarantined - journalists are deeply reluctant to point the finger of blame at the state-corporate Establishment of which they are a part and by which they are richly rewarded.

We are not supposed to notice that the same British media endlessly packing their pages with realpolitik-friendly 'concern' for the plight of Ukrainian people suffering invasion and bombardment by Russia have no interest *whatever* in massive environmental damage and

mass human suffering caused by US and British corporations profiting from the crimes of their governments. Latest media reports [predict](#) that '2022 profits at Britain's BP could break the \$20bn mark' in the next week. ExxonMobil is 'expected to report year-to-date earnings approaching \$70bn'.

By contrast, all 'mainstream' media gave high-profile coverage over several days to allegations that a policeman in oil-rich Iran had been caught on camera committing 'sexual abuse'. The BBC [analysed](#) video footage of the incident: 'officer approaches her from behind and puts his left hand on her bottom'.

Former Guardian journalist Jonathan Cook [asked](#): why does the West not 'give a damn about these women's lives, or those of their brothers, when it comes to enforcing decades of western sanctions?'

The answer: for the same reason the West doesn't give a damn about its victims in Libya, Palestine, Iraq, or anywhere else. Western state-corporate 'concern' for human rights is a function of power, not of compassion.

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