

## Zionist Federation of Australia

### Behind the News complaint, 19 May 2021

On 19 and 25 May 2021, Behind the News (BTN) aimed to explain Hamas–Israel violence with history and proximate causes. Through key omissions, factual inaccuracies, the choice of background imagery, and the emphasis of the Palestinian over the Israeli narrative, the effect is to undermine the willingness or ability for Behind the News’ target audience (children) to accept or consider Israel’s side of the story. We have received reports that children experienced antisemitic bullying and intimidation as a result of the screening of these stories at their schools.

This complaint addresses the [19 May story](#).

ABC Editorial Policies contravened: “Do not unduly favour one perspective over another”; “Present a diversity of perspectives so that, over time, no significant strand of thought or belief within the community is knowingly excluded or disproportionately represented.”

The story’s title breaches the ABC’s ‘Israel/Palestine cheat sheet’, which recommends against using the term ‘Palestine’.

The following are some examples of bias.

#### **1:51**

##### **‘Before the First World War, there was no Israel’**

This misleads the viewer into thinking that, before WWI, Palestine existed (and that Israel immorally replaced it). There was no Palestine before WWI. The Ottomans—which controlled the region from 1517—didn’t name any region [Palestine](#). Before the British adopted the term, the area in question was last called Palestine by the [Romans](#). BTN should have had, ‘Before the First World War, there was no Israel or Palestine’.

#### **2:04**

##### **‘Britain took control of this area, which became known as the British Mandate for Palestine’**

The map that accompanies this statement says ‘Palestine’, and adds to the incorrect impression that the area consisted of a country called Palestine, which was later replaced by Israel. The [map](#) should have read, ‘Mandatory Palestine’ or ‘British Mandate of Palestine’. The narrator should have said, ‘Britain took control of this area and named it Palestine’.

#### **2:25**

##### **‘This is something the British leaders had shown support for’**

This undermines the Jewish legal claim to the land. Establishing a Jewish homeland was British policy. Further, the 1920 Treaty of Sevres called for the establishment of a Jewish homeland. The British Mandate for Palestine was established because the

League of Nations had [unanimously determined that a Jewish homeland should be created in what Britain called Palestine.](#)

**3:49**

**'Palestinians thought the UN decision was unfair... only assigned less than half the land'**

True, but BTN omitted that, ten years earlier, [Palestinian Arabs rejected](#) a British proposal where the Arabs would have obtained much more than half. Further, BTN omitted that [60 per cent](#) of the land apportioned to the Jewish state by the UN was desert.

BTN says the Jews were also unhappy, but (unlike for the Palestinians) doesn't explain why (the League of Nations had promised Jews the entire land, but now its successor was dividing that land).

**4:12**

**'What followed was a war between the Israeli army and Palestinians, who had some support from neighbouring Arab states.'**

This is incorrect on many levels and undermines Israel's side of the story. The wording frames the violence as an army (Israel's) against unarmed civilians. However, the war, as can be seen by Israeli, Palestinian and Arab statements, was about Arab attempts to destroy the nascent Jewish state, and Israel's attempts to prevent that from happening.

Statements from:

[Israel](#)

[Palestinians](#)

[Arabs](#)

The Palestinians had organised militias, and these were [attacking](#) Jewish villages and towns, as well as the Israeli army. The war was a 'total war', where almost all facets of both societies were organised to help the war effort (Moshe Naor, "Israel's 1948 War of Independence as a Total War", *Journal of Contemporary History* (vol. 43, no. 2, 2008), p. 241).

Saying that the Palestinians received 'some support' misleads the viewer as to the scale of the threat facing Israel, and the scale of support provided to the Palestinian side. [Lebanon Syria, Jordan, Iraq and Egypt all invaded](#) in an attempt to destroy Israel.

**5:30**

**'Throughout this period, many Palestinians continued to push for independence'**

This misleads the viewer as to Palestinian objectives. Until 1988, the Palestinian leadership's objective was Israel's destruction. For example, in a 1972 interview, PLO leader Yasser Arafat said, "The end of Israel is the goal of our struggle, and it allows for neither compromise nor mediation... We want war, victory. Peace for us means the destruction of Israel and nothing else." (Reproduced in Barry Rubin, *Revolution*

*until Victory? The politics and history of the PLO*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994, p. 41).

