

**The BBC's Reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict
August 1 2005 – January 31 2006**

**Loughborough University
Communications Research Centre**

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Contents

1. Purpose of the Report p.3
 2. Method p.5
 3. Sample p.7
 4. Results of Content Analysis
 - 4.1 Frequency of Coverage in News Programmes p.10
 - 4.2 Actors in News Programmes p.16
 - 4.3 Speaking Time of Actors in News Programmes p.22
 - 4.4 Themes in News Programmes p.28
 - 4.5 Actors and Themes in News Programmes p.34
 - 4.6 Reporting the Historical Context of the Conflict p.44
 - 4.7 Reporting Fatalities in News Programmes and Services p.46
 - 4.8 Keywords used in the Conflict p.53
 - 4.9 Current Affairs p.62
 - 4.10 BBC News news.bbc.co.uk p.81
 5. Conclusion p.86
- Bibliography p.88
- Appendix
- The BBC and Impartiality p.93

1. Purpose of the Report

The purpose of this report is to provide evidence in the form of a content analysis of the BBC's reporting of what the BBC calls the 'Israeli-Palestinian conflict'. The report, commissioned by the BBC's Board of Governors, is intended to aid the Independent Panel, appointed by the BBC's Board of Governors, to come to a judgment concerning whether the BBC's reporting of this subject is impartial. It is informed by our experience of news media content analysis in many fields, and is designed to provide accurate and robust data on the content of BBC and other media news coverage of this conflict in a defined period.

The report is not Loughborough University Communications Research Centre's assessment of whether we believe that the BBC's reporting is impartial or not. The concept of impartiality is contested. It is a matter for debate whether impartial reporting is either desirable or possible. In this report we do not adopt a particular meaning of impartiality and then use it as a way of judging the BBC's coverage. This is a matter for the Independent Panel should it decide to do so.

The report does not attempt to explain why the BBC's coverage of the subject is as it is. Content analysis permits us to describe accurately the coverage itself and subsequently to pose research questions but it does not furnish explanations. Both the production of news and the consumption and comprehension of it by audiences are excluded from research into content. Evidence about content, of the kind provided in this report, can only act as circumstantial and suggestive evidence about the cause or consequences of news content. To move beyond this would require the use of an additional set of research methods that would enable us to investigate journalistic practice and the role of public diplomacy. We have included a bibliography of books, articles and reports concerning the subject, some of which seek to explain media coverage of the subject. We have done so on the understanding that this is not an endorsement of a particular explanation or perspective to be found in the academic literature.

It is worth setting out two inherent difficulties facing journalism in reporting complex situations or circumstances, since these both have implications for the nature and use of evidence such as that provided here. Firstly, news seeks to be comprehensive, providing audiences with information about all that is important or salient to them, yet given limitations of time or space is necessarily highly selective. Such selection involves professional judgements that cannot be judged or even inferred here. Secondly, journalism of course tries to make the information it provides meaningful and comprehensible. This necessarily involves the deployment of implicit or sometimes explicit contexts, allusions, or associations which might be regarded by some as contentious, or influential in framing audience understanding of events reported. Yet without any such context, however limited or inherent, meaningful communication is all but impossible. Some of this can be formally detected by research methodology, but such analysis can go no further than accurate though analytical description.

A final caveat must be noted in any research of this kind. In selecting a period of time to analyse, the researchers were guided by the requirements of the commissioning body. Any period selected, however, tends to be construed as symptomatic of a lengthier period or wider issue. Methodologists rely on sampling, for which rigorous rules and procedures exist, to use a limited analysis as a basis for generalisation. Content analysis often precludes this procedure. Of what period is an analysis of several weeks' coverage of the Middle-East a sample – the last year, the period since the first Intifada, the coverage of the region since the formation of Israel? Clearly it is only problematically any of these, and thus must be considered as no more than an analysis of a particular period of time, inevitably coloured by the specific events that loomed largest within that period. Without a longer time frame for the analysis no other deduction is legitimate.

2. Method

Both quantitative and qualitative methods of analysis were employed in the analysis of the content of news and current affairs programmes.

2.1 Quantitative Content Analysis

Quantitative content analysis is a technique that aims to provide systematic, statistical descriptions of the manifest content of the reporting. The aim of this approach is to count what is there rather than, for example, to analyse meanings that may be implicit in the coverage. An important stage in this method is deciding what to count. The coding schedule developed for this research was piloted and refined using a small sample of the coverage. A similar coding schedule was used across media (television, radio, Internet) and format (news and current affairs) in order to aid comparison. Inter-coder reliability checks were conducted and calculated in order to ensure consistency and reliability. The data collected was analysed using SPSS, a standard statistical computer package for social sciences. For the purposes of compiling tables and presenting an overview of the data pertinent to the research certain coding schedule categories are typically aggregated. This obviously entails the exercise of judgment on the part of researchers concerning the relative importance of certain data. Extra-media data for our research were also collected from reliable, publicly available sources where we considered that such additional evidence will help the Panel in their use of the content analysis.

2.2 Inter-coder Reliability

Kappa inter-coder reliability tests were conducted for all of the major variables included in the content analysis schedule. The minimum level of acceptable reliability was set at 0.80. Variables that failed to achieve this level have been excluded from this report.

2.3 Qualitative Content Analysis

Qualitative analysis of specific elements of media content has always been a central and valued component of our previous work (most recently, for example, for the Electoral Commission on media reporting of the 2005 General Election and for the Commission for Racial Equality on 'Britishness' in media and political discourse) and we see it as an important, if necessarily circumscribed, aspect of this project. This analysis will focus upon demonstrating in detail the rhetoric of presentation and argumentation. Qualitative discursive analysis, as well as analysing the explicit content of a text, analyses meanings implicit in the text (for example, the premises that inform a report but that are not explicitly stated). Also of concern to qualitative discursive analysis is how value is conveyed by texts (for example, through the choice of words or images in a report and the connotations that they may carry). For the purposes of this report we have integrated the qualitative analysis of items with the presentation of quantitative findings. Caution must again be exercised with reference to the relationship between the qualitative analysis offered here and the quantitative analysis. The qualitative analysis examines a small number of items. It aims to illustrate broader issues that may be pertinent to the Panel's work.

3. Sample for the Quantitative Content Analysis

BBC national news programmes (BBC 1 6pm, BBC1 10pm, BBC2 Newsnight, BBC News 24, Radio 4 Today, Radio 4 6pm Bulletin, Radio Five Live Drive) and BBC Internet news coverage of Israel and the Palestinians were collected from August 1 2005 to January 31 2006. Current affairs broadcast programmes were collected from January 1 2005 to January 31 2006. Sky News at 9pm, ITV News at 10.30pm, and C4 News at 7pm were collected from October 1 2005 to the end of January 2006 excluding December 24 2005 to January 3 2006.

Table 1: Details of Sample: News, Current Affairs and BBC News

National TV News	BBC Radio	BBC Internet Websites	BBC TV Current Affairs
BBC1 6pm News	R4 Today 7-8.30am	BBC News news.bbc.co.uk	January 1 2005 – January 31 2006
BBC1 10pm News	R4 6pm Bulletin R5 Live Drive 5-6pm		
BBC2 Newsnight 10.30pm			
BBC News 24 8-9pm weekdays; 8-8.30pm weekends.			
ITV News 10.30pm			
C4 News, 7pm			
Sky News 9- 10pm			

Only the unique written text content of the BBC news website referring to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict was collected. This was to avoid double-counting bi-

media output collected elsewhere (for example, it does not include audio and video reports available online).

When statistics are presented solely for BBC broadcast news and news online they refer to the August 1 – January 31 sample period. When statistics are shown that compare BBC and non-BBC broadcast news it is for a shorter sample period – October 1 – December 23 and January 3 – January 31. This shorter sample period arose because of the unavailability of some programmes for the longer sample period and the need to compare like-with-like. The sample period for BBC Current Affairs was January 1 2005 – January 31 2006. This should be borne in mind when considering the relationship between broadcast news and current affairs output.

3.1 Sample for Qualitative Analysis

The time-demanding character of qualitative research means that the corpus for analysis is normally much smaller than for quantitative research. The items chosen for qualitative analysis were chosen according to three criteria: 1. that complaints had been made to the BBC about their content, particularly their alleged lack of impartiality; 2. that the items would cover a range of formats (online, television news, current affairs); 3. that the choice of items would include items complained about by pro-Israeli groups and items complained about by pro-Palestinian groups.

3.2 Is the sample 'representative'?

Although the extent of the data collected compares very favourably to previous research in this area, whether conducted in the UK or internationally, it should be noted that the sample does not include all of the BBC national news output, not to mention all national broadcast news output. For this reason, as we noted in the introduction, caution must be used when contemplating the representativeness of these results and whether they may be used to generalise about the BBC or about UK national news. Also the news coverage was analysed for only a period of six months and so restraint ought to be applied when seeking to make generalisations over time. A compelling argument could be made concerning the remarkable, atypical

character of the conflict during this period of time. In previous and subsequent periods not only may events 'on the ground' change but also styles, methods, and values of reporting.

3.3 Hawthorne Effect

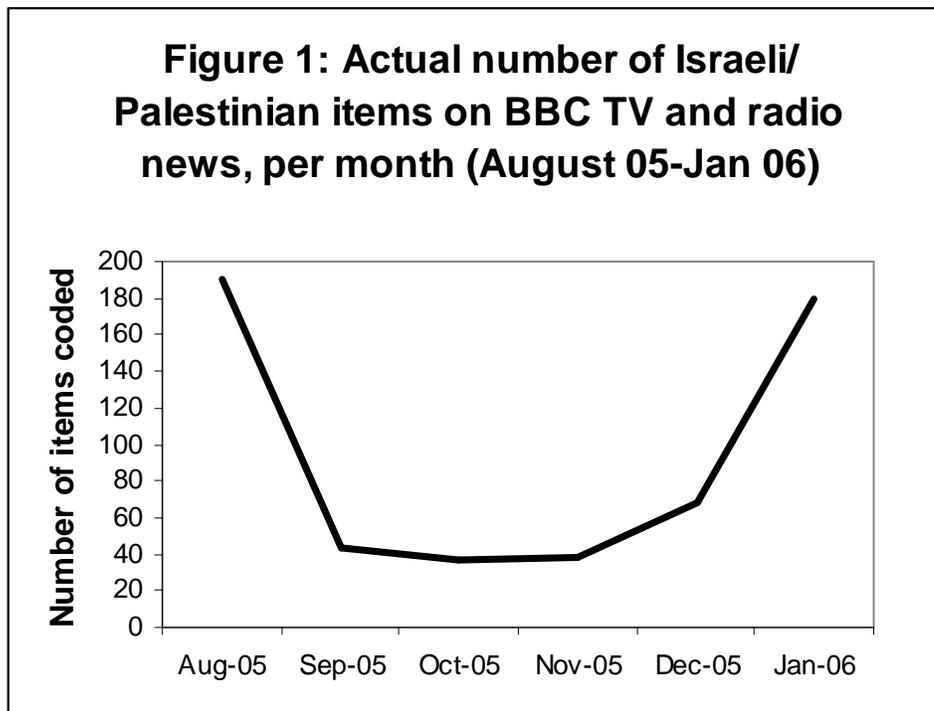
The BBC's Board of Governors announced publicly in September 2005 that it was to undertake an impartiality review with respect to the Corporation's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. As such we must consider whether the performance of journalists and editors changed in light of their awareness that their coverage was being scrutinised. Where such responses occur, it is known in discussion of research methodology as the Hawthorne Effect which dates back to a study of labour productivity at the Hawthorne factory of the Western Electric Company in the 1920s. In that study worker behaviour changed as much because of the effects of being observed as because of other changes in the working environment. This effect has been frequently noted, and guarded against, in later studies. Given the sensitivity of the subject and the timing of the review in the run-up to Charter Review, it is conceivable that the impartiality review may have had some effect on some of the BBC coverage. Precisely what that effect may have been, however, is obviously a matter that cannot be assessed by means of a content analysis alone.

4. Results of Quantitative Content Analysis

4.1 Frequency of Coverage in News Programmes

Most of the coverage of the conflict over the six-month period occurred in two of the months: August 2005, where the story was the pullout from Gaza and areas of the West Bank; and January 2006 where there were two stories – Sharon’s stroke and its implications for the region and the Palestinian elections that led to an unexpected Hamas victory. Between August and January the conflict was largely displaced by other stories (in September, for example, by Hurricane Katrina) with reports occurring sporadically in response to particular events (such as ‘suicide bombings’ and the kidnapping of a British human rights activist in Gaza).

The below figure shows overall numbers of item for BBC broadcast news programmes on a month-by-month basis. Coverage of the conflict was largely concentrated into two months – August and January:



If we disaggregate these figures we can gain some insight into the relative importance of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict for different BBC news programmes:

Table 2: Monthly breakdown of the numbers of Israeli/Palestinian news items in BBC News, by programme August 1 2005-January 31 2006

	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05	Dec-05	Jan-06
BBC1 6pm	17	3	5	2	4	17
BBC1 10pm	24	3	7	6	9	22
BBC1 Weekend	6	2	1	6	3	10
BBC1 Newsnight	8	0	4	4	5	16
BBC News 24	48	12	7	3	27	36
BBC Radio 4 Today	38	14	5	8	14	41
BBC Radio 4 6pm	30	8	6	9	6	23
BBC 5 Live Drive	19	2	2	0	0	14

It would appear from these figures that BBC News 24 gave a higher priority to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict than other BBC television news programmes.

It could be argued that such frequency counts are a crude measure of the extent of news coverage in this area: an item merely seconds long counts for the same as an item several minutes in duration. As a further assessment of the extent of coverage we also measured the time (in seconds) of each news item. Figure 2 shows the aggregated distribution of coverage in seconds for all BBC news coverage (August 05 – January 06). The monthly distribution correlates exceptionally strongly to that identified in Figure 1 (Pearsons $r=0.995$). Table 2 breaks down the general distribution presented in Figure 2.

Figure 2: Length of Israel/ Palestinian coverage, All BBC News (August 05- Jan 06)

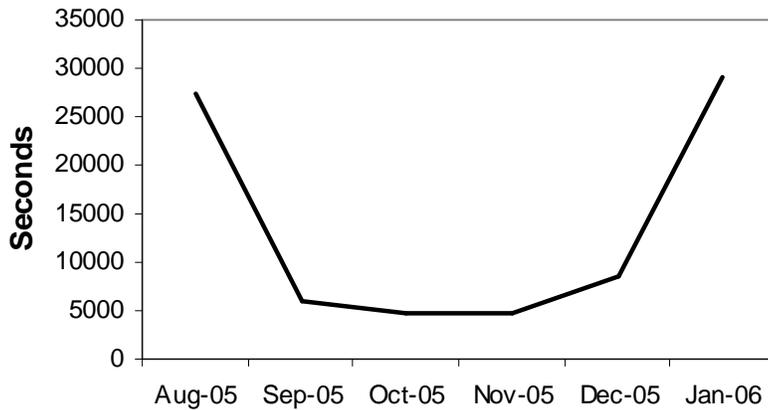


Table 3: Total length in seconds of Israel Palestine items in BBC News, per month August 1 2005-January 31 2006

	Aug-05	Sep-05	Oct-05	Nov-05	Dec-05	Jan-06
BBC1 6pm	1930	257	302	244	494	2423
BBC1 10pm	3314	425	468	906	808	3361
BBC1 Weekend	611	180	14	549	317	761
BBC1 Newsnight	2336	0	1702	813	879	4591
BBC News 24	6554	1319	631	291	3567	7100
BBC Radio 4 Today	6032	2380	647	1274	2206	6353
BBC Radio 4 6pm	4094	881	507	664	374	2393
BBC 5 Live Drive	2602	578	386	0	0	2100

It is interesting to note also that the Israeli-Palestinian conflict attracted considerably more airtime on BBC 10 pm news than on the 6pm news. The former is normally conceived of as the flagship bulletin. The Israeli-Palestinian conflict coverage seems to acquire greater status or news value in this context. Coverage of the conflict then may reflect the particular characters of the different news programmes. Differences in time between London and

Jerusalem (Jerusalem is 2 hours ahead of GMT) may also help to explain differences between news programmes.

