

The deadly truth behind aerial attacks on Iran



165 children and staff were killed when a girls' elementary school at Minab, Iran, was hit by a US-Israeli air strike on 28 February. The photo was posted on X/Twitter by Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi

US media coverage focuses on Israeli-US assault, but sidelines airstrike on girls' school

By Granville Williams

The attacks by Israel and the US on Iran beginning on 28 February put an abrupt end to the negotiations underway between the US and Iran – to the delight of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who has always viewed as anathema anything remotely resembling diplomacy or the pursuit of peace.

As the US/Israeli assault on Iran entered its second week, *The Economist* in an article headlined 'The Iran war has been a stunning aerial success' presented a glowing account of the military campaign which 'evinces careful planning, massive firepower and overwhelming success'.



It quotes the US military commander overseeing military operations in the area saying in the first four days America had attacked almost 2,000 targets, including 17 ships, among them a submarine. Israel's bombing is even more intense, striking around 1,000 targets a day.

What the article didn't mention was the deadly consequenc-



Above: *Sun on Sunday* reports assassination Left: *Telegraph* front page focuses on Starmer

es of this assault on people in Iran, and now in the Lebanon. On Thursday 5 March the IDF warned people in the Dahiyeh area of Beirut to 'evacuate immediately' ahead of airstrikes on what it claimed were Hezbollah targets. It's an area with a population of 500,000 and chaos ensued as those who could

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EDITORIAL

UK media highlight Trump's attack on Starmer

You would be forgiven if you relied on the bloc of right-wing newspapers to find out much about the US-Israeli assault on Iran. The most important front-page story for them was the fact that Keir Starmer wasn't toeing the line supporting Donald Trump's illegal action and, initially, blocking the use of British bases for air strikes against Iran.

The *Daily Telegraph* and *The Sun* conveyed Donald Trump's message about how 'very disappointed' he was in Starmer. And, as media commentator Ray Snoddy pointed out, "The real firepower directed at the British Prime Minister came from the massed ranks of the columnists and leader writers."

Richard Littlejohn in the *Mail* suggested that if Starmer managed to survive until the next Labour Party Conference, "perhaps he might close proceedings by leading delegates in singing his very own version of the party's traditional anthem 'We'll Keep The White Flag Flying Here'.

According to Leo McKinstry in *The Sun* the last shreds of Sir Keir's authority 'have vanished in the fog of war' and Starmer is cowering in Downing Street 'paralysed by indecision and left-wing dogma'.

Deadly truth behind aerial attacks on Iran

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fled. Israeli jets also bombed southern and eastern Lebanese towns, including Douris in the Bekaa Valley. Meanwhile the IDF is pushing further into Southern Lebanon.

Remember the chilling tone of Defence Secretary Hegseth's defence of Operation Epic Fury on 2 March when he described the US-Israeli airstrikes on Iran as the 'most lethal and precise air power campaign in history' and the scorn for those traditional allies 'who wring their hands and clutch their pearls, hemming and hawing about the use of force'?

We are now seeing some of the consequences of the 'lethal air campaign'.

On 28 February what was claimed to be a naval base operated by the Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps in Minab, southern Iran, was bombed. In fact it was a school with around 170 girls at it.

Adam Johnson has made a detailed analysis of US media coverage of the bombing. His findings include:

- The attack did not merit a

single front-page story from February 28 to March 4 in *The New York Times*, the *Washington Post* or the *Wall Street Journal*. These outlets did cover it, but relegated the story to the back pages, as in A11 for *The Times*. It was an afterthought to a much grander narrative of 'Decapitation strikes' and 'Iranian counterattacks'.

● Only one of the