

Patrick Lawrence

Israel's barbarism, our media's complicity

The year just past, and we had all better face this, will be remembered as the year the Zionist regime in Israel dragged the Western post-democracies into a state of barbarism we, the inheritors of “the Judeo-Christian tradition,” were supposed to have left behind many centuries ago. I offer this assertion after lengthy reflection. In its suggestion of the historic magnitude of our moment, I do not consider it in the slightest hyperbolic.

Let us consider this, my opening proposition, two ways. There is the question of conscience and the question of institutional collapse. These are separate but closely related matters. In the latter line I assign special gravity to the derelictions of the West's most powerful media and what this means for all those readers and viewers these media have abandoned to a state of ignorance.

To my first point, over the past year those purporting to lead the post-democracies have effectively force-marched their populations into a condition of moral depravity from which there is no ready means of escape. We are condemned to complicity as the West underwrites—militarily, politically, diplomatically—Israel's campaign of terror in Gaza. All pretense to decency has given way to a perverse idolatry of [totalized power](#). The values and beliefs by which the West once purported to live survive now only in memories and imaginations.

And to my second, those posing as leaders in the Western nations now display a near-complete disregard for the truth. They are indifferent to all thought of

answerability as they support the daily atrocities of Israel's genocidal campaign against Palestinians: Long answerable only to those who corrupt them, they now answer, before they answer to anyone else, to an Israeli regime obsessed with the elimination of an entire population. This is what I mean by institutional failure.

The courts, legislatures, law-enforcement agencies, universities, publishers, theaters, museums, and so on down a long list: In a decadent state before the Zionist state began its fully visible display of barbarity in October 2023, all such institutions have since proven, on both sides of the Atlantic, basely vulnerable to the Jewish lobby's manipulations—its bribes, its intimidations and threats, its numerous psychological operations.

The U.S. Congress is now considering a law—it passed in the lower house last May—condemning criticism of Israel as anti-Semitic, and so punishable as a crime. University administrations, intimidated by Zionist benefactors, have more or less destroyed the principle of academic freedom in little more than a year. In Germany one can be threatened with prison for advocating the Palestinian cause. Across the West professors are fired, executives and line workers lose their jobs, art exhibitions and performances are canceled—all in defense of “the crimes of crimes” the Zionist state now commits.

This is what I mean by barbarism. And we must hold the Atlantic world's corporate and state-funded media high among the institutions responsible for this descent. In their abjectly dishonest coverage of the Gaza crisis, they have licensed Western leaders' support for countless crimes against humanity while immunizing them from all public objection. It is by way of these media that genocide has been normalized. Barbarism: Is there some other word for what the West has made of itself these past sixteen months?

Owen Jones, an independent journalist whose work I will shortly explore, calls the Israeli genocide in Gaza “an abomination which was made possible by the Western media throughout.” In [a piece published Christmas Eve](#) he continues:

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They whitewashed and ignored crimes. They failed to frame coverage around the stated intentions of Israeli leaders and officials—that is, stated commitments to war crimes, crimes against humanity and genocide. They instead deferred to Israeli claims to abide by international law, almost exclusively delivered to Western audiences and which have no credibility... When they did detail Israeli crimes, such revelations were orphaned from the overall narrative of what Israel is doing.

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The problem of bias among Western newspapers and broadcasters covering the Gaza crisis has been evident since Israel’s assault began. This is not news. There is the infamous case of Jeffrey Gettleman, a *New York Times* correspondent, who published a piece in December 2023 under the headline, “[Screams Without Words: How Hamas Weaponized Sexual Violence on October 7.](#)” This piece was [soon and thoroughly discredited](#) as the product of *The Times*’s collaboration with Israeli propagandists—a disgrace *The Times* has since done its best to obscure.

But for a long time the full extent of Western media’s mis- and disinformation—their “whitewashes,” to borrow Owen Jones’s term, was unclear. For some months it appeared to many that Gettleman’s was an extreme but more or less singular

case. There was no indication of what we can call systemic corruption among Western media, across-the-board corruption, and how such corruption actually works.

Two recent reports now make this clear. Together they indicate that mainstream media in the West have had systems in place since 7 October 2023 through which their cooperation with Israeli propaganda agencies and censors has been a matter of daily routine. Their abandonment of readers and viewers to ignorance, to put this point another way, has been complete.

Owen Jones, a British journalist, published "[The BBC's civil war over Gaza](#)" on 19 December. Jones reported separately that he spent months researching the state-funded broadcaster's coverage of the Israeli–Palestinian crisis and the mechanisms by which it obscured or otherwise misrepresented realities on the ground to protect terrorist Israel from public opprobrium. *Drop Site News*, an American publication where Jones's lengthy piece appeared, called it "a landmark investigation," and fair enough: It is one.