Below we compare the extent of BBC news coverage of the conflict with that of commercial news programmes. This comparison is conducted over a more limited period of time than that for the overall analysis of BBC coverage listed above. The dates are October 1 2005 to December 23 2005 and January 3 2006 to January 31 2006. Although we are not able to compare levels of coverage for August 2005 (which saw the first major spike in coverage for the BBC), the distribution of coverage from October onwards was remarkably consistent across all media sampled. Levels of attention to Israeli/ Palestinian matters were equally low in commercial news during the months of October, November and early December, but then rose considerably in January 2006.

Figure 3 compares the number of BBC and non-BBC items related to the Israeli/ Palestinian conflict for this period. Figure 4 provides an equivalent analysis of the amount of time dedicated by different programmes to this subject.

**Figure 3: Comparison of the number of Israeli/
Palestinian news items
(1 Oct'05-23 Dec'05 & 3 Jan'06-31 Jan'06)**

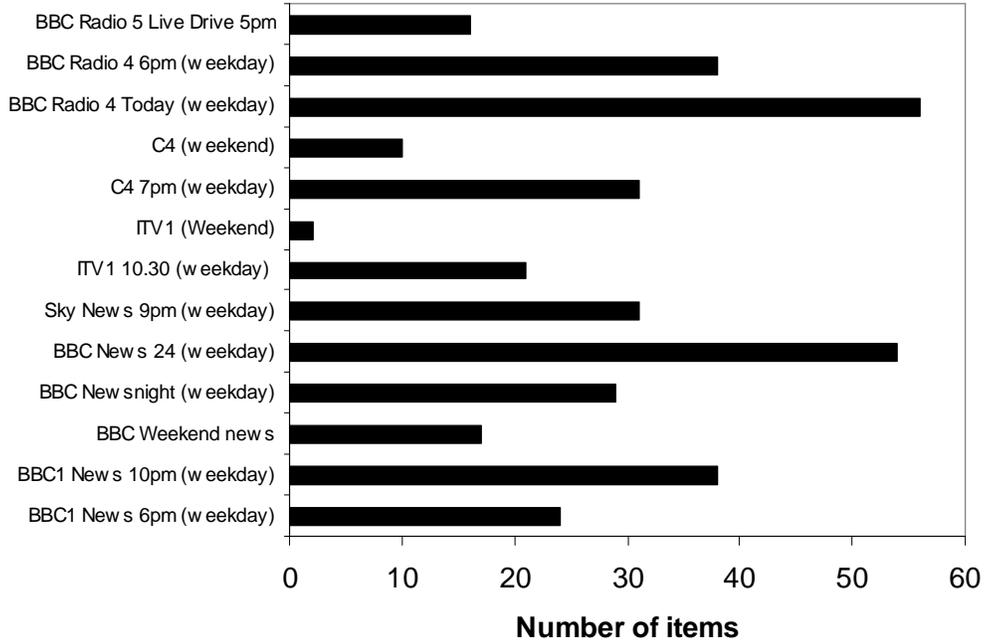
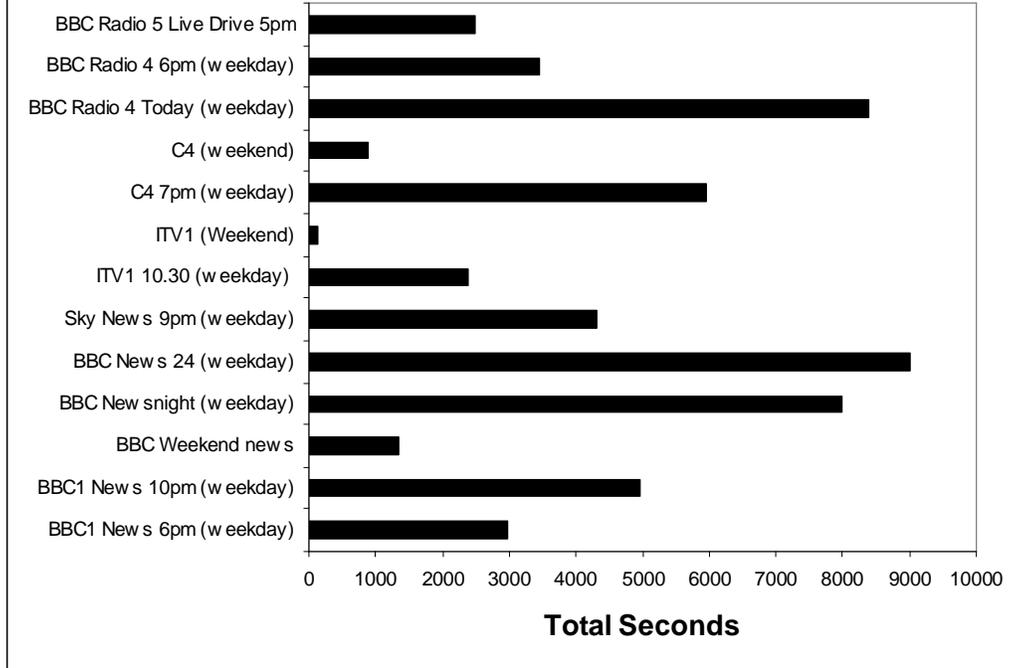


Figure 4: Comparison of the total length (in seconds) of Israeli/ Palestinian news coverage (1 Oct '05 - 23 Dec '05 & 3 Jan - 31 Jan '06)



Levels of BBC coverage – whether assessed in terms of the number of items or their length - exceeded those found in most commercial news stations (with the exception of C4).

The consistent pattern found across media in the extent of coverage suggests that reporting of the conflict is highly event driven or dependent and episodic. The two critical discourse moments (August and January) coincide with big events concerning the region (the Gaza withdrawal, Sharon’s ill health, Hamas’ election success). This suggests a reactive, rather than investigative, approach to news-gathering in the region.

4.2 Actors in News Programmes

Actors are individuals or institutions whose actions, opinions, or existence are mentioned directly by the journalist during the course of an item. To be coded as an actor the actor must either speak, be paraphrased by a journalist, or be referred to by a journalist. An individual or institution mentioned by another individual or institution directly involved in the conflict during the course of the item was not considered to be an actor. For each item, we coded up to 10 actors. The tables below show the percentage of actors from different nations/groups. 'Israeli Arabs' were counted as Israelis in reports that referred to them as Israelis (they were counted as actors three times on BBC1 6pm news, 4 times on BBC1 10pm news, 3 times on R4 6pm bulletin, and once on R4 Today August 1 2005 – January 31 2006; they were counted as actors once on BBC1 10pm news during the shorter sample period). Political actors were for our purposes defined narrowly as representatives of political parties.

Across all BBC news programmes in the extended sample (1 August 2005 - 31 Jan 2006), Israeli actors represented 49% of those coded, Palestinians 32% (see table 4). Israeli appearances exceeded Palestinian appearances by a ratio of roughly 1.5:1. This difference is almost entirely explained by the amount of coverage respectively given to 'other sources' (i.e. non-party political) in both contexts (primarily settlers, representatives of the Israeli army and other state actors).

Table 4: Percentage of appearances for actors in BBC broadcast news coverage (August 1 2005 – January 31 2006)

	All BBC News
	%
Israeli Political	18
Other Israeli	31
Palestinian Political	21
Other Palestinian	11
UK Political	2
Other UK	8
All Syrian	0.1
All Jordanian	
All Lebanese	
All Egyptian	0.1
All Iranian	1
Al Quaida	
Other Regional	
US Politician	4
Other US	0.4
EU	1
UN	1
Arab League	
World Jewish Congress	
Relief Agencies	0.1
International Solidarity Movement	0.1
International Media	0.1
All French	0.2
All German	0.2
All Italian	0.1
All Chinese	
All Russian	0.1
Other	0.3
(Total number of appearances)	(1370)

Notes: Up to 10 'actors' could be coded per news item. Percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place. Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Table 5: Comparison of the percentage of appearances for actors in individual BBC TV news programmes (August 1 2005 – January 31 2006)

	BBC News 6pm (Week day)	BBC News 10pm (Week day)	Other BBC TV News (week end)	BBC2 News -night	BBC News 24
	%	%	%	%	%
Israeli Political	14	15	23	24	20
Other Israeli	39	29	24	20	28
Palestinian Political	25	21	30	23	22
Other Palestinian	9	17	10	8	10
UK Political	1	2	1	4	3
Other UK	7	9	9	4	11
All Syrian	-	0.5	-	-	-
All Jordanian	-	-	-	-	-
All Lebanese	-	-	-	-	-
All Egyptian	-	-	-	-	-
All Iranian	-	0.5	-	3	1
Al Quaida	-	-	-	-	-
Other Regional	-	-	-	-	-
US Politician	1	5	4	9	3
Other US	1	-	-	-	1
EU	-	0.5	-	-	1
UN	1	-	-	3	0.3
Arab League	-	-	-	-	-
World Jewish Congress	-	-	-	-	-
Relief Agencies	-	-	-	-	-
International Solidarity Movement	-	0.5	-	-	-
International Media	-	-	-	-	1
All French	-	-	-	1	-
All German	-	-	-	-	0.3
All Italian	-	-	-	-	-
All Chinese	-	-	-	-	-
All Russian	-	0.5	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	1	0.3
(Total appearances)	(137)	(209)	(70)	(100)	(329)

Notes: Up to 10 'actors' could be coded per news item. Up to 18 actors could be coded per current affairs programme. Percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place. Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Table 6: Comparison of the percentage of appearances for actors in individual BBC radio news programmes (August 1 2005 – January 31 2006)

	R4 Today	R4 6pm (week day)	R5 Live 5pm
	%	%	%
Israeli Political	23	18	5
Other Israeli	35	27	49
Palestinian Political	15	23	17
Other Palestinian	7	12	10
UK Political	3	1	4
Other UK	7	7	5
All Syrian	-	-	-
All Jordanian	-	-	-
All Lebanese	-	-	-
All Egyptian	0.4	-	-
All Iranian	2	3	-
Al Quaida	-	-	-
Other Regional	-	-	-
US Politician	4	4	5
Other US	-	-	-
EU	1	1	2
UN	2	0.5	-
Arab League	-	-	-
World Jewish Congress	-	-	-
Relief Agencies	0.4	-	-
International Solidarity Movement	-	-	-
International Media	-	-	-
All French	-	1	-
All German	-	1	-
All Italian	-	-	-
All Chinese	-	0.5	-
All Russian	-	0.5	-
Other	-	-	2
(Total appearances)	(224)	(222)	(79)

Notes: Up to 10 'actors' could be coded per news item. Up to 18 actors could be coded per current affairs programme. Percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place. Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

The percentages for Israeli and Palestinian actor appearance are similar across BBC news programmes with the exception of Five Live Drive. The small sample size for this programme may help to explain why there is this difference as an outlying case may significantly affect the findings.

If we turn to a comparison between BBC and non-BBC news programmes there is greater parity in the presence of Palestinian and Israeli actors in BBC programmes compared to the larger BBC sample. Indeed in this shorter period of time Palestinians appear more than Israelis on both the BBC1 6pm and 10pm news programmes. This is an artefact of the more limited sample period used for BBC/non-BBC comparisons. The shorter sample period includes the Palestinian elections and excludes the Gaza pullout. (This shows the desirability of a sample that includes similar Israeli and Palestinian events, for example, elections). What is striking here, though, is that the greater prominence of Israeli actors is still evident in non-BBC news programmes, despite these factors.

Table 7: Comparison of the frequency of appearances of actors in BBC & Commercial news coverage of the Israeli/ Palestinian conflict (October 1- December 23 & January 3 – January 31)

	BBC1 6pm	BBC1 10pm	BBC1 Week end	BBC2 News- night	BBC News 24	SKY 9pm News	ITV News 10.30 (Week Day)	ITV News (Week End)	C4 7pm News (Week Day)	C4 News (Week End)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Israeli Political	22	17	22	22	27	33	29	50	29	44
Other Israeli	16	13	19	18	15	20	21	33	15	12
Palestinian Political	42	29	38	26	27	23	31	0	27	25
Other Palestinian	4	16	13	4	10	8	8	17	6	
UK Political	3	4		5	2	2	2		5	
Other UK	4	7		4	4	3			6	
All Syrian		1								
All Jordanian										
All Lebanese										
All Egyptian						1				
All Iranian		1		4	2	1	2		4	6
Al Quaida										
Other Regional										
US Politician	3	10	8	11	5	5	2		6	
Other US	3				1				2	
EU		1			2		2			
UN	1			4	1	2	2		1	
Arab League										
World Jewish Congress										
Relief Agencies										
International Solidarity Movement		1								
International Media					2					
All French				1						
All German					1		2		1	6
All Italian										
All Chinese										
All Russian		1							1	
Other				1						
Number of appearances	67	102	37	78	118	85	52	6	108	16

Notes: Up to 10 'actors' could be coded per news item. Up to 18 actors could be coded per current affairs programme. Percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place. Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

By far the most frequently appearing third parties are UK and US actors. UK and US actors appear more often, for example, than UN actors, EU actors, or actors from the Middle East. This may be problematic in terms of impartiality if

it is considered that UK and US actors generally favour one of the parties in the conflict.

4.3 Speaking Time of Actors in News Programmes

This section provides data on the 'accessed voices' presented in the Israeli-Palestinian coverage. The number of appearances of actors can be seen as a measure of *news presence* while the amount of quotation or talk time is linked with issues of *news access*. Whose voices do we hear? Who is allowed to speak and for how long? The granting of access to the news is widely recognised in the secondary literature as an indicator of both the perceived news value and credibility of sources.

The BBC editorial guidelines stress the importance of presenting a 'balance of views': 'we must ensure we avoid bias or an imbalance of views on controversial subjects' (BBC, 2005: 26). Comparing talk-time and actor appearances may help to assess whether such a balance has been achieved.

Parity in talk time or actor appearances do not, however, necessarily indicate impartiality. Different actors may be treated differently by journalists during interviews. Some may be exposed to more rigorous questioning than others.

The BBC's editorial guidelines state that actors with contentious views should be rigorously questioned and fairly treated:

we must rigorously test contributors expressing contentious views during an interview whilst giving them a fair chance to set out their full response to our questions (BBC, 2005: 27).

The BBC's editorial guidelines suggest that both 'balance' and fair treatment of contributors are necessary but not sufficient conditions of impartial journalism.

