

# Israeli Lies Go Unchallenged on BBC's Flagship Current Affairs Show

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*In March, the BBC's flagship news program Today broadcast [an interview](#) with Moshe Yaalon, Israel's defense minister.*

Yaalon was given [free rein](#) to disseminate lies and propaganda with not a single interruption or challenge from Today presenter, Sarah Montague.

In response, the [Palestine Solidarity Campaign](#) and many individuals complained to the BBC about the substandard level of interviewing. The replies received from the BBC have revealed the extent to which the organization is prepared to make a fool of itself in order to justify and protect its soft interviews with Israeli spokespeople.

Many had complained that Yaalon was allowed to deny the occupation and the siege on Gaza, and had falsely claimed the Palestinians have "political independence" with Israel not wanting to "govern them whatsoever" — and had done so without any challenging interventions from Montague.

In fact, [as Yaalon told lie after lie](#), there was absolute silence from Montague as the minutes ticked on, with not a sound to indicate she was still present.

The BBC complaints department sent this collective response to those who contacted it about the broadcast: "Please note that it's always going to be difficult in a live environment against time constraints to challenge each and every comment made, given the amount of other questions and points to cover."

A quick look at some of *Today's* interviews with Palestinian spokespeople is enough to demonstrate just how ludicrous this statement from the BBC is.

And a comparison with *Today's* interviews with Israelis during the same time period is sufficient to reveal the unswerving nature of the BBC's pro-Israeli, anti-Palestinian bias.

## **Patronising and Aggressive**

Take, for example, interviews conducted by *Today* during July and August 2014.

On 3 July, with the occupied West Bank almost totally shut down by Israel following the disappearance of three Israeli teenagers, *Today* presenter John Humphrys interviewed Abdullah Abdullah, chairperson of the Palestinian Legislative Council's political committee.

Humphrys ignored the alleged difficulties of a live environment and time constraints and

instead challenged “each and every comment” made by Abdullah, to the extent that the senior Palestinian politician was effectively denied the opportunity to comment at all.

This is part of the interview:

Humphrys: “What I’m trying to do is ask you where we go from here.”

Abdullah: “From here? This racist Israel is exposing itself once more...”

Humphrys [interrupting]: “Can you just cut the rhetoric for a moment and try and deal with the practicalities?”

Abdullah: “This is a government of gangsters. It’s got to be exposed...”

Humphrys [interrupting]: “A bit less rhetoric perhaps and a bit more thought to what is actually going to take place in the Middle East.”

Abdullah: “This is the lack of resolution in the international community...”

Humphrys [interrupting]: “To do what?”

Abdullah: “Israel has been created by your country some 66 years ago...”

Humphrys [interrupting]: “Can we talk about now instead of fifty years ago? That’s what I’m trying to do, talk about what should happen now.”

Abdullah: “If we go to the root cause of it, we would be able to solve everything...”

Humphrys [interrupting]: “We’ve been going to the root cause of it for fifty years. It hasn’t got anywhere has it?”

The interview continues in the same vein for another thirty seconds, with a patronising, aggressive Humphrys continually interrupting and refusing to allow Abdullah the time to complete any of the observations he is trying to make.

At one point, he even puts words into Abdullah’s mouth, saying: “If you’re saying this morning that nothing can move forward until Israel is destroyed, well, at least we know what your position is.”

Abdullah has said nothing of the sort and, when he attempts to make his position clear — “What I say is that Israel...has to be held accountable for its violations of international law” — he is interrupted again by the BBC presenter.

Compare this aggression to Montague’s passive encounter with Yaalon, where the Israeli minister decides what he’s going to say and says it uninterrupted, and at no point is asked to “cut the rhetoric” — despite referring to Gaza as “Hamastan.”

### **Easy Ride for Israel**

Immediately after Humphrys spoke to Abdullah on 3 July, he interviewed the Israeli government spokesperson, Mark Regev — Palestinians aren’t interviewed by *Todaywithout* an Israeli to counter them. The same isn’t true in reverse, and Israelis are continuously interviewed — as Yaalon was — with no Palestinian present to give an alternative viewpoint.

Regev was given his customary easy ride on the BBC. Humphrys was polite and non-challenging, and allowed the Israeli to blame Hamas for all the violence that takes place in the West Bank and Gaza without daring to question him on Israeli army violence against Palestinian civilians.