Jones interviewed more than a dozen BBC correspondents, reporters, and editors who detailed what amounts to the internal censorship operation the Beeb imposes on its Israel–Palestine coverage. He also conducted a thorough analysis of the broadcaster's reports since the events of 7 October 2023 and, not least, investigated those BBC officials identified as responsible for corrupting the coverage. Jones's sources consistently, not to say unanimously, identified an editor named Raffi Berg, as mentioned in this following passage, as the single most obvious source of the pro–Israel bias imposed on the work of correspondents and editors determined to do honest work:

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The BBC journalists who spoke to Drop Site News believe the imbalance is structural, and has been enforced by the top brass for many years; all of them requested anonymity for fear of professional retribution. The journalists also overwhelmingly point to the role of one person in particular: Raffi Berg, BBC News online's Middle East editor. Berg sets the tone for the BBC's digital output on Israel and Palestine, they say. They also allege that internal complaints about how the BBC covers Gaza have been repeatedly brushed aside. "This guy's entire job is to water down everything that's too critical of Israel," one former BBC journalist said.

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Berg began his career as an editor at F.B.I.S., the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, a C.I.A. organization that monitored overseas radio broadcasts from its founding in 1941 until it was dissolved in 2005. After he joined the Beeb early in this century, he gained notoriety for pieces glorifying I.D.F. military operations and West Bank settlers. Berg's power as the BBC's online editor for the Middle East is without equal or check, Jones's sources told him. "If it's Israel/Palestine, it has to go through Raffi before curation even O.K. it," one of these sources said. "Anyone who writes on Gaza or Israel is asked: 'Has it gone to edpol [editorial policy], lawyers, and has it gone to Raffi?'"

In November, a month before Jones finished his investigations and published in *Drop Site News*, more than a hundred BBC staff signed an open letter—this is Jones's phrasing—"accusing the organization, along with other broadcasters, of failing to adhere to its own editorial standards." The signatories asked management to incorporate a variety of changes in editorial processes to protect accurate

reportage. But senior BBC staff ignored this démarche, as it had all others previously, hiding behind the broadcaster's traditional pose as "the world's most trusted international news source."

This is not journalism and merits no trust. It is a system of information control and, as we say, perception management—or, as one BBC staff put it, "systematic Israeli propaganda."

Jones has come in for no end of ad hominem attacks and other attempts to discredit his work since he published last month. And it is all so predictable as to be boring. *Jewish News*, a London weekly, [dismisses the Jones's investigation](#) as a "vile and sinister anti-Semitic attack" on Berg. Jake Wallis Simons, a columnist at *The Telegraph*, [called Jones](#) "an enfant terrible harbouring a singular preoccupation with the Jewish state." Always it is the same: One never sees an attempt to engage the reporting, in this case an exhaustive, 9000-word investigation, with substantive replies; groundless aspersions are the only resort.

As to Berg, Jones reports that he responded to his, Jones's, queries by hiring one Mark Lewis, a noted defamation attorney, a former director of U.K. Lawyers for Israel, and an ardent right-wing Zionist. It rather makes the point, I would say, of all those BBC staff protesting Berg's insidious role at the Beeb.

Over the weekend *The Intercept*, an independent news journal (and with bias problems of its own, but we can leave this for another time) published a piece by Daniel Boguslaw, an investigative reporter in the Washington bureau, under the headline, "[CNN Runs Gaza Coverage Past Jerusalem Team Operating Under Shadow of I.D.F. Censor.](#)" This is also an excellent piece of work. The U.S. cable broadcaster has a different system, Boguslaw writes, but it is the same story at the far end. All CNN reports having anything to do with Israel or Palestine are run

through the network's Jerusalem bureau, which would be perfectly fine except that the correspondents in the Jerusalem bureau, as Boguslaw reports, "operate under the shadow of the country's military censor."

Boguslaw elaborates:

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Like all foreign news organizations operating in Israel, CNN's Jerusalem bureau is subject to the rules of the Israel Defense Forces' censor, which dictates subjects that are off-limits for news organizations to cover, and censors articles it deems unfit or unsafe to print. As *The Intercept* reported last month, the military censor recently restricted eight subjects, including security cabinet meetings, information about hostages, and reporting on weapons captured by fighters in Gaza. In order to obtain a press pass in Israel, foreign reporters must sign a document agreeing to abide by the dictates of the censor.

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Let's read this again to make sure we are all fully in the picture. All overseas news organizations are subject to the Israeli censor's rules, the censor determines what can and cannot be reported, including which subjects are acceptable and which are off limits, and anyone applying for press credentials must sign an agreement—yes, sign an agreement—agreeing to accept the official censor's authority.

If there is no Raffi Berg in the CNN operation, either at head office in Atlanta or in Jerusalem—and I count this a considerable "if"—it is merely because there is no need of one: The Raffi Berg work is done directly by the Israelis upon which CNN purports to report.

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It is impossible to overstate the importance of these two reports. I do not see how anyone who has read and considered them can any longer accept mainstream coverage of the Gaza crisis, or of West Asia altogether, at face value. Every column inch of it, every segment of broadcast, is tainted by those intent on apologizing for the barbarism we find all around us—Israel’s and the barbarism of all those supporting it.

I have long wondered whether the truth of any given time is by definition radical—counter, I mean to say, to reigning orthodoxies. This is certainly so in our time. This imposes a great responsibility on independent media and those who publish, write, and edit them. Let us not miss how the two publications I consider here enrich our understanding of our world, and so bring us the possibility that we may someday step back from the edge of our barbarism.

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