Table 8: Comparison of the percentage of quotation time for actors in individual BBC TV news programmes (August 1 2005 – January 31 2006)

	BBC News 6pm (Week day)	BBC News 10pm (Week day)	Other BBC TV News (week end)	BBC2 News -night	BBC News 24
	%	%	%	%	%
Israeli Political	9	10	4	28	6
Other Israeli	37	22	33	17	23
Palestinian Political	29	21	27	23	19
Other Palestinian	11	23	17	7	15
UK Political	2	6	1	2	1
Other UK	4	3	4	10	13
All Syrian	-	-	-	-	-
All Jordanian	-	-	-	-	-
All Lebanese	-	-	-	-	-
All Egyptian	-	-	-	-	-
All Iranian	-	-	-	1	0.1
Al Quaida	-	-	-	-	-
Other Regional	-	-	-	-	-
US Politician	3	11	13	11	8
Other US	3	-	-	-	5
EU	-	2	-	-	3
UN	2	-	-	1	6
Arab League	-	-	-	-	-
World Jewish Congress	-	-	-	-	-
Relief Agencies	-	-	-	-	-
International Solidarity Movement	-	2	-	-	-
International Media	-	-	-	-	1
All French	-	-	-	-	-
All German	-	-	-	-	1
All Italian	-	-	-	-	-
All Chinese	-	-	-	-	-
All Russian	-	1	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-	-	-
(Total Seconds)	(661)	(1008)	(290)	(3488)	(6299)

Notes: percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place. Totals may not add up to 100 due to rounding.

Here we can see that there is variation between BBC television news programmes in terms of showing Israeli and Palestinian actors speaking. The BBC 1 6pm news granted 46% of talk time to Israelis and 40% to Palestinians while the 10pm news gave Palestinians 44% compared to 32% for Israelis. We expected to find greater consistency across BBC news programmes bearing in mind the existence of common editorial guidelines and that the

programmes draw reports from the same pool of correspondents. Such differences may point to different editorial practices on different programmes.

Generally speaking 'other Israeli' sources i.e. non-party political sources were given more speaking time than 'other Palestinian' sources. Most of the other Israeli actors were either representatives of the Israeli state or 'settlers'. The disparity that we find overall in terms of percentages of Israeli and Palestinian actors granted talk time is because of the greater number of non-party political Israeli sources that come to word.

Table 9: Comparison of the percentage of quotation time for actors in BBC radio news programmes (August 1 2005 – January 31 2006)

	R4 Today	R4 6pm (week day)	R5 Live
	%	%	%
Israeli Political	28	22	-
Other Israeli	29	10	18
Palestinian Political	16	18	11
Other Palestinian	4	7	20
UK Political	7	5	2
Other UK	11	23	35
All Syrian	-	-	-
All Jordanian	-	-	-
All Lebanese	-	-	-
All Egyptian	1	-	-
All Iranian	-	2	-
Al Quaida	-	-	-
Other Regional	-	-	-
US Politician	3	12	13
Other US	-	-	-
EU	-	-	-
UN	2	-	-
Arab League	-	-	-
World Jewish Congress	-	-	-
Relief Agencies	-	-	-
International Solidarity Movement	-	-	-
International Media	-	-	-
All French	-	-	-
All German	-	2	-
All Italian	-	-	-
All Chinese	-	-	-
All Russian	-	-	-
Other	-	-	-
Total seconds	(8224)	(544)	(1796)

Notes: percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place.

Whereas talk time was relatively even for the Radio 4 6pm bulletin, the BBC's flagship agenda-setting morning news programme Today granted 57% of quotation time to Israelis and 20% to Palestinians. It is worth noting that overall quotation time is significantly greater for the Today programme than other radio news programmes. This signals the importance of interviews for the programme.

Table 10 below compares the percentage of direct quotation time counted for various actors concerned with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in BBC and non-BBC TV news. Here we are concerned to compare 'like with like'. Radio news obviously relies more on talk. There are far higher incidences of interviews and less reliance on soundbites in radio news. Therefore, this table solely compares the direct quotation of actors in BBC and non-BBC television news programmes.

Table 10: Comparison of the percentage of quotation time for actors in individual BBC and non-BBC news programmes

(October 1- December 23 '05 & January 3- January 31 '06)

	BBC1 6pm	BBC1 10pm	BBC1 Week end	BBC2 News- night	BBC News 24	SKY 9pm News	ITV News 10.30 (Week Day)	ITV News (Week End)	C4 7pm News (Week Day)	C4 News (Week End)
						%	%	%	%	%
Israeli Political	11	12	3	23	6	54	7		15	1
Other Israeli	29	18	26	19	17	19	44	100	16	10
Palestinian Political	33	25	37	19	22	5	29		18	59
Other Palestinian	9	14	17	6	12	5	9		10	
UK Political	3	8		3	2	6	3		3	
Other UK	3	3		11	7				21	
All Syrian										
All Jordanian										
All Lebanese										
All Egyptian										
All Iranian				2	0.2				1	
Al Quaida										
Other Regional										
US Politician	3	15	18	14	15	6	4		11	29
Other US	7				0.4				2	
EU		2			5					
UN	2			2	10	3	3			
Arab League										
World Jewish Congress										
Relief Agencies										
International Solidarity Movement		3								
International Media					2					
All French										
All German					1				1	
All Italian										
All Chinese										
All Russian		1							1	
Other										
(Total seconds)	(442)	(735)	(215)	(2665)	(3402)	(985)	(207)	(19)	(1983)	(482)

Notes: percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place.

The results show that there was variation in terms of showing Israelis and Palestinians speaking across the national news programmes surveyed during the limited sample period (for example, Sky News gave 73% of talk time to

Israelis and 10% to Palestinians whereas the BBC 6pm News gave 42% to Palestinians and 30% to Israelis).

Aside from Israelis and Palestinians, talk time is given largely to either UK or US political or non-political actors. Third party positions either from the Middle East or from the rest of the world are marginalised in comparison to the presentation of UK and US perspectives. This is potentially significant as UK and US perspectives may be no more impartial than Israeli or Palestinian views but there is an absence of third party voices that may disagree with UK and US perspectives.

In comparison to coverage of domestic politics the proportion of direct speaking time given to political actors is low in the coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. During the 2005 UK General Election, for example, 32% of the BBC1 10pm News's campaign coverage was direct quotation of political actors. This compares with 7% for the programme's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict during the sample period. The conflict, then, is a highly mediated one where comparatively few actors are allowed to come to word and address their audience directly and where journalists are comparatively more prominent. There are a number of possible explanations for why this is so ranging from logistical reasons to reasons concerned with news values and impartiality.

4.4 Themes in News Programmes

Themes emerge from the reporting when similar issues are reported over time. They occupy a shifting space between the macro-level – the Israeli-Palestinian conflict – and the micro – the individual reports. The existence of themes, whether consciously or subconsciously, helps the journalist to decide what is newsworthy and they are used to organize the conflict for both journalists and audiences. An item may have only one theme. Often, however, items refer to or deploy multiple themes, and our coding schedule permitted us to code up to three themes per item. To be included as a theme, it had to take up at least 10 seconds of broadcast time.

Table 11 shows the main themes identified in the quantitative content analysis of BBC Israeli/Palestinian news coverage for the sample period.

Table 11: Themes in BBC News Coverage (August 1 2005 – January 31 2006)

Themes	%
Peace talks/summits	0.3
The Roadmap/peace proposals	0.1
Israeli withdrawals/hand-overs	27
New settlements/land annexations	0.4
Barriers/security fence/Sea barrier	1
IDF actions against property	0.3
IDF actions against persons	2
Removal of movement restrictions	1
IDF restrictions on movement	2
Settler attacks on Palestinians - persons	2
Settler attacks on Palestinians - property	0.1
Bombs in Israel	2
Palestinian attacks on settlers	0.4
Intra-Israeli politics	22
Intra-Israeli violence	1
Intra-Palestinian politics	14
Intra-Palestinian violence	3
Human Rights Groups	1
Role of: US	0.3
Role of UK	1
Role of EU	0.1
Role of Others	0.1
Israeli foreign relations	3
Palestinian foreign relations	2
Historical background	1
Palestinian economy	1
Human interest: Israeli	1
Human interest: Palestinian	0.3
Kidnapping	7
UK suicide bomber family trial	1
(Number of Themes Coded)	(673)

Notes: up to three themes could be coded per news item

Attention to intra-Israeli politics exceeded attention to intra-Palestinian politics (22 percent to 14 percent). The size of the former category is significantly affected by the news of Sharon's stroke (when coverage of this matter is excluded, the category for 'intra-Israeli politics' reduces to 10.5 % of all coded themes).

The Israeli withdrawals from Gaza and elsewhere were seen by the BBC as the single most newsworthy event of the sample period (27 percent). In contrast, there was little coverage of other issues concerning land that occurred during the sample period (0.4% of reports included the theme of land annexation). Given the crucial importance of land to the conflict (and particularly the status of East Jerusalem), the news media's focus on land issues during the withdrawal from Gaza, and the fact that a report for the European Union Council of Foreign Ministers, prepared by Heads of Mission in Jerusalem and Ramallah but not published by the EU, criticised continuing annexations in the West Bank during the period, why did land annexations receive comparatively little attention? The contents of the EU report were reported on in The Financial Times, The Times, The Independent, and The Guardian, and on BBC News online, on Friday 25 November. The report itself was widely published on the Internet. It claims: 'Israel's activities in Jerusalem are in violation of both its Roadmap obligations and international law...Palestinians are, without exception, deeply alarmed about East Jerusalem. They fear that Israel will 'get away with it', under the cover of disengagement' (www.holyland-lutherans.org/05%20Nov%20EU%20Jerusalem.doc p.1). The report suggests that Palestinians were concerned that the disengagement from Gaza would be highlighted in media reports while the annexations would be overlooked. On the basis of the themes reported, there is at least a *prima facie* case for examining whether their fears proved to be justified and, if so, how and why this occurred. The possibility that certain themes may be overlooked may reflect the event driven, rather than investigative, character of reporting of the conflict.

**Table 12: Breakdown of Themes in BBC Television News Programmes
(August 1 2005-January 31 2006)**

	BBC1 6pm	BBC1 10pm	BBC Weekend	BBC Newsnight	BBC News 24
	%	%	%	%	%
Peace talks/summits		1			1
The Roadmap/peace proposals			3		
Israeli withdrawals/hand overs	35	24	13	15	31
New settlements/land annexations		1			
Barriers/'security fence'/Sea barrier	2	4			1
IDF actions against property					1
IDF actions against Persons		1	6		2
Removal of movement restrictions		1	6		
IDF restrictions on movement		3	3	4	1
Settler attacks on Palestinians - persons	2	4		2	1
Settler attacks on Palestinians - property		1			
Bombs in Israel	2	1	6	2	3
Palestinian attacks on settlers			3		1
Intra-Israeli politics	12	16	28	26	25
Intra-Israeli violence	4				
Intra-Palestinian politics	18	11	3	24	12
Intra-Palestinian violence	6	5	6	2	3
Human Rights Groups		1			
Role of: US					
Role of UK	2	3		4	
Role of EU	2				
Role of Others				2	
Israeli foreign relations		4		9	2
Palestinian foreign relations	2	1	3	2	2
Historical background		1		2	3
Palestinian economy			3		1
Human interest: Israeli			9		
Human interest: Palestinian		1			
Kidnapping	10	10	3		10
UK suicide bomber family trial		3			
Other	2	1	3	4	2
Number of Themes Coded	51	79	32	46	163

Table 13: Breakdown of Themes in BBC Radio News Programmes (August 1 2005-January 31 2006)

	R4 Today	R4 6pm	R5 Live 5pm
	%	%	%
Peace talks/summits			
The Roadmap/peace proposals			
Israeli withdrawals/hand overs	25	28	45
New settlements/land annexations	1	1	
Barriers/'security fence'/Sea barrier	1		
IDF actions against property			
IDF actions against Persons	4	2	
Removal of movement restrictions		1	
IDF restrictions on movement	2	5	4
Settler attacks on Palestinians - persons		3	4
Settler attacks on Palestinians - property			
Bombs in Israel	1	2	2
Palestinian attacks on settlers		1	
Intra-Israeli politics	28	14	17
Intra-Israeli violence	1	2	
Intra-Palestinian politics	14	16	19
Intra-Palestinian violence	3	1	2
Human Rights Groups	1	2	
Role of: US	1		
Role of UK			
Role of EU			
Role of Others			
Israeli foreign relations	4	5	2
Palestinian foreign relations	2	3	2
Historical background			
Palestinian economy	2	1	
Human interest: Israeli	2	1	
Human interest: Palestinian			2
Kidnapping	6	7	
UK suicide bomber family trial		2	
Other	4	2	
Number of Themes Coded	159	96	47

Table 14: Comparison of themes in BBC & non-BBC news coverage related to the Israeli/ Palestinian conflict (October 1- Dec 23 '05 & January 3 – January 31 06)

	BBC1 6pm	BBC1 10pm	BBC1 Week end	BBC2 News- night	BBC News 24	SKY 9pm News	ITV News 10.30 (Week Day)	ITV News (Week End)	C4 7pm News (Week Day)	C4 News (Week End)
	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%	%
Peace talks/summits		2								8
The Roadmap/peace proposals			6							
Israeli withdrawals/hand overs									3	8
New settlements/land annexations										
Barriers/security fence/Sea barrier	4	2			1					
IDF actions against property					1					
IDF actions against Persons		2			1				5	
Removal of movement restrictions		2	12				4			
IDF restrictions on movement		5	6	3						
Settler attacks on Palestinians - persons		2								
Settler attacks on Palestinians - property										
Bombs in Israel	4	2		3	3	8	8		11	8
Palestinian attacks on settlers			6		1					
Intra-Israeli politics	23	27	35	32	49	45	37	100	27	31
Intra-Israeli violence										
Intra-Palestinian politics	35	21	6	29	23	24	25		14	8
Intra-Palestinian violence	12	7	12	3	7	11	13		3	15
Human Rights Groups										
Role of: US									5	
Role of UK	4	5		6						
Role of EU	4									
Role of Others				3						
Israeli foreign relations		7		12	4	5	8		16	8
Palestinian foreign relations	4	2	6	3	4	3	4		5	
Historical background				3	1					
Palestinian economy										
Human interest: Israeli			12							8
Human interest: Palestinian		2							3	
Kidnapping		4				3				
UK suicide bomber family trial		1								
Other	8	5		3	3	3				8
Number of Themes Coded	26	44	17	34	70	38	24	2	8	13

4.5 Actors and Themes in News Programmes

As a related exercise, we examined how themes identified in coverage were linked to particular interested parties involved in the conflict. This measure does not indicate any active editorial endorsement of a particular perspective or side, it simply shows which actors were most directly associated with the subject matter of each report. For example, was the withdrawal from Gaza principally covered as an Israeli story (i.e. focusing on the political implications for Israel and the experiences of Israeli citizens) or a Palestinian story? Or were the implications discussed equally?

Up to two 'actors' could be assigned to each coded theme. These were independent measurements from those discussed in the section 4.2. Table 15 shows the distribution of 'actors linked to themes' in all BBC news coverage from August 1 2005 to January 31 2006. Table 16 provides a comparison of the distribution of these linked actors between BBC and non-BBC TV news programmes (October 1- December 23 05 & January 3 – January 31 06).

Across all BBC coverage, Israeli actors accounted for 56 percent of the thematic links identified. Palestinian actors represented 29 percent of those coded (see table 15). These differences reduced slightly for the second, more compressed sample period (see table 16), but Israeli actors still accounted for 48 percent of those identified, compared with 37 percent of Palestinians. As is discussed in the next section, the greater difference found for the more extensive BBC sample, is clearly a result of the intensive coverage given to the Gaza withdrawal.