Six days later, Humphrys interviewed the head of the Palestinian Centre for Human Rights, Raji Sourani, who was on the phone from Gaza.

Gaza, by then, was under day and night attack by Israel.

Sourani explained this, to which Humphrys replied: "Couldn't you stop it if you stopped firing rockets at Israel?"

Sourani: "I think Israel initiated that for several years before..."

Humphrys [interrupting, and incredulous]: "Israel initiated you firing rockets at them?"

Sourani: "No, I'm talking about before this, Israel was attacking for seven nights, bombing Gaza from south to north, and nobody slept for seven days before that, and they were bombing for seven days before that..."

Humphrys [emphatically]: "Three Israeli teenagers have been murdered."

Sourani: "Eleven has been killed by Israel, including four Palestinian teenagers, and nobody has mentioned that and that's a great shame. There is no holier than holy blood. Every blood is holy, even Palestinian one."

The minute-long interview ends here and Humphrys goes on to interview Daniel Taub, Israel's ambassador to the UK. The rudeness and hectoring disappears and Taub is given four minutes to tell lies about Gaza, such as this —"It's an area that's clearly not under occupation" — unchallenged.

Humphry's interview with Sourani, as well as demonstrating yet again the hostile atmosphere of the BBC for Palestinians, reveals how deeply ingrained the Israeli narrative is within the minds of BBC presenters.

Humphrys sounded genuinely incredulous at Sourani's suggestion that Israeli violence may have preceded Palestinian violence, rather than being, as Israel always maintains, a defensive reaction to it.

His attitude is that of the colonial-minded journalist, wedded to the belief that if the natives would only stop firing their rockets the colonizer could live in peace.

The theft of land and freedom by the colonizer doesn't come into it, and Humphrys even implies that Gaza deserves the fatal collective punishment it is receiving because three Israeli teenagers were killed in the West Bank.

## **Breathtaking**

Such unbalanced, biased interviewing continued through July and August, as Israel was pounding much of Gaza to rubble and wiping out entire Palestinian families.

The lack of impartiality was replicated on BBC television news and BBC Online, where pro-Israeli commentators were presented as “independent” and brought on to defend Israel’s actions.

On the 31 July episode of *Today*, [Sarah Montague, true to form, interviewed two Israelis](#) — and no Palestinians — on whether Israel’s assault on Gaza was legal.

Her guests — a retired colonel from the Israeli army, who greenlighted massacres in Gaza during Operation Cast Lead five years before, and a former spokesperson for the Israeli government —enjoyed nine minutes of gentle conversation in which they were able to assert that Israel had no other option but to attack and did so only with great sorrow.

*Today* continued to provide [a willing platform](#) for Israeli propaganda into August.

On 13 August, former Israeli president, Shimon Peres, was given airtime in an interview with Middle East correspondent, Wyre Davis, for the stated reason than his was “one voice that we haven’t heard much of during this crisis.”

Davis allowed him to tell one astounding lie after another for four minutes.

This was his first lie: “Look, we left Gaza willingly, unilaterally...We handed over to the Palestinians a free, open Gaza, which is a beautiful strip of...a beautiful beach. They could have developed it for tourism, for fishing, for agriculture. We don’t understand, frankly, why are they fighting? What are they shooting? We left. What is the purpose? They want to be free. They are free.”

And this came towards the end: “When we left Gaza, Gaza was open. No restriction, no closure, nothing whatever. We helped them even, to build a new modern agriculture. We would like to see them a normal nation, living in peace, developing their country.”

To which a compliant Davis replied: “Your position is clear. You obviously pursue peace from a position of strength.”

The lies were breathtaking, the fact he was allowed to tell them unchallenged, extraordinary. Compare this to Abdullah’s interview on *Today* a month earlier, when he wasn’t given the space even to complete a sentence, or Sourani’s interview when he was hectorred to justify Gaza’s rockets, the BBC interviewer’s concern, as it always is, being only for Israel, not for the Palestinians under occupation.

The BBC complaints department can fire off as many email messages as it likes, arrogantly declaring the impartiality of the BBC or trying to pretend interviewers don’t have time to “challenge each and every comment made” by an Israeli interviewee.

But an analysis of just one BBC program’s interviews with its Palestinian and Israeli guests shows those claims to be as big a lie as any told by an Israeli spokesperson appearing on *Today*. And that is truly shameful.

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