

Dear Jeff Winch:

I am writing in reply to four complaints you filed recently with the CRTC (Ref. 886689, 886821, 887360 and 888370), forwarded to CBC Ombudsman, Jack Nagler, with multiple examples taken from CBC's coverage of the current conflict in the Middle East that you take to exhibit a "pattern of unethical bias" intended to "manipulate and deceive Canadians (and protect Israel)."

Since I am the Senior Manager of Journalistic Standards, Brodie Fenlon, Editor in Chief of CBC News, asked me to reply to you directly, an opportunity I welcome.

Let me say right away that I appreciate hearing your comments on our stories and I regret you are disappointed in some of them. However, I must tell you that your view that we are manipulating and deceiving Canadians with biased stories is certainly not one I share, nor do I believe it is supported by the examples you cite.

But before I respond to them in more detail, I want to be clear about balance in our coverage.

I agree with you that fairness and balance are of overarching importance in all our journalism. Indeed, we have an obligation through federal regulation and our own rigorous journalistic policy to carry different points of view on controversial matters of interest and concern. And the current conflict in the Middle East certainly qualifies on both counts.

But I want to be clear about what that balance means. While CBC's journalistic policy expects our coverage to balance differing points of view, it also acknowledges that balance does not necessarily mean mathematical equivalency. Balance does not, for instance, mean that every voice or every sentence that could be seen as pro-Israeli must be immediately juxtaposed with an equally strong voice or sentence that could be seen as pro-Palestinian. Indeed, balance is a more sophisticated concept that can be achieved over a series of stories or over a reasonable period of time.

More specifically, in Ref. 886689 (Nov. 3) you cited examples of bias you find in two interviews on the October 27 edition of CBC Radio's *The Current*. The story that morning was about the growing calls for a humanitarian pause or full ceasefire in the aerial and artillery bombardment then in its third week and relief from the Israeli imposed siege that had blocked water, food and fuel from entering the Gaza Strip. It included short audio clips of a Palestinian engineer, a woman sheltering with her family near Gaza City and the relative of seven Hamas-held Israeli hostages. The two interviews included in the story were with Liberal MP Chandra Arya, who along with some 22 other Liberal MPs had signed a letter asking the Canadian government to call for a ceasefire, and Israel's ambassador to Canada Iddo Moed.

Specifically, you wrote that on at least three occasions program host Matt Galloway should have asked the same or a parallel question to both men, that another question to Mr. Arya was "incredibly simplistic," and that Mr. Galloway allowed Mr. Moed to "lie and rant ... and never challenged or confronted him."

I appreciate that you would have asked different questions or asked the questions differently, but that doesn't mean the questions he asked are biased. I don't believe they are. Mr. Galloway encouraged both men to explain their point of view. Canadians are interested, and it is our obligation to give them the opportunity to hear their perspective. It is also Mr. Galloway's responsibility to question assumptions, to challenge, to point out there are other views. I think you will find Mr. Galloway did that. I appreciate that you might disagree with what Mr. Moed had to say, but in any reasonable listening it could not accurately be said that Mr. Galloway "cake-walked" him.

You also raised an interesting question about language. You wrote that CBC reporters refer to the October 7 attacks as "murderous," "vicious," or "brutal," but don't use the same words to describe Israeli attacks that kill Palestinians.

Different words are used because although both result in death and injury, the events they describe are very different. The raid saw Hamas gunmen stream through the border fence and attack Israelis directly with firearms, knives and explosives. Gunmen chased down festival goers, assaulted kibbutzniks then shot them, fought hand to hand, and threw grenades. The attack was brutal, often vicious, and certainly murderous.

Bombs dropped from thousands of feet and artillery shells lofted into Gaza from kilometers away result in death and destruction on a massive scale, but it is carried out remotely. The deadly results are unseen by those who caused them and the source unseen by those suffer and die.

It's a different kind of event and is described differently as "intensive," "unrelenting," and "punishing," raining death and destruction on one of the most densely populated places on earth. On people under siege with no place to run there's no mistaking the deadly impact. Those stories routinely report the number of casualties, how they are mostly women and children. Every day they show video of the injured being raced to barely functioning hospitals, dead children in the arms of their grieving parents and the vistas of devastated rubble-filled wasteland that was once a vibrant city. The language is different, but the impact for both is harrowing. They are different stories, and we have tried to describe both accurately and vividly.

In Ref. 666821 (Nov. 8) you wrote again about a similar language issue. In a report on the November 6 edition of *The World at Six* you wrote that the reporter described the killing of some 1400 Israelis as a "slaughter," but later said some 10,000 Gazan had been "killed." Why not say "massacre" or "slaughter" or "mass murder," you asked. Other reports at the time referred to 1400 Israelis "killed" in the Hamas raid and included accusations of collective punishment, genocide and the mass murder of Gazans. As I said earlier, balance does not mean precisely parallel language.

In Ref. 887360 (Nov. 15) you wrote that the images accompanying (I'm assuming) CBC News online stories "almost always" show close-up shots of Israeli suffering, but "wide shots" from Gaza that "do not show Palestinian people suffering." This emphasis "skews the readers' empathy," you wrote.

Your premise is not sustainable. The stories from Gaza and Israel are different and the coverage will be different. The October 7 raid on Israel lasted hours, a good part of the story out of Israel after that focused on the families of the hostages, their grief, anxiety and demands for the government to free them. At the same time a good part of the focus of the story from Gaza was Israel's "total siege" of some 2.2 million people and the widespread devastation resulting from the relentless bombing and shelling. Different video shots may well support those different stories – it's difficult to show the widespread devastation without a "wide shot" – but there is nothing here to support your view that they are "biased" or "skew readers' empathy."

In Ref. 888370 (Dec. 1) you wrote about a CBCNews.ca story posted earlier that day under the headline, "Who is Yahya Sinwar, the Hamas political leader in Gaza?" You feel the investigative story "demonizes" the Hamas leader and "all Palestinians." If we wanted to profile a psychopath," you feel that Israeli prime ministers "have far more blood on their hands."

There are two sides to most stories, sometimes more. Achieving the fairness and balance you value – and CBC News certainly does – means hearing the views of those on all sides. Yahya Sinwar is a prominent figure on one side of the conflict. We have an obligation to include the views of those representing Hamas as much as we have an obligation to include the views of those on the Israeli side. Yahya Sinwar is a relatively unknown figure even to those who follow developments in the Middle East, but knowing something about him and his views is important to help Canadians understand the conflict. I think you find the views and actions of the Israeli leader, a man widely seen as disgraced, have been the subject of multiple stories over the years.

Thank you again for writing with your comments. I hope my reply has reassured you of the continuing integrity of CBC News.

Sincerely,

Nancy Waugh
Senior Manager,
Journalistic Standards
CBC News

Cc. Jack Nagler, CBC Ombudsman
Brodie Fenlon, Editor in Chief, CBC News