Table 15: Actors linked to themes in BBC Broadcast News coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (August 1 2005 – January 31 2006)

	All BBC News
	%
Israeli Political	28
Other Israeli	28
Palestinian Political	22
Other Palestinian	7
UK Political	1
Other UK	8
All Syrian	0.2
All Jordanian	
All Lebanese	0.2
All Egyptian	
All Iranian	3
Al Quaida	
Other Regional	
US Politician	1
Other US	0.3
EU	
UN	
Arab League	
World Jewish Congress	
Relief Agencies	
International Solidarity Movement	
International Media	
All French	
All German	
All Italian	0.2
All Chinese	
All Russian	
Other	
(Total number of linked actors)	(665)

Notes: Up to 2 'actors' could be linked to individual themes identified. Percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place.

Table 16: Comparison of Actors linked to themes in BBC & non BBC broadcast news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict (October 1 – December 23 2005 & January 3 – January 31 2006)

	BBC News	Non BBC News
	%	%
Israeli Political	43	41
Other Israeli	5	7
Palestinian Political	31	37
Other Palestinian	6	2
UK Political	2	2
Other UK	3	2
All Syrian	0.3	
All Jordanian		0.9
All Lebanese	0.3	
All Egyptian	6	8
All Iranian		
Al Quaida		
Other Regional		
US Politician	2	
Other US	1	
EU		1
UN		
Arab League		
World Jewish Congress		
Relief Agencies		
International Solidarity Movement		
International Media		
All French		
All German		
All Italian		
All Chinese		
All Russian		
Other		
(Total appearances)	(327)	(112)

Notes: Up to 2 'actors' could be linked to individual themes identified. Percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place.

BBC coverage of Israeli withdrawals from Occupied Territory August – September 2005

This tendency to orientate reporting more frequently to Israeli rather than Palestinian actors was particularly evident in coverage given to the Israeli withdrawal from Gaza and parts of the West Bank in August-September 2005 - which, as has been shown, was considered by BBC journalists to be the

most newsworthy topic to occur during the sample period (see table 10)¹.

Table 17 shows that 85 percent of all actors linked to the withdrawal story were Israeli, compared with 15 percent for Palestinian actors².

Table 17: Actors linked to 'Israeli Pullouts/ Handovers' Theme (All BBC News, August & September Only)

	%
Israeli Actors	
Ariel Sharon	5
Israeli Government Actor	1
Benjamin Netanyahu	1
Shimon Peres	0.3
IDF	29
Israeli Police	1
Avi Dichter	0.3
Jerusalem Post	0.3
Israeli Ambassador	1
Ma'ariv	1
Settlers	44
Other Israeli Citizens	2
Palestinian Actors	
Mahmoud Abbas	3
Other Fatah	1
Hamas	1
PLO	0.3
Hisballah	0.3
Palestinian Police	1
Palestinian Citizens	9
Other Actors	
US Other Actor	1
(Total number of linked actors)	(665)

Notes: Up to 2 'actors' could be linked to individual themes identified. Percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place.

Table 18 shows the distribution of actors reported in BBC news items where 'Israeli Pullouts/ Handovers' was the main theme identified. Here again, the presence of Israeli actors considerably exceeded those from the Palestinian side (74 percent of reported actors, compared with 22 percent).

¹ There was also considerable coverage of 'Intra Israeli politics' across the sample, but this category included a range of related but distinctive events, such as reports of Ariel Sharon's break with his Likud party and his subsequent ill health.

² Percentages are rounded.

Table 18: Actors Reported in News Items with ‘Israeli Pullouts/ Handovers’ as the Main Theme (All BBC News, August & September Only)

	%
Israeli Political Actor	10
Israeli Other Actor	64
Palestinian Political Actor	11
Palestinian Other Actor	11
UK Political Actor	0.2
UK Other Actor	1
US Politician	1
US Other Actor	0.5
Other	0.5
(Number of Actors)	(413)

Notes: up to 10 Actors could be coded per news item. Percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place.

Neutral language – reporting the Gaza withdrawals

In the immediate aftermath of the Gaza withdrawals, a particular BBC report on this subject received considerable public criticism. In September 2005 the BBC received 634 complaints with respect to its reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Sixty-three per cent of these complaints referred to one news report by Orla Guerin on Palestinian reaction to Israel’s pullout from Gaza that was broadcast in slightly different versions on September 12 on BBC 1pm News, 6pm News and 10pm News and also made available in another version on the BBC News website (the version analysed here was broadcast on the BBC 6pm News). The BBC News online version is still available via the headline ‘Palestinians tear apart synagogue as they enter Gaza’ (http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4235768.stm#).

Orla Guerin’s reporting had been criticised by the Israeli government and by pro-Israeli groups on previous occasions. (e.g. ‘BBC accused of bias against Israel’, *Guardian*, 1/4/ 2004: 12; ‘Beeb “Guilty of Rank Hypocrisy”’, *Daily Express*, 14/1/2004: 11). Guerin has consistently defended herself against

such criticisms. In an interview with David Rowan in the Evening Standard in December 2003 she states:

"People's subjective perceptions of me I pay no attention to. They will hear what they want to hear. What people are saying is not, 'We want you to be fair and impartial', but, 'We want you to be on our side'. And we're not on anybody's side."

<http://www.davidrowan.com/2003/12/interview-orka-guerin-bbc-middle-east.html>

The BBC's internal monitoring of this particular complaint notes that there was evidence that this was a result of activity co-ordinated by www.honestreporting.com - a pro-Israeli website that asks readers to complain to news organizations deemed to be anti-Israel:

Israel is fighting an uphill battle and needs all the help it can get. Much has been achieved, yet there is much more yet to do. One person alone may not make a difference, but thousands united can...
(www.honestreporting.com)

Honestreporting.com described Guerin's report in the following way

'Synagogue Desecrations

'Media outlets rationalize the burning of sacred Jewish sites in Gaza

'Mere hours after Israel completed its historic withdrawal from Gaza on Sunday (Sept. 11), Palestinian mobs descended on former Jewish settlements, desecrating their synagogues by burning them to the ground and looting anything left. While observers the world over were saddened and outraged, some media outlets tried to justify the sacrilege, or even blame it on Israel.

'The [BBC TV report](#) by Orla Guerin justified the arson mobs in this manner:

"Palestinians came streaming to the settlements that caused them so much pain, to sightsee and to loot. Israel stole thirty-eight years from them; today, many were ready to take back anything they could."

This is a clear example of BBC bias — Guerin states as 'fact' that Palestinians in Gaza had their lives somehow 'stolen' by Israeli since 1967, a claim the BBC uses to rationalize the Palestinian mob violence.'
(http://www.honestreporting.com/articles/45884734/critiques/Synagogue_Desecrations.asp)

Guerin's report refers specifically to events at Neve Dekalim, previously a settlement in the Gaza Strip, the day after the Israeli pullout. Guerin seeks to place what she refers to as 'mass looting' of abandoned Israeli settlements in the context of occupation and sees the looting as a response to the end of occupation. She attempts to convey to the audience why Palestinians may wish 'to loot' the settlements.

While Guerin attempts to convey why some Palestinians were motivated to attack the abandoned settlements, this does not necessarily mean that she sought to justify such actions. For example, she refers to the actions as 'chaotic' and undertaken in a 'frenzy of destruction'. The latter description in particular is difficult to reconcile with the claim that she sought to justify such actions.

Guerin's report displays the difficulties of finding a neutral language with which to describe the ending of an occupation or the sacking of a synagogue that has profound cultural resonance for European audiences.

Stills and Audio Transcription from Orla Guerin's September 12 Report



This was mass looting, and maybe a bid to destroy the past. No one tried to stop it.

	<p>Not even when it came to Jewish Holy Places.</p>
	<p>Inside the largest settlement, Neve Dekalim</p>
	<p>they attacked this synagogue from the floor to the ceiling.</p>
	<p>Palestinians say Israel has only itself to blame for all this because it refused to demolish the synagogues itself.</p>

	<p>What we're witnessing here now is a frenzy of destruction.</p>
	<p>Everything is being beaten, torn down and carried away. For Israelis this was a Holy Place; to Palestinians a symbol of suffering and occupation. And what's happening here now was all but guaranteed.</p>
	<p>But outside we found others who just wanted to relish this day.</p>

In an editorial meeting in May 2004 Stephen Whittle, the BBC's controller of editorial policy at that time, urged journalists to search for a neutral language:

Drawing the discussion to a close, Stephen Whittle reminded programme makers and journalists to take care in the use of language, and ensure they understand the context in which difficult words are being used. He said we should not rush to make a judgment on the perpetrators of acts of violence, but should wait and assess the situation before using words that may appear judgemental or that we might otherwise later regret. Neutral language is the key and it should be remembered that there is little distinction now between domestic and global services – both are equally available. (BBC Editorial Policy Meeting (2004) Minutes of May meeting.

www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/assets/meetings/may_minutes.doc

The problem is clearly illustrated by the example above. The notion of neutral language assumes the availability of descriptive terms for actions and motives that carry no baggage of connotation, and which do not impute reason or motive. Such language is possibly unavailable. Such a concept of neutral language, as with the broader demand for overall neutrality in reporting, assumes an unambiguously impartial account and description from which departures can be identified. This applies to the choice of events to report as much as to the language with which it is accomplished.

When a report concerns attacks on a synagogue it is difficult to imagine what a neutral, value-free language would look like. A straight description of actions is conceivable. An alternative to using or attempting to use neutral language is to describe events from the perspective of the competing groups involved in turn. Such an approach was clearly adopted by Guerin in the report. By presenting the events inside the synagogue from Israeli and Palestinian perspectives she is seeking to distance herself from them both.

In addition, in order to show that not all Palestinians reacted to the pullout by 'looting', Guerin examines other responses. These reactions are looked upon by her more positively judging by the way she describes their actions and attitudes. In contrast to the 'frenzy of destruction' inside, 'outside we found others who just wanted to relish this day'. There follows a short interview with a Palestinian who is visiting peacefully the settlement who says that he has today fulfilled a dream through reclaiming occupied land. This is the only interview in the piece. The item closes with a medium shot of Palestinians playing at the seaside on what was a settler-only beach. If we compare the reporting of the two Palestinian responses to the end of occupation, the destruction of the synagogue is described as frenzied while the peaceful visitor is presented as relishing the experience.

While a close reading of the item shows that the criticism of Guerin that she sought to justify Palestinian attacks on property and a synagogue is not

supported by the evidence, that does not mean that the report was necessarily impartial. Some words clearly carry positive connotations and some clearly negative ones. Guerin did not avoid the use of such words in her report. It is not clear, however, whether an impartial neutral language is available to describe actions and events. The use of 'toned down' language is no guarantee of impartiality.

In addition to the question concerning the possibility of impartial reporting there is also the issue of whether impartial reporting is desirable. If people throw stones through a house-window of a Jewish or Muslim person because they do not like their religion, would an impartial report showing both sides of the story and avoiding controversial terms such as 'racist' be moral? Or is the public interest best served by providing a neutral report?

4.6 Reporting the Historical Context of the Conflict in News Programmes

One common criticism of UK national news coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict is that it concentrates very much on the 'here and now' of the conflict and fails to convey to audiences an historical understanding of how and why the conflict has developed. Such an understanding, it is often claimed, is indispensable in order for audiences to make sense of current events. In order to assess the extent to which BBC journalists provide historical context in their reports we counted the occurrence of references in news programmes to important historical events in the conflict. These are listed in table 19. The percentages indicate the relative frequency with which each event was referred to in news items. Journalists made few references to historical events when reporting contemporary developments. The Gaza withdrawals, for example, were mostly reported without mentioning when Gaza was occupied (the 1967 War).

Table 19: References to Historical events in Israeli/ Palestinian BBC News Coverage(August 1 2005-January 31 2006)

Historical Event	Percent of All Items
Sykes-Picot Agreement	0
Balfour Declaration	0.2
British Mandate for Palestine	0
Hebron massacre (1929)	0
Great uprising (1936-39)	0
Peal Commission (1937)	0
Lehi (Stern Gang) attacks (1940-49)	0
Alexandria Protocol (1944)	0.2
Holocaust	0.4
Partition of Palestine (1947)	0
1948 War	0
Deir Yassin Massacre	0
Nakba	0
Qibya massacre (1953)	0.4
Israel invades Egypt (1956)	0
Israel withdraws from Sinai (1957)	0.2
Founding of PLO (1964)	0
Six Day War (1967)	2
Avivim school bus massacre (1970)	0
Munich Massacre (1972)	0.4
Operation Wrath of God (1972)	0.4
Yom Kippur war (1973)	0.2
Entebbe (1976)	0
Camp David (1978)	0
Return of Sinai (1979)	0.4
Israel invades Lebanon (1982)	1
Sabra and Shatila	1
Intifada (1987)	0.2
Founding of Hamas (1988)	0.2
Palestinian declaration of Independence (1988)	0
Gulf War 1, Scud attacks (1991)	0
Oslo Peace Process/Accords (1993-95)	0.4
Nobel Peace Prize (Peres, Rabin, Arafat) (1994)	0
Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin (1995)	0
Camp David 2 (2000)	0.4
Al-Aqsa Intifada	1
Operation Defensive Sheild (2002)	1
Yasser Araft dies (2004)	0.2
Gaza pullout (2005).	50

4.7 Reporting Fatalities in News Programmes

The reporting of violence is clearly of major importance to the overall reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The BBC is regularly criticised by both pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian groups for misrepresenting acts of violence. Which acts of violence are reported? How are they reported? These are extremely complex issues to analyse. They are also difficult to report on as the issue of fatalities and how they are described is perhaps the key propaganda battleground between actors in the conflict.

Table 20: Number of Fatalities reported and Number of Reports in which a specific number of Fatalities were reported October 1 – December 23 2005 – January 3 – January 31 2006

News Programme	Number of Israeli fatalities reported	Number of reports mentioning specific number of Israeli fatalities	Number of Palestinian fatalities reported (excluding suicide bombers)	Number of reports mentioning specific number of Palestinian fatalities
BBC 1 6pm	0	0	0	0
BBC 1 10pm	5	1	8	2
BBC 1 7.35pm	2	1	0	0
BBC2 Newsnight	5	1	0	0
ITV 10.30pm	5	1	0	0
C4	10	3	0	0
Sky	10	2	0	0
BBC News 24	9	2	0	0
R4 Today	0	0	0	0
R4 6pm	13	3	2	1
R5 Drive	5	1	0	0
Total	64	15	10	3

These figures refer to reports where specific numbers of fatalities were mentioned. They include all fatalities i.e. combatants as well as civilians but exclude references to the deaths of 'suicide bombers'. They include cases where the same fatalities were mentioned in different reports as we were

interested in the extent of news reporting of fatalities. Reports referring to fatalities but without specifying the number were excluded. Reports referring to fatalities that occurred before the sample period were excluded.