The PLO only (implicitly) accepted Israel's right to exist in 1988 (and formally did in 1993). Within five years of the 1988 implicit Palestinian acceptance of Israel's right to exist, an Israeli–Palestinian peace agreement was signed.

**5:35**

### **Israel annexed East Jerusalem**

Notwithstanding that Israel has agreed that the status of Jerusalem is subject to negotiations with the Palestinians (making the 'annexation' somewhat moot), there is a bigger problem.

Immediately before this section, BTN downplayed Palestinian actions (i.e. 'push for independence'; no mention of actual objectives or terrorism). It then emphasised two widely condemned Israeli practices – the incorporation of East Jerusalem and settlements.

The effect is to downplay (actually, ignore) the negative aspects of Palestinian behaviour and emphasise negative aspects of Israeli behaviour, which guides the viewer to a biased conclusion.

**7:01**

### **Hamas**

BTN's description of Hamas is mostly accurate, except that it didn't mention Hamas's objective—to destroy Israel and kill Jews.

Excerpts from [Hamas's constitution](#):

'Israel will exist, and will continue to exist, until Islam abolishes it, as it abolished that which was before it';

'The initiatives, the so-called peace solutions, and the international conferences for resolving the Palestinian problem stand in contradiction to the principles of the Islamic Resistance Movement [Hamas]';

'There is no solution to the Palestinian problem except by jihad. Initiatives, proposals and international conferences are a waste of time and a farce';

'The Prophet, Allah's prayer and peace be upon him, says: 'The hour of judgment shall not come until the Muslims fight the Jews and kill them, so that the Jews hide behind trees and stones, and each tree and stone will say: 'O Muslim, O servant of Allah, there is a Jew behind me, come and kill him!''

Omitting Hamas's objective prevents the viewer from understanding the conflict.

**7:45**

### **All this history provides context**

A broadly accurate summary is provided of both the Israeli and Palestinian narratives as to why the conflict continues today. The Israeli narrative was given 8 seconds (7:52–8:01). The Palestinian narrative was given 11 seconds (8:10–8:21). However, the Israeli narrative section concluded with, '[Israel's narrative] provides a bit of context to its behaviour over the years, which has been criticised for being aggressive and disproportionate'. No such clarifier mentioning negative Palestinian behaviour was added to the end of the Palestinian narrative. This undermines Israel's position.

### **8:21**

#### **Israel controls Gaza's borders**

Israel AND EGYPT control Gaza's borders. Israel has [no control](#) over the Egypt–Gaza border. The Israeli (and Egyptian) blockade of Gaza began in 2007, after Hamas took control of the area from Fatah. Only mentioning Israel makes it seem that Israel is alone in seeking to isolate Hamas. Mentioning Egypt as well would allow the viewer to understand that Hamas is a violent actor, isolated regionally by both Jewish and (many) Arab states.

### **9:03**

#### **Human Rights Watch report**

While it is true that the HRW report accused Israel of apartheid, the [report has been criticised](#) for its political bias, but this criticism wasn't presented by BTN. Further, there are also NGO reports critiquing the human rights conditions of Gazans under Hamas's rule, but these were omitted by BTN.

A graphic said Arab Israelis were full citizens but clarified that 'many identify as Palestinian'. This is not true. An April 2020 poll [revealed](#) that seven per cent of Israeli Arabs identified as 'Palestinian'. Half identified as 'Israeli Arabs'. Just under a quarter identified themselves as 'Israeli'. Were Israel actually practising apartheid, the overwhelming majority of Arab Israelis would identify as Palestinian.

### **9:16**

#### **Both sides**

The Israeli claim that Hamas fires rockets from civilian areas in order to maximise Palestinian civilian deaths is omitted. BTN implies the Israeli strikes are indiscriminate. This undermines Israel's position. Further, the Israeli Prime Minister is quoted (Hamas 'will pay a heavy price') but Hamas leaders are not (such as [their call for Palestinians to 'cut off the heads of Jews'](#)). This is another device that makes the viewer think worse of Israel.

Most of these examples display bias against Israel. Because of the age of the target audience and key omissions that would have provided balance, the cumulative effect is to undermine Israel's moral right to defend itself and, indeed, to exist, in the eyes of Australian school children.

BTN stories on 25 May 2021, in 2017, 2014 and 2012 also clearly favoured the Palestinian perspective. There have been no BTN stories that clearly favour the Israeli perspective.