Table 21: Fatalities in Israel and the Occupied Territories October 1 2005 – January 31 2006

Who killed whom?	Number
Israelis killed by Palestinians	19
Palestinians killed by Israelis	70

Source for Palestinians killed: B'Tselem

<http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp>

Source for Israelis killed: Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs

<http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/MFA/Terrorism-%20Obstacle%20to%20Peace/Memorial/2000/In%20Memory%20of%20the%20Victims%20of%20Palestinian%20Violence%20a>

B'Tselem is an Israeli human rights information centre whose stated aim is to change Israeli policy in the occupied territories by informing the Israeli public of events there. According to its website: 'B'Tselem ensures the reliability of information it publishes by conducting its own fieldwork and research, whose results are thoroughly cross-checked with relevant documents, official government sources, and information from other sources, among them Israeli, Palestinian, and other human rights organizations.'

(http://www.btselem.org/English/About_BTselem/Index.asp). Their statistics have been used by reputable organizations such as Amnesty International. They publish figures for Israeli as well as for Palestinian casualties. The Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs 'formulates, implements and presents the foreign policy of the Government of Israel' (http://www.israel-mfa.gov.il/MFA/MFAArchive/2000_2009/2003/10/Ministry+of+Foreign+Affairs.htm). They do not publish figures for Palestinian casualties.

Over the course of the sample period the national news programmes surveyed reported six times as many Israeli as Palestinian fatalities. Over the four month period, however, according to B'Tselem, 70 Palestinians were

killed by Israelis and, according to the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 19 Israelis were killed by Palestinians.

In table 20, fourteen of the 15 reports that mention a specific number of Israeli fatalities refer to one of three incidents – the October 16 drive-by killing by Palestinian gunmen of 3 Israeli civilians at Gush Etzion in the West Bank, Israeli Occupied Territory; the Hadera market bomb where a Palestinian bomber killed 6 Israeli civilians on October 26 (reported as 5 because the sixth victim died a number of days later); and the Netanya shopping centre bomb where a Palestinian bomber killed 5 Israeli civilians on December 5. If the statistics available from the Israel Foreign Ministry are correct, some single Israeli fatalities were not reported. For example, neither the killing of an IDF soldier near Ramallah on December 8 nor the killing of a civilian settler near Hebron on December 16 were reported.

Three reports mention a specific number of Palestinian fatalities in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank. Two of these refer to what was described as retaliatory action taken by the IDF in response to attacks on Israel or Israelis by Palestinian militants. The third report is best described as a ‘human interest’ story: the father of a Palestinian boy killed by the IDF (the boy was treated in an Israeli hospital) had donated his son’s organs to help save the lives of Israeli children.

If we examine the number of specific fatalities mentioned by BBC News online we see figures that offer a contrast with those furnished by the analysis of broadcast news. If we count all mentions of specific fatalities on BBC News online (i.e. where the same fatalities are mentioned in more than one BBC News online report) during the same sample period, there were ten BBC News online reports that mentioned a total of 42 Israeli fatalities while there were eighteen reports that mentioned a total of 56 Palestinian fatalities. BBC News online covers stories relating to Israeli Defense Force killing Palestinians in Gaza and the West Bank much more frequently than either BBC or non-BBC broadcast news.

From our small sample of ‘specific number’ reports, we can make five tentative observations: that generally the killing of more than one Israeli by Palestinians either by gun or bomb were reported on by national broadcast programmes; if one Israeli was killed, the killing was generally not reported; that ‘targeted killings/assassinations’ of Palestinians by Israelis and Israeli air or ground raids were generally not reported on by national broadcast programmes but were reported by BBC News online; that specific numbers of Palestinian fatalities were generally not reported by broadcast news programmes; and that, if B’Tselem figures are correct or if BBC News online reporting provides a more comprehensive account of Palestinian fatalities, a small percentage of Palestinian fatalities were reported by broadcast news.

Table 22: Number of Reports mentioning specific numbers of fatalities and number of fatalities reported BBC broadcast news August 1 2005 – January 31 2006 (excluding December 24- January 2 for R5 Five Live Drive)

News Programme	Specific Number of Israeli fatalities reported	Number of reports mentioning specific number of Israeli fatalities	Specific Number of Palestinian fatalities reported (excluding ‘suicide bombers’)	Number of reports mentioning specific number of Palestinian fatalities
BBC 1 6pm	5	1	3	1
BBC 1 10pm	5	1	8	2
BBC 1 7.35pm	2	1	0	0
BBC 1 10.10pm	2	1	0	0
BBC2 Newsnight	5	1	0	0
BBC News 24	10	3	8	3
R4 Today	5	1	0	0
R4 6pm	24	6	7	3
R5 Drive	5	1	3	1
Total	63	16	29	10

The above table includes an incident reported 3 times on August 5 2005 (BBC1 6pm, Radio 4 Today, and Radio 4 6pm) where 4 'Israeli Arabs' were killed by an Israeli who was then himself killed. Because the 4 were identified in reports in BBC broadcast news as 'Israeli Arabs' rather than as 'Palestinians' they were included in the Israeli columns. The table also includes a Radio 4 6pm report of the killing of 3 Israelis on a bus by a man wearing Israeli army uniform. The table does not include BBC September 24 reports on a Hamas demonstration in Jebaliya refugee camp in Gaza on September 23 where it was reported that a truck carrying gunmen and home-made explosives detonated killing 'at least 15 militants'. This was a highly unusual case and was reported primarily as an accidental event. We excluded it for this reason.

According to the Israel Ministry of Foreign Affairs, there were 23 Israelis killed by Palestinians during this period. In the six month sample there were still 3 incidents where more than 1 Israeli was killed by a Palestinian (Gush Etzion, Hadera, and Netanya). According to B'Tselem, there were 20 Israelis killed by Palestinians and 98 Palestinians killed by Israelis during this period.

**Table 23: Fatalities in Israel and the Occupied Territories August 1 2005
– January 31 2006**

Who killed whom?	Number
Israeli civilians killed by Palestinians in occupied territories	5
Israeli civilians killed by Palestinians in Israel	11
Israeli security forces personnel killed by Palestinians in occupied territories	4
Israeli security forces personnel killed by Palestinians in Israel	0
Total Israelis killed by Palestinians	20
Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces in the occupied territories	94
Palestinians killed by Israeli security forces in Israel	0
Palestinians killed by Israeli civilians	4
Total Palestinians killed by Israelis	98
Palestinians killed by Palestinians	8
Palestinians killed during the course of an assassination/targeted killing	23 (included in total figure above)
Palestinians killed who were the target of an assassination/targeted killing	17 (included in total figure above)

Source: <http://www.btselem.org/English/Statistics/Casualties.asp>

If we examine BBC News online coverage for the 6 month period again a contrasting picture emerges. Counting all references to a specific number of fatalities (i.e. including multiple mentions of fatalities) BBC News online reported 45 Israeli fatalities in 13 reports and 83 Palestinian fatalities in 25 reports. The Israeli figures include 3 mentions of the Netanya bombing and 4 mentions of the Hadera bombing (giving a total for these reports of 35 fatalities). BBC news online is more comprehensive with respect to Israeli fatalities than broadcast news in that it generally reports single killings (such as the stabbing of an Orthodox Jew outside Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem on August 25 2005 and the Hamas kidnapping and murder of an Israeli businessman on September 27 2005). The Palestinian figures include a report on August 3 2005 where Islamic Jihad denied responsibility for a rocket attack

that resulted in the death of a Palestinian boy and a report on December 4 2005 of a gun-fight between rival Palestinian groups that led to five deaths.

During the six month sample period there were 15 BBC News online reports that referred to specific numbers of Palestinian fatalities killed in IDF operations in Gaza and the West Bank against Palestinian 'militants' ('targeted killings/ assassinations', air raids, and ground raids). Two reports (October 28 and November 8), referring to the same event, mention that 4 'bystanders' as well as four 'militants' were killed in the operation. As with Israeli fatalities BBC News online is more comprehensive than BBC broadcast news with respect to Palestinian fatalities. If we compare, however, the number of fatalities in BBC News online with those provided by B'Tselem (and if the B'Tselem figures are correct) and we take into consideration that some fatalities are mentioned in more than one report, there would appear to be some fatalities left unaccounted for.

While 'targeted killings/assassinations' of Palestinian leaders by the IDF and IDF air or ground raids in Gaza or the West Bank were generally reported by BBC News online, they were generally not reported by BBC broadcast news. Palestinian attacks that result in the death of more than one Israeli civilian were generally reported on BBC broadcast news. The possible consequence of this for audiences who rely solely on BBC broadcast news is that they may understand that the violent aspects of the conflict may be thought of as primarily consisting of Palestinian attacks on Israeli civilians.

At the beginning of this section reference was made to the importance of fatalities in the propaganda battle between political actors. Reporting fatalities and analysing the reporting of fatalities is, as a consequence, a complex undertaking. Content analysis of reporting seeks to provide accurate descriptions of reporting but cannot explain why the reporting is as it is. The reporting of fatalities is clearly an issue that calls for more intensive and extensive research utilising a wider range of research methods.

4.8 Keywords used in conflict coverage

The tables below show the occurrence of words used by either journalists or actors in the conflict coverage:

Table 24: Comparison of the use of terms in all BBC News (August 1 2005 –January 31 2006)

	BBC
	Percent of Items using the term
'Palestinian'	66
'Israeli'	76
'Palestine'	4
'Israel'	75
'Occupied Territories'	5
'Occupation'	6
'Palestinian Territories'	1
'Muslim'	2
'Jewish'	24
'Christian'	1
'Terrorist (related to Palestinians)'	7
'Terrorist (related to Israelis)'	0.4
'Suicide Bomber'	8
'Militant (related to Palestinians)'	15
'Militant (related to Israelis)'	0.5
'Extremist (related to Palestinians)'	1
'Extremist (related to Israelis)'	2
'Refugees (related to Palestinians)'	2
'Refugees (related to Israelis)'	0
'Jihad'	0.2
'Intifada'	2

BBC journalists avoid the use of terms perceived to be contested when describing the conflict (terms such as Palestine, occupied territories, terrorist). When they do use these terms it is made clear that they are paraphrasing the opinions of actors in the conflict. We see this as an attempt by journalists to follow the BBC editorial guidelines by using 'neutral language'. BBC journalism is regularly criticised by pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian groups for avoiding their preferred descriptions of the conflict.

Table 25: Comparison of Journalist and Quoted Actor usage of key terms in all BBC coverage (August 1 2005- January 31 2006)

	Journalist	Quoted Actor	Number of appearances
Occupied Territories	77%	23%	34
Terrorist (related to Palestinians)	45%	55%	56
Terrorist (related to Israelis)	50%	50%	2
Militant (related to Palestinians)	86%	14%	83
Militant (related to Israelis)	67%	2%	3
Extremist (related to Palestinians)	67%	32%	6
Extremist (related to Israelis)	100%		10
Jewish	83%	17%	147

Notes: up to three actors could be linked to the appearance of each term in an item, to cover those occasions when more than one person used it.

A number of issues relate to this search for a ‘neutral language’:

- why are some terms thought to be contentious while others not (‘Israel’, for example, is thought to be uncontentious despite the fact that Palestinian ‘militants’, among others, do not recognize the state of Israel. ‘Palestine’, on the other hand, is deemed to be contentious)?;
- does the avoidance of certain contentious terms mean that the reporting is impartial? It could be argued that the avoidance of controversial terms is itself an indication of partiality;
- if contentious terms are avoided in favour of more ‘neutral’ descriptions, then it may be difficult to convey to audiences what the contest or conflict is actually about.

Such questions raise extremely complex linguistic and philosophical issues that we can not analyse in depth here. In the following we seek to provide some insight into the complexity of issue by examining one of the most contentious aspects of the coverage – the use by BBC journalists of the word ‘militant’ to describe Palestinians attacking Israeli civilians

‘Militant’ or ‘Terrorist’ – consistency across conflicts

As we have shown, journalists eschew the use of what they perceive to be controversial terms when covering the Israeli-Palestinian conflict or, if they are

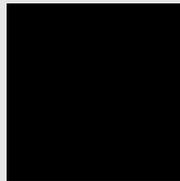
used, it is made clear that it is the views of actors in the conflict that are being reported. BBC journalists, for example, do not use the word 'terrorist' to describe Hamas supporters who bomb Israeli civilian targets preferring to use the word 'militant'. Although the word 'militant' is not value-neutral, the use of this word by journalists is an attempt to find a neutral way of describing the conflict.

Before the London bombings of July 7 2005 the BBC received a regular stream of criticism concerning the BBC's use of the word 'militant' to describe those Palestinians engaged in violent attacks on Israeli civilians. Most complainants would prefer the BBC to describe these individuals and/or groups as 'terrorists'. Since the July 2005 London bombings many complainants have accused the BBC of double-standards in that the London bombers were described as 'terrorists' in some reports by the BBC.

Here is a July 12 2005 BBC News online report about an attack on Israeli civilians in Netanya:

Bomber strikes Israeli coast town

A suicide bomber has killed two people and himself and injured about 30 at the entrance to a shopping centre in the Israeli coastal town of Netanya.



Rescue services rush to the scene of the bombing

Palestinian militant group Islamic Jihad claimed the bomber, an 18-year-old male from the West bank.

It is the first suicide attack in Israel since Islamic Jihad attacked a Tel Aviv nightclub on 25 February.

Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas blamed the attack on traitors "working against the Palestinian interest".

The White House said it was an unjustified "vicious attack" on civilians.

'Clothes on fire'

Eyewitnesses say the bomber tried to get inside the shopping mall but was pushed away by security guards before blowing himself up.

Schools in Israel have broken up for the summer and it appears that a number of teenagers were among the injured.

Doron Shafir, a paramedic among those first to reach the scene, said he saw a woman whose clothes were on fire.



"Another, her handbag was burning," he added. "We stepped on it to put it out. She was just sitting there. She did not know what was happening to her."

The explosion in Netanya follows four months of relative calm in Israel.

Netanya has been a target in the past but that was before Israel began building its barrier around the West Bank.

Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon has consistently called for Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas to launch a crackdown on militant groups.

Truce appeal

Mr Abbas said the organisers of the bombing should be punished for their "stupid" attack.

"There is no rational man who can do those things on the eve of the Israeli withdrawal from 22 [Jewish] settlements [in the Gaza Strip and West Bank]," he added.

Jibril Rajoub, a security aide to Mr Abbas, called on all Palestinian factions to abide by the February truce with Israel.

Both Palestinian and Israeli sources identified the bomber as Ahmed Abu Khalil, 18, from the nearby West Bank.

In a farewell video message quoted by Reuters news agency, he said: "We reiterate our commitment to calm, but we have to retaliate for Israeli violations."

Israeli security forces report that a Palestinian was wounded on Tuesday trying to drive a bomb into a Jewish settlement in the northern West Bank.

A police spokesman said the man's van, which was carrying gas canisters, exploded about 100 metres (yards) inside the Shavei Shomron settlement and he was critically injured but nobody else was hurt.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/4676257.stm

Islamic Jihad is referred to in the report as a 'militant' group. The person planting the bomb is referred to either as a 'bomber' or 'suicide bomber'.

If we compare the above report to a July 7 2005 BBC News online report of the London bombs, it is clear that reservations about using the words 'terror' and 'terrorist' in Middle East coverage do not apply to all journalists when covering a bomb attack in London:

London rocked by terror attacks

At least two people have been killed and scores injured after three blasts on the Underground network and another on a double-decker bus in London.

UK Prime Minister Tony Blair said it was "reasonably clear" there had been a series of terrorist attacks.

He said it was "particularly barbaric" that it was timed to coincide with the G8 summit. He is returning to London.

 OPEN



Passengers evacuate an underground train at Kings Cross
(Photo: Alexander Chadwick)

[Enlarge Image](#)

An Islamist website has posted a statement - purportedly from al-Qaeda - claiming it was behind the attacks.

[Map of where the blasts happened](#)

US President George Bush told reporters at the G8 Summit in Gleneagles that "the war on terror goes on."

The Queen said she was "deeply shocked" and sent her sympathy to those affected.

Home Secretary Charles Clarke said the morning rush-hour blasts occurred between Aldgate East and Liverpool Street tube stations; between Russell Square and King's Cross tube stations; at Edgware Road tube station; and on a bus at Tavistock Square.

"We will not yield to these terrorists, we will find them, we will bring them to justice," he said.

Paul Woodrow, of the London Ambulance Service, is in Russell Square near the bus which exploded.

"At King's Cross station there is a rescue operation in the tunnel down on the line," he said.

"Although we cannot confirm casualties - it is too early - we are dealing with large numbers of casualties."

Metropolitan Police Deputy Assistant Commissioner Brian Paddick said the initial estimates were of 150 seriously injured and "many more" walking wounded. Police also said two people had died at Aldgate.

“ It's particularly barbaric that this has happened on a day when people are meeting to try to help the problems of poverty and Africa ”

Tony Blair

[Blair statement in full](#)
[Bus 'ripped apart'](#)
[Blast locations in detail](#)

Ania Lichtarowicz, from BBC News, said a doctor who had been treating people in Tavistock Square said at least 10 people had died.

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/4659093.stm>

Here is the way that the Chairman of the Board of Governors defended the BBC's use of the word 'terrorist' to describe the London bombings. (It should be noted that he was defending the BBC from the criticism that it had not called the bombers terrorists and that by not doing so the BBC was being either unpatriotic or appeasing terrorists or both rather than defending the BBC for using 'terrorist'.)

London bombings

The BBC chairman was also asked about the use of the word "terrorist" in news broadcasts, to which he replied the corporation's position on the issue was clear.

"The BBC has been describing them as such... The BBC's coverage has used the word terror, terrorism, terrorist very, very freely on all our major news outlets.

"There was some sub-editing of a couple of pages on the website which I haven't got to the bottom of yet [where the word 'militant' was used] but which the director general I'm sure will tell the governors about."

The chairman said it was not just his view, but one widely shared in the corporation that the bombings could be described as terrorism.

"It is the view of all the BBC journalists and editors. It has been very clearly signalled on all our news outlets."

Mr Grade said the BBC did sometimes act in a defensive manner as it was often subjected to criticism.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv_and_radio/4695229.stmMichael

If we examine the BBC's Editorial Guidelines for the reporting of 'acts of terror', however, we find a position expressed that is potentially at variance with that expressed by Michael Grade (and apparently the opinions of all BBC journalists and editors) and with the BBC's coverage of the 7/7 bombings.

Terror

We must report acts of terror quickly, accurately, fully and responsibly. Our credibility is undermined by the careless use of words which carry emotional or value judgements. The word "terrorist" itself can be a barrier rather than an aid to understanding. We should try to avoid the term, without attribution. We should let other people characterise while we report the facts as we know them.

We should not adopt other people's language as our own. It is also usually inappropriate to use words like "liberate", "court martial" or "execute" in the absence of a clear judicial process. We should convey to our audience the full consequences of the act by describing what happened. We should use words which specifically describe the perpetrator such as "bomber", "attacker", "gunman", "kidnapper", "insurgent, and "militant". Our responsibility is to remain objective and report in ways that enable our audiences to make their own assessments about who is doing what to whom.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/edguide/war/mandatoryreferr.shtml>

Thus the view of the editorial guidelines is that the use of the word 'terrorist' is comment (or characterisation) rather than a neutral description of a person, though this injunction was plainly regarded as unnecessary for reporting of the London bombings. In relation to the issue analysed here, the minutes of the Editorial Policy Meeting in May 2004 record the following instruction

Islam, Israel and Terrorism Terminology

- It is important to take care and remain consistent in the use of language. Inconsistency in the use of words such as "terrorism" can lead to questions about the BBC's impartiality. When reporting acts of violence we should stick to the facts of what has occurred and avoid rushing into applying labels that may appear judgemental or inappropriate ideological descriptions of the perpetrators. Neutral language is key. (BBC Editorial Policy Meeting minutes, 2004)

There is thus an interesting contrast in the required language to be used in reporting bombers whose evident purpose is to spread fear and panic in civilian populations. One group (the London bombers) are, it is ruled, to be

called 'terrorists' and the other group (Hamas) 'militants'. This does not mean that the BBC's reporting of Palestinian bombers is pro-Palestinian. Such a conclusion would have to be based on an analysis of similar Israeli and Palestinian acts of violence. It does show, however, that there may be an inconsistency in the BBC's use of 'terrorist', 'terror attacks' and so on. Further research is necessary to determine whether 'terrorism' was used exclusively for the London bombs (implying that there may be a 'home'/'away' or 'domestic'/'foreign' distinction made in reporting such events) or is used in reporting some conflicts (domestic and foreign) but not others (domestic and foreign) for more complex reasons.

Comparison of the use of terms in BBC and Non BBC News

Table 24 shows that the language used to describe the conflict is remarkably similar across BBC and non-BBC news programmes. The belief that some terms are contentious and others not are shared across BBC and non-BBC news programmes.

**Table 26: Comparison of the use of terms in BBC and Non BBC News
(October 1 – December 23 2005 & January 3 – January 31 2006)**

	BBC	Non BBC
	Percent of Items using the term	Percent of Items using the term
'Palestinian'	69	73
'Israeli'	76	80
'Palestine'	6	6
'Israel'	89	96
'Occupied Territories'	5	5
'Occupation'	3	5
'Palestinian Territories'	1	0
'Muslim'	2	0
'Jewish'	6	6
'Christian'	1	1
'Terrorist (related to Palestinians)'	10	8
'Terrorist (related to Israelis)'	0	3
'Suicide Bomber'	14	22
'Militant (related to Palestinians)'	15	18
'Militant (related to Israelis)'	0	0
'Extremist (related to Palestinians)'	2	1
'Extremist (related to Israelis)'	1	0
'Refugees (related to Palestinians)'	0	0
'Refugees (related to Israelis)'	1	3
'Jihad'	0.4	0
'Intifada'	2	3

4.9 Current Affairs

The table below shows appearance of actors in current affairs programmes from January 1 2005 to January 31 2006. There are more Israeli actors than Palestinians because there are more 'other Israeli' actors. Also UK and US actors appear more than other third party actors.

**Table 27: Appearance of Actors in BBC Current Affairs coverage
(January 1 2005 - January 31 2006)**

	Current Affairs
	%
Israeli Political	14
Other Israeli	31
Palestinian Political	17
Other Palestinian	21
UK Political	2
Other UK	5
All Syrian	1
All Jordanian	
All Lebanese	0.4
All Egyptian	1
All Iranian	
Al Quaida	
Other Regional	
US Politician	6
Other US	1
EU	
UN	1.5
Arab League	
World Jewish Congress	
Relief Agencies	
International Solidarity Movement	
International Media	
All French	0.4
All German	
All Italian	
All Chinese	
All Russian	
Other	
(Total Appearances)	(259)

Notes: percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place.

**Table 28: Themes in Current Affairs coverage
(January 1 2005 - January 31 2006)**

Themes	%
Peace talks/summits	4
The Roadmap/peace proposals	7
Ceasefires/Truces	2
Israeli Arabs Living in Israel	2
Israeli withdrawals/hand overs	24
New settlements/land annexations	4
Barriers/'security fence'/Sea barrier	4
IDF actions against property	
IDF actions against Persons	13
Removal of movement restrictions	
IDF restrictions on movement	
Settler attacks on Palestinians - persons	
Settler attacks on Palestinians - property	
Bombs in Israel	7
Palestinian attacks on settlers	
Intra-Israeli politics	4
Intra-Israeli violence	4
Intra-Palestinian politics	
Intra-Palestinian violence	
Human Rights Groups	
Role of: US	
Holocaust	
Role of UK	
Role of EU	
Role of Others	
Israeli foreign relations	
Palestinian foreign relations	
Historical background	
Israeli Economy	
Palestinian economy	2
Human interest: Israeli	7
Human interest: Palestinian	7
Kidnapping	
UK suicide bomber family trial	
Other themes	7
(Number of Themes Coded)	(45)

Notes: percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place.

In contrast to the broadcast news reporting (over a shorter 6 month sample period), current affairs programmes examined a broader palette of themes - the violence of the conflict (Palestinian attacks on Israelis and Israeli attacks on Palestinians in particular), the peace process, issues of land annexation. Given our broadcast news sample, we do not know whether this broader

palette was a consequence of the longer sample period or of the character of current affairs.

‘Neutrality’ and ‘Balance’ in Current Affairs: The Last Stand

As we have shown in the quantitative content analysis, the pullout from Gaza was reported primarily as an intra-Israeli conflict. Israeli actors were given more talk-time and made more appearances than Palestinian actors. Here we examine the issue of balance in a BBC documentary concerning the Gaza pullout.

The BBC Editorial Guidelines concerning ‘controversial subjects’ state that due weight should be given to a range of views and perspectives during the period within which the subject is controversial. This may require that sometimes a programme represents all of the main views.

We must ensure a wide range of significant views and perspectives are given due weight in the period during which a controversial subject is active. Opinion should be clearly distinguished from fact. When the issues involved are highly controversial and/or a decisive moment in the controversy is expected we will sometimes need to ensure that all of the main views are reflected in our output. This may mean featuring them in a single programme, or even a single item.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/edguide/impairality/controversialsu.shtml>

Is balance for controversial subjects to be achieved within a programme or over current affairs output during the ‘active’ period? Here we examine a ‘This World’ documentary, The Last Stand, broadcast on BBC2 at 9pm November 10 2005. It was criticised by pro-Palestinian groups for only showing one side of the conflict.

Such an interpretation of the documentary is not controversial as this was its stated aim. The ‘This World’ programme website describes the documentary as ‘from the perspective of extreme right-wing settlers’

(http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/this_world/default.stm). What is at

stake, therefore, is not whether the documentary, claiming to be balanced, only gave one side of the story but whether such 'from one perspective' documentaries should be made about controversial subjects and, if so, should there be the provision of balance over the 'active' period of the controversial subject?

While one settler was given a camera to record her life, the description of the programme as being 'from the perspective of extreme right-wing settlers' serves to downplay the role of editors and directors in the production of the documentary. It is a documentary about these people and their beliefs – partly *an attempt* to view the world from their perspective but also implicitly critical of some of their views. This also raises the issue of 'neutrality' in current affairs output.

The makers of *The Last Stand* sought to encourage the audience to identify with what the settlers see as their struggle in a number of scenes. The first of these emphasises the danger that settlers face in Gaza, and the brutality of the 'Palestinian militants'. It makes this point by using an example of a settler family killed as they drove along a settler-only road, and then – through the visual rhetoric of the medium – implies that this family also faces this threat. The choice of images, the positioning of the camera inside the car as it travels along the road, and the use of point of view shots also encourages audiences to identify with the settlers and to feel a sense of danger and threat. Audiences are encouraged to see the world from their point of view.

Excerpt 1:

Time	Image	Sound
5.06		[VO] A settler woman driving on
5.08		Gaza's main settler road with her four daughters is ambushed.
5.12		All five.
5.13		passengers are.
5.14		killed.
5.15		

5.16		
5.17		[VO, translation] The car stood here. Tali was slumped over the wheel. She was hit by the first shots. The four girls were hit, some dead, some dying.
5.27		These two bastards came, this scum of the earth came up to the car window. The window was shattered. They saw what was inside the car. Not soldiers, not settlers. They saw little girls.
5.38		Imagine the inhumanity. Taking a kalashnikov, and shooting at point blank range, three bullets into the head of a two year old baby.
5.48		[English translation ends; Arik continues in Hebrew]
5.50		[sound of car engine]
5.51		

5.53		
5.54		[Datya, speaking] I was attacked here, a couple of years ago. I was driving in the car.
5.59		And, I stopped here, on the road. Ahh, a guy opened the door, and tried to stab me with a knife.
6.08		But, errr, I fought back.

As these screen images show, following Arik Itzhaki's description of the scene and his own view of the attackers, the camera pans down to the ground, pauses, and then cuts to a close up of the couple's own three children. So immediately following Arik's point, about killing children, the programme cuts to their children; the rhythm of the cuts used when showing the pictures of the dead children is also replicated when footage of Iztaki family, echoing the implicit message that they are also potential targets for murderers. In short, the programme implies: 'these children could easily have been these children'.

A second sequence, in which Datya Iztaki talks about her love of their land, the house that she built and why she does not want to leave, develops this view of the family:

Excerpt 2:

Time	Image	Sound
8.26		<p>[Datya speaking in English] I built this house. You know, it was just an empty sand dune.</p>
8.31		<p>And every stage was just so difficult and complicated because of the, the, the politics involved around it and the Arabs that were working and stopped working</p>
8.39		<p>and we brought in people from India to do part of the house.</p>
8.43		<p>Its stone, its land, I love this place.</p>
8.46		<p>I invested my life here so, so you're attached to it.</p>
8.49		<p>But me leaving here won't change anything, because the ocean is still the same ocean and the Arabs are still the same Arabs and what they say they want is the State of Israel.</p>

8.58		Two nations with two religions cannot live on the same land
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Gradually, therefore, a picture builds of an 'extreme right-wing' settler family. This starts with Arik, the husband, giving his solution to the problem that Israel finds itself in:

Excerpt 3:

Time	Image	Sound
10.28		[VO, translation] 'I would take them [refugees] in an organised fashion and move them 20 kilometres south to Northern Sinai.
10.36		And the greater vision is a state for the Jewish people which will be concentrated
10.40		here, from the Nile river to the Euphrates river.
10.42		True, it does create a certain moral problem, being within the borders of Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and Egypt. So what about them? More or less what they wanted to do to us. That's the nature of politics and history.

In short, his solution is the 'ethnic cleansing' of all non-Jewish people between the Nile and Euphrates. Later in the documentary, an interview reveals that the eldest son, David, holds extreme views with respect to his Palestinian neighbours.

From the BBC Transcript of The Last Stand

10.13.25 Interviewer Subtitle What will they do with this house and others?

10.13.29 David Subtitle Give them to the Arabs.

10.13.31 Interviewer Subtitle What do you think about it?

10.13.34 David Subtitles That they don't deserve it. They have to be killed, not be given our houses.

10.13.41 Interviewer Subtitle All of them must be killed? David Subtitle Yes.

10.13.43 Interviewer Subtitle Why? David Subtitle Because they're evil.

10.13.48 Interviewer Subtitle Aren't there any good Arabs? David Subtitle Yes.

10.13.51 Interviewer Subtitle Where? David Subtitle I don't know.

10.13.53 Music

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/shared/spl/hi/programmes/this_world/transcripts/the_last_stand_10_nov_05.txt

The inclusion of this scene in the documentary may be seen as implicit criticism of the beliefs of David and of the settler family. The shift by the interviewer from speaking about some Arabs to all Arabs raises the question of whether David is racist and then his views are shown to be, at best, inconsistent and, at worst, racist. This is immediately followed by music signifying that an important documentary event had occurred.

The BBC's editorial guidelines with respect to questioning is explicit about how such contentious views should be treated by journalists:

we must rigorously test contributors expressing contentious views during an interview whilst giving them a fair chance to set out their full response to our questions (BBC, 2005: 27).

This notion of impartiality stresses the role of journalists as *watchdogs* rather than as neutral observers and recorders. This raises questions, of course, concerning the criteria to be used for testing contentious views. Are they epistemological criteria (is the view of a group coherent?)? Are they ethical criteria (is the view of the group 'good' or 'just')? The notion of rigorous testing logically entails that the journalist must be partial towards some criteria that are then used as the grounds of judgment. This commitment to rigorous testing, however, may be difficult to reconcile with the commitment to finding 'neutral' language and to impartiality as neutrality between competing positions.

The documentary, therefore, is not presenting a heroic (or entirely sympathetic) portrait of a settler family as one would have expected if the documentary had indeed been from their perspective. If initially the documentary sought to encourage audiences to identify with the family, it also reveals attitudes that would serve to alienate many in the audience. This may have been the intention of the documentary makers as this style of making documentaries about people with 'extreme' political views has become popular and acclaimed in recent years as a way of exploring views at the margins of society (Louis Theroux, for example, won BAFTAs in 2001 and 2002 for documentary series that bear stylistic and narrative resemblance to *The Last Stand*). Whether this is the case or not, the description of the programme as being 'from the perspective of extreme right-wing settlers' is difficult to substantiate.

There are two issues to be considered with reference to balance. The first concerns whether the style of documentary adopted for *The Last Stand* is appropriate for a current affairs programme concerning the Israeli-Palestinian conflict where audiences may not be aware of other perspectives that may contrast with the perspective offered in the programme. Is the BBC warning to audiences that the programme is from the perspective of a particular group

sufficient irrespective of whether the description is accurate? The issue here is whether 'balance' is required *within* programmes because of the controversial and complex character of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict as the Editorial Guidelines state may sometimes be desirable. If we take, for example, the representation of the Israeli Defense Force during the programme, we see that the focus of the documentary was on one aspect of IDF activities in Gaza.

The IDF only appear in any significant way in two scenes: in the first (briefly referred to above) settlers occupy an empty Palestinian home, provoking a reaction from Palestinian neighbours, which then degenerates into a pitch battle; the IDF step in and separate them.

Excerpt 4:

Time	Image	Sound
33.21		[Chanting in Hebrew; no subtitles]
33.26		A group of West Bank settlers react to the demolition of Tal Yam by taking over
33.31		a vacant Palestinian house on the Arab side of the road.
33.44		Tension quickly builds up. It is now clear that the delicate status quo between the settlers and the Arab farmers will not last.

33.52		[Arabic: subtitle reads 'The dogs!']
33.54		
33.55		
33.57		With repeated provocations from a group of extreme
34.00		right wing activists, the battle begins.
34.03		
34.05		[Hebrew: subtitle reads: 'Death to the Arabs! Death to the Arabs!']

34.09		[Dramatic music begins] [series of fast cuts]
34.11		
34.13		
34.15		
34.18		[Hebrew: subtitle reads: 'Itzik, I'm shooting in the air']
34.21		The Israeli soldiers and police find themselves in the middle of the
34.24		battle trying to keep the peace.

34.29		
34.32		
34.34		[Hebrew: subtitle reads: 'Why don't you shoot him?']
34.35		[Hebrew: subtitle reads: 'Why don't you shoot him?']
34.40		
34.43		An
34.44		Israeli soldier protects a young Palestinian who is almost stoned to death [Dramatic music fades to sustained minor chord]

34.51		[Hebrew singing: subtitle reads: 'Avenge but one of my two eyes in Palestine'] [Music continues: series of sustained chords]
34.56		[Hebrew singing: subtitle reads: 'Avenge but one of my two eyes in Palestine']
35.10		[Series of very short scenes of struggle & arrests of the settlers]
35.15		
35.21		[Hebrew: subtitle reads: 'You didn't help us! They almost killed us!']

The voice over for the key section of this sequence states: “The Israeli soldiers and police find themselves in the middle of the battle trying to keep the peace”; and later “An Israeli soldier protects a young Palestinian who is almost stoned to death.” While, in terms of the depicted scene, these points are accurate, they only depict a part of what the IDF did in Gaza. Without contextualisation, it is possible that audiences may assume that the IDF is a peace-keeping force.

The second issue concerns whether, if the style and content of *The Last Stand* is thought to be appropriate to a controversial subject, bearing in mind considerations of both neutrality and balance contained within the BBC's editorial guidelines, should another similarly high profile documentary have been commissioned and shown during the 'active' period that investigated competing views of the Gaza pullout to those presented in *The Last Stand*?

Historical References in Current Affairs programmes

The table below shows references to historical events in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We expected that current affairs programmes would tend to provide more historical context in their reporting of the conflict. While this is true to a certain extent we found a very limited range of historical reference – the 1967 war, Israel's return of Sinai to Egypt, and the Intifada.

Table 29: References to Historical events in Israeli/ Palestinian BBC Current Affairs Coverage(January 2005-January 2006)

Historical Event	Percent of All Programmes
Sykes-Picot Agreement	
Balfour Declaration	
British Mandate for Palestine	
Hebron massacre (1929)	
Great uprising (1936-39)	
Peal Commission (1937)	
Lehi (Stern Gang) attacks (1940-49)	
Alexandria Protocol (1944)	
Holocaust	
Partition of Palestine (1947)	
1948 War	
Deir Yassin Massacre	
Nakba	
Qibya massacre (1953)	
Israel invades Egypt (1956)	
Israel withdraws from Sinai (1957)	
Founding of PLO (1964)	
Six Day War (1967)	28
Avivim school bus massacre (1970)	
Munich Massacre (1972)	3
Operation Wrath of God (1972-)	3
Yom Kippur war (1973)	
Entebbe (1976)	
Camp David (1978)	3
Return of Sinai (1979)	7
Israel invades Lebanon (1982)	
Sabra and Shatila	
Intifada (1987)	7
Founding of Hamas (1988)	
Palestinian declaration of Independence (1988)	
Gulf War 1, Scud attacks (1991)	
Oslo Peace Process/Accords (1993-95)	
Nobel Peace Prize (Peres, Rabin, Arafat) (1994)	
Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin (1995)	
Camp David 2 (2000)	7
Al-Aqsa Intifada	24
Operation Defensive Sheild (2002)	7
Yasser Araft dies (2004)	7
Gaza pullout (2005).	37

4.10 BBC News news.bbc.co.uk

The below table shows the appearance of actors by nationality/group (Israeli Arabs were counted as Israelis when identified in reports as Israelis. This occurred eleven times). While the figures for Israeli and Palestinian actors are in line with those for broadcast news, there is greater representation of non-UK/US third parties. These actors feature on BBC News online but fail to appear as frequently on BBC broadcast news where there is greater competition for time and space. This would imply that broadcast editorial decisions concerning the relative importance or newsworthiness of third parties were made that served to privilege some third party perspectives.

**Table 30: Appearance of Actors in BBC News online coverage
(August 12005 – January 31 2006)**

	Internet
	%
Israeli Political	26
Other Israeli	19
Palestinian Political	25
Other Palestinian	9
UK Political	2
Other UK	4
All Syrian	0.3
All Jordanian	
All Lebanese	0.4
All Egyptian	1
All Iranian	2
Al Quaida	
Other Regional	4
US Politician	4
Other US	0.2
EU	2
UN	1
Arab League	
World Jewish Congress	
Relief Agencies	1
International Solidarity Movement	
International Media	
All French	
All German	0.1
All Italian	0.2
All Chinese	-
All Russian	1.2
Other	1.5
(Total Appearances)	(1083)

Notes: percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place.

The following table looks at themes in BBC News online coverage:

**Table 31: Themes in BBC News online coverage
(August 1 2005 – January 31 2006)**

Themes	%
Peace talks/summits	0.5
The Roadmap/peace proposals	3
Ceasefires/Truces	1
Israeli withdrawals/hand overs	18
New settlements/land annexations	2
Barriers/'security fence'/Sea barrier	1
IDF actions against property	
IDF actions against Persons	11
Removal of movement restrictions	3
IDF restrictions on movement	2
Settler attacks on Palestinians - persons	
Settler attacks on Palestinians - property	
Bombs in Israel	4
Palestinian attacks on settlers	1
Intra-Israeli politics	16
Intra-Israeli violence	1
Intra-Palestinian politics	10
Intra-Palestinian violence	1
Human Rights Groups	1
Role of: US	
Holocaust	0.5
Role of UK	
Role of EU	
Role of Others	
Israeli foreign relations	9
Palestinian foreign relations	3
Historical background	0.5
Israeli Economy	0.3
Palestinian economy	1
Human interest: Israeli	1
Human interest: Palestinian	1
Kidnapping	3
UK suicide bomber family trial	1
Other themes	3
(Number of Themes Coded)	(371)

Notes: percentages above 0.5 are rounded to the nearest single figure, percentages below are rounded to one decimal place.

One clear difference between broadcast and internet themes is that 11% of BBC News online themes concern Israeli Defense Force operations against persons in comparison to 2% of the themes of BBC broadcast news. Israeli operations were, therefore, known about by BBC journalists and they were deemed newsworthy enough to be reported on for BBC News online but not,

in general, newsworthy enough to be included in broadcast news programmes where there is greater competition for time and space. A possible explanation for this may be that the more spectacular character of Palestinian 'suicide' attacks tend to lead to broadcast news coverage while the 'low signature' actions of Israeli forces do not. This means, however, that BBC audiences relying largely on broadcast news were given the misleading impression that the conflict primarily involves acts of violence by Palestinians on Israeli civilians.

Given that there is less competition for time and space on BBC News online one might expect to find the provision of more historical context in online reports. Generally speaking, however, this was not realised in online reporting as the table below demonstrates.

Table 32: References to Historical events in Israeli/ Palestinian BBC News online coverage(August 1 2005-January 31 2006)

Historical Event	Percent of All Items
Sykes-Picot Agreement	0
Balfour Declaration	0
British Mandate for Palestine	0
Hebron massacre (1929)	0
Great uprising (1936-39)	0
Peal Commission (1937)	0
Lehi (Stern Gang) attacks (1940-49)	0
Alexandria Protocol (1944)	0
Holocaust	0.4
Partition of Palestine (1947)	0
1948 War	0
Deir Yassin Massacre	0
Nakba	0
Qibya massacre (1953)	1
Israel invades Egypt (1956)	0
Israel withdraws from Sinai (1957)	1
Founding of PLO (1964)	0
Six Day War (1967)	4
Avivim school bus massacre (1970)	0
Munich Massacre (1972)	0.3
Operation Wrath of God (1972)	0.3
Yom Kippur war (1973)	0.3
Entebbe (1976)	0
Camp David (1978)	0
Return of Sinai (1979)	0.4
Israel invades Lebanon (1982)	1
Sabra and Shatila	0.3
Intifada (1987)	0.3
Founding of Hamas (1988)	0
Palestinian declaration of Independence (1988)	0
Gulf War 1, Scud attacks (1991)	0
Oslo Peace Process/Accords (1993-95)	2
Nobel Peace Prize (Peres, Rabin, Arafat) (1994)	0.3
Assassination of Yitzhak Rabin (1995)	0
Camp David 2 (2000)	1
Al-Aqsa Intifada	1
Operation Defensive Sheild (2002)	0
Yasser Araft dies (2004)	0
Gaza pullout (2005).	24

5. Conclusion

This report is not Loughborough University Communications Research Centre's assessment of whether we believe that the BBC's reporting is impartial or not. The concept of impartiality is contested. It is a matter for debate whether impartial reporting is either desirable or possible. In this report we have not adopted a particular meaning of impartiality and then used it as a way of judging the BBC's coverage. This is a matter for the Independent Panel should it decide to do so.

The report does not attempt to explain why the BBC's coverage of the conflict is as it is. Content analysis permits us to describe accurately the coverage itself and subsequently to pose research questions but it does not furnish explanations. This would require the use of an additional set of research methods that would enable us to investigate journalistic practice and the role of public diplomacy.

The qualitative content analysis sought to illustrate broader issues that may be pertinent to the work of the Panel:

- The consistency of the BBC's use of 'terrorist' across reporting of different conflicts;
- The possibility and/or desirability of using 'neutral' language in reporting conflict;
- The issues of 'balance' and 'neutrality' with respect to 'from the perspective of' style of current affairs programmes concerning controversial subjects.

We consider that the following findings of the quantitative content analysis are important for the Panel to consider when reaching a judgment concerning the impartiality of the BBC's coverage of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict:

- That there were significant differences across BBC news programmes and services in the allocation of talk time and appearance of actors (sections 4.1, 4.2, 4.3);
- That there was a broad parity in BBC coverage taken as a whole in the amount of talk time given to Israeli and Palestinian party political actors (section 4.3);
- That a disparity (in favour of Israelis) existed in BBC coverage taken as a whole in the amount of talk time given to non-party political Israelis and Palestinians (section 4.3);
- That a disparity (in favour of Israelis) existed in BBC coverage taken as a whole in the amount of talk time given to Israelis and Palestinians (section 4.3);
- That there was a broad parity in BBC coverage taken as a whole in terms of the appearance of Israeli and Palestinian party political actors (section 4.2);
- That a disparity (in favour of Israelis) existed in BBC coverage taken as a whole in terms of the appearance of non-party political Israeli and Palestinian actors (section 4.2);
- That a disparity (in favour of Israelis) existed in BBC coverage taken as a whole in terms of the appearance of Israeli and Palestinian actors (section 4.2);
- That aside from Israelis and Palestinians, talk time was given largely to either UK or US political or non-political actors. Third party positions either from the Middle East or from the rest of the world were marginalised in comparison to the presentation of UK and US perspectives (sections 4.2, 4.3);
- That some important themes were relatively overlooked in the coverage of the conflict, most notably in the recent period the annexation of land in and around East Jerusalem (section 4.4);
- That BBC journalists generally did not provide historical context in their reporting of the conflict (section 4.6);

- That BBC broadcast news reported Israeli and Palestinian fatalities differently in that Israeli fatalities generally receive greater coverage than Palestinian fatalities (section 4.7).

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Appendix

The BBC and Impartiality

Without a clear sense of what the BBC means by impartiality and how impartiality might be measured, the work of the independent review would be impossible to fulfil. Although the brief of Communication Research Centre at Loughborough University is simply to conduct a content analysis of reporting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict we believe that a short discussion of the notion will aid the work of the panel in its deliberations. It should be pointed out that the BBC itself recognises that claims to impartiality raise difficult issues and a project is proposed to examine what impartiality means in the digital age (minutes of Governors' Meeting, June 2005).

'Impartiality lies at the heart of the BBC's commitment to its audiences' (BBC, 2005: 26). In addition, impartiality is a contractual obligation to the Crown under the Agreement for the BBC's Royal Charter (Department of National Heritage, 1996: 8). The importance of impartiality to the BBC then could hardly be overestimated but what does the BBC mean by impartiality?

The impartiality of the BBC has, of course, been regularly called into question, most notably recently during the Gilligan Affair. As a consequence the ability of the BBC Board of Governors to exercise impartial oversight of the BBC's output is also questioned. It is often claimed that the Board of Governors are caught between being *advocates* and *overseers* of the BBC's journalism.

Conflicts over impartiality are not only empirical in character (a question that may be decided by providing evidence) but also conceptual (what does impartiality mean?) In order to address the empirical question sensibly we must first be clear, therefore, about the meaning of the concept. In defining the meaning of impartiality we will draw on the BBC's Editorial Guidelines published in the aftermath of the Hutton Inquiry (BBC, 2005). It may be possible, for example, to distil from the Editorial Guidelines criteria of

impartiality that may be used to develop appropriate content measurements of BBC output.

According to the Guidelines, impartiality, in practice, means that:

- we [the BBC] seek to provide a properly balanced service consisting of a wide range of subject matter and views broadcast over an appropriate time scale across all of our output. We take particular care when dealing with political or industrial controversy or major matters relating to current public policy.
- we strive to reflect a wide range of opinion and explore a range and conflict of views so that no significant strand of thought is knowingly unreflected or under represented.
- we exercise our editorial freedom to produce content about any subject, at any point on the spectrum of debate, as long as there are good editorial reasons for doing so.
- we can explore or report on a specific aspect of an issue or provide an opportunity for a single view to be expressed, but in doing so we do not misrepresent opposing views. They may also require a right of reply.
- we must ensure we avoid bias or an imbalance of views on controversial subjects.
- the approach to, and tone of, BBC stories must always reflect our editorial values. Presenters, reporters and correspondents are the public face and voice of the BBC, they can have a significant impact on the perceptions of our impartiality.
- our journalists and presenters, including those in news and current affairs, may provide professional judgments but may not express personal opinions on matters of public policy or political or industrial controversy. Our audiences should not be able to tell from BBC programmes or other BBC output the personal views of our journalists and presenters on such matters.
- we offer artists, writers and entertainers scope for individual expression in drama, arts and entertainment and we seek to reflect a wide range of talent and perspective.
- we will sometimes need to report on or interview people whose views may cause serious offence to many in our audiences. We must be convinced, after appropriate referral, that a clear public interest outweighs the possible offence.

- we must rigorously test contributors expressing contentious views during an interview whilst giving them a fair chance to set out their full response to our questions.
- we should not automatically assume that academics and journalists from other organisations are impartial and make it clear to our audience when contributors are associated with a particular viewpoint.

(BBC, 2005: 26-7)

If we unpack the meaning of impartiality according to the BBC, it is possible to discover three meanings of impartiality that are in conflict with one another.

Meaning 1

Impartiality as equal treatment *irrespective* of actions and beliefs of the group: this is where broadcasters treat equally all groups irrespective of the actions of those groups or the actions they advocate. This definition of impartiality requires broadcasters not to make value judgments about what they report whether they are covering the resumption of peace talks in Sharm el-Sheikh or a bus-bomb in Netanya.

The problem with this approach is the inherently value-laden character of both words and images often despite the value-neutral intention of the journalist. Are bus-bombs detonated by ‘martyrs’, ‘terrorists’, ‘freedom fighters’, ‘militants’, ‘suicide bombers’, or ‘homicide bombers’? All of these descriptions contain value judgments. Avoiding the preferred Hamas description ‘martyrs’ and Israeli government description ‘terrorist’ and using the term ‘militant’ to denote the person carrying out the bombing may mean that the broadcaster is *independent of* those organizations but not necessarily *impartial* in the reporting of the event.

At root, this is a philosophical question that has been a central concern of the modern philosophy of language concerning whether language use can be impartial. If it is thought that language use can never be impartial then

obviously the BBC's project of being impartial is doomed to fail – it is simply not possible to be impartial in this sense.

A fascinating discussion, worth quoting at length, took place in the Editorial Policy meeting in May 2004 on language used to describe acts of political violence:

6. Islam, Israel and Terrorism Terminology

Opening the discussion, Stephen Whittle said that recent events had raised questions about the use of language when reporting Islam, Israel and terrorism. For example, is it right to call the killing of Nick Berg an “execution” or to describe groups carrying out terrorist acts as “Islamic”?

Anne Koch (Senior Commissioning Editor, WS English Networks and News) said the debate about language had been particularly important in the World Service, with consideration given to terms ranging from “Muslim” to “collateral damage”. She said we have to use language that is as neutral as possible. For example, there are certainly acts of “terror”, but the word “terrorist” is a loaded one. It is important to think about what the word may be achieving. Is it simply describing what is being done, or is it polemical? If it is the latter, we should find a different word. Anne recalled that Alan Little had presented a series of programmes for the World Service, in the aftermath of 9/11, without using the word “terrorist”.

Anne said there were problems with consistency in the use of the word “terrorist”. BBC World had not used the word in coverage of the Madrid bombing. However, when it showed some News 24 footage which did use the term, it brought complaints about the failure to also apply it to attacks in the Israeli-Palestinian, questioning the BBC's impartiality. Malcolm Balen (Senior Editorial Adviser, News) said he was also concerned by consistency which becomes more of a problem with the increasing globalisation of news. He said when News 24 footage is seen around the world using the word “terrorist” in Madrid, it is difficult to explain to Israeli complainants.

Mark Damazer added that there is no wholly satisfactory solution and the World Service is adopting the least worst position. Once correspondents are allowed to use the word freely in some areas, it immediately raises questions about whether the BBC is adopting a position in the areas where it is not used. He said it is a source of frequent complaints.

Addressing other problematic terms, Roger Hardy (Islamic Affairs Contributor, World Service) said he does not use the word “execution”,

since it is the language of the people doing the killing. He said he also finds “Islamic terrorism” unacceptable; “violence carried out in the name of Islam” is preferable. Roger said that many other words create difficulties. For example, he was rebuked recently for using the word “militants” since some Islamic people consider it a term of praise. Mark Damazer said whilst he was not happy with the word “militant”, which he considered weak and insipid, he believes it may be the best option at the moment.

Roger Hardy said it’s simply not possible to get neat labels for all actions where violence and Muslims are involved. He urged programme makers to pare down their language and stick to reporting only the actions rather than rushing to apply an ideological description. For example, to say “gunmen have attacked...” is accurate reporting of an action; to say “Muslim gunmen have attacked...” risks rushing to a political judgement.

Mark Damazer said the word “terrorist” can be avoided by reporting only what has clearly happened. For example, bombs are planted by bombers. However, the problem of how to describe groups that commit acts of violence is sometimes solved by familiarity. It is no longer necessary to describe the Provisional IRA. Similarly, it is questionable whether a qualifying clause is required for Al Qaeda since most people now have their own definition of the group. Nahed Abouzeid (Editorial Coordinator, Arabic Service) added that our job as journalists is not to follow others labels, but to properly inform audiences about issues.

Margaret Hill (Chief Adviser, Editorial Policy) observed that, however much we may want to eradicate the word “terrorist” from our output, we appear to have difficulty doing so. She asked whether it would be possible to use the word “terrorism” to apply only to *acts*, since they are acts of terror, and it does not say that the perpetrator must necessarily be solely a terrorist. Malcolm Balen replied that he agreed that a bomb going off is an act of terror and it would not say that it was the perpetrators’ sole aim or that they were ipso facto terrorists. However, he believed this was a fine distinction which may cause more problems than it solves.

Drawing the discussion to a close, Stephen Whittle reminded programme makers and journalists to take care in the use of language, and ensure they understand the context in which difficult words are being used. He said we should not rush to make a judgment on the perpetrators of acts of violence, but should wait and assess the situation before using words that may appear judgemental or that we might otherwise later regret. Neutral language is the key and it should be remembered that there is little distinction now between domestic and global services – both are equally available. Stephen also urged the meeting to make use of the expertise that exists within the BBC – in the World Service, Newsgathering, the Asian Network and News Analysis and Research.

(BBC, 2004)

Stephen Whittle, the BBC's then Controller of Editorial Policy, clearly believes that a 'neutral language' of description exists but this is very far from an uncontested belief and some may see this definition as not a sound basis upon which to build the BBC's approach to impartiality.

Meaning 2

Bounded impartiality: this is where broadcasters treat equally some groups but not others (for example, a broadcaster may discriminate in its coverage between groups believed to be 'significant' and those not). This definition of impartiality requires broadcasters not to make judgments about what they report with reference to certain groups but not others. On the one hand, it would be difficult to imagine a news programme that did not impose some boundaries as reporting would never come to an end as each shade of opinion would need to be discussed with equal attention. On the other hand, who decides what is 'significant'? The most common answers to this question refer to the relative popular support of groups or their power to influence events. While reporting may seek to be impartial between similarly supported or powerful groups, the BBC obviously condones partiality with respect to groups thought to be less significant, hence the usefulness of the concept of 'bounded impartiality'. On the one hand, the guidelines commit the BBC to diversity, reporting a wide range of subject matter and views. On the other, the commitment to impartiality applies only to those actors deemed to be significant.

Bounded impartiality is, of course, subject to the same considerations the possibility of a 'neutral' language discussed above.

Meaning 3

Impartiality as consistency of treatment **according** to group actions and policies: this is where broadcasters treat equally events of the same or similar type irrespective of the group that carries them out. Impartiality here means the consistency of application of judgments in reporting events and ascribing

responsibility irrespective of which group carries them out. This notion of impartiality is clearly present in the Guidelines when reference is made to the testing of contentious views:

we must rigorously test contributors expressing contentious views during an interview whilst giving them a fair chance to set out their full response to our questions (BBC, 2005: 27).

This notion of impartiality stresses the role of journalists as *watchdogs* rather than as neutral observers and recorders. This raises questions, of course, concerning the criteria to be used for testing contentious views. Are they epistemological criteria (is the view of a group coherent?)? Are they ethical criteria (is the view of the group 'good' or 'just')? The notion of rigorous testing logically entails that the journalist must be partial towards some criteria that are then used as the grounds of judgment.

This notion of impartiality, however, is in conflict with a notion of impartiality as equal treatment of groups *irrespective* of action or policy. If the views of groups are implicitly revealed to be 'wrong' or 'bad' through this process of rigorous testing, does this not violate the BBC's commitment to impartiality if we take impartiality to mean neutrality to action or policy? One could imagine a situation where two groups are equally rigorously tested and one group clearly passes the test while the other fails. Can this programme be said to be impartial? One could make the argument that it is impartial because the groups are tested by the same criteria but it would be impossible to satisfy all of the guidelines with respect to impartiality.

This difficulty in applying simultaneously competing conceptions of impartiality is revealed in the minutes of the June 2005 BBC Editorial Policy meeting that discussed the introduction of the new guidelines:

David Jordan (Chief Adviser, Politics) considered how the Editorial Guidelines address Impartiality. He said the critical element is to achieve a range of views and a diversity of voices – even those whose views we may find disagreeable. We also need to achieve a fairness of attitude towards subject matter. This means that our content can reach judgements on events, so long as they are reached objectively and not

founded on the prejudices of a reporter, correspondent or other BBC content producer.

Now this discussion of impartiality may be dismissed merely as a question of semantics. Once applied to a case, however, the central importance of discussing the meaning of impartiality is obvious. Let us take the reporting of the London bombs on July 7. The BBC was accused by some of pandering to terrorists and by others of supporting the British state in its coverage of the bombings. Some may naively argue that this in itself reveals the BBC to be impartial but this is rather simplistic.

Here is the way that the Chairman of the Board of Governors defended the BBC's use of the word 'terrorist' to describe the 7/7 bombings:

London bombings

The BBC chairman was also asked about the use of the word "terrorist" in news broadcasts, to which he replied the corporation's position on the issue was clear.

"The BBC has been describing them as such... The BBC's coverage has used the word terror, terrorism, terrorist very, very freely on all our major news outlets.

"There was some sub-editing of a couple of pages on the website which I haven't got to the bottom of yet but which the director general I'm sure will tell the governors about."

The chairman said it was not just his view, but one widely shared in the corporation that the bombings could be described as terrorism.

"It is the view of all the BBC journalists and editors. It has been very clearly signalled on all our news outlets."

Mr Grade said the BBC did sometimes act in a defensive manner as it was often subjected to criticism.

http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/entertainment/tv_and_radio/4695229.stmMichael

If we examine the BBC's Editorial Guidelines for the reporting of 'acts of terror', however, we find a position expressed that it potentially at variance

with that expressed by Michael Grade and with the BBC's coverage of the 7/7 bombings.

Terror

We must report acts of terror quickly, accurately, fully and responsibly. Our credibility is undermined by the careless use of words which carry emotional or value judgements. The word "terrorist" itself can be a barrier rather than an aid to understanding. We should try to avoid the term, without attribution. We should let other people characterise while we report the facts as we know them.

We should not adopt other people's language as our own. It is also usually inappropriate to use words like "liberate", "court martial" or "execute" in the absence of a clear judicial process. We should convey to our audience the full consequences of the act by describing what happened. We should use words which specifically describe the perpetrator such as "bomber", "attacker", "gunman", "kidnapper", "insurgent, and "militant". Our responsibility is to remain objective and report in ways that enable our audiences to make their own assessments about who is doing what to whom.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/edguide/war/mandatoryreferr.shtml>

If we accept as the Guidelines imply that the use of the word 'terrorist' carries a value-judgment rather than being simply a neutral description of a person, then the BBC can hardly be claiming to be impartial in its coverage of 7/7 according to either meaning 1 or meaning 2 of impartiality even though it is this sense of impartiality that is invoked in the 'Terror' section of the Editorial Guidelines (impartiality *irrespective* of action or policy). One could also argue that the Guidelines were not being followed in the sense that the BBC arguably adopted the language used by the UK government to denounce the bombings.

Such an approach would also seem to be supported by the summary of the conclusions of the Editorial Policy Meeting in May 2004:

Islam, Israel and Terrorism Terminology

- It is important to take care and remain consistent in the use of language. Inconsistency in the use of words such as "terrorism" can

lead to questions about the BBC's impartiality. When reporting acts of violence we should stick to the facts of what has occurred and avoid rushing into applying labels that may appear judgemental or inappropriate ideological descriptions of the perpetrators. Neutral language is key. (BBC Editorial Policy Meeting minutes, 2004)

The BBC could always invoke the third meaning of impartiality (equal treatment *according* to action). This at least is a potentially coherent position to take that could be tested empirically. It would require that all similar acts were described in a similar way. If we consider the bombings conducted by Hamas supporters in Israel, however, we find that they are not the work of terrorists but of 'militants' (news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4677303.stm). Given that the bombers in both cases target civilians, seek to spread fear and panic in civilian populations, and are protesting against what they see as occupying forces, it is unclear why one group should be called 'terrorists' and the other group 'militants'.

It is not as yet clear what the consequences of this are either for the editorial guidelines or journalistic practice or whether the implications of the reporting of the 7/7 bombings have been realised. Will the guidelines be revised again? Or will Hamas 'bombers' and 'militants' shortly become Hamas 'terrorists'? Or will the London bombers cease to be 'terrorists' and be downgraded to 'militants'? Obviously this issue also raises questions about the even-handedness of the BBC: do 'terrorists' commit acts of terrorism in the UK while 'bombers' target Israel?

Summing up this necessarily brief discussion of the BBC's approach to impartiality, we may see a lack of conceptual clarity about the meaning of impartiality in the BBC's Editorial Guidelines. The different meanings of impartiality found in the Editorial Guidelines tend to place competing demands upon journalists. This is problematic for an institution that is committed to providing impartial reporting and calls for further consideration of the Editorial Guidelines. In addition, as the reporting of the 7/7 bombings illustrate, there are grounds for doubting whether the BBC's professional practice reflects the

Editorial Guidelines in all cases and whether journalistic practice is consistent across the reporting of different conflicts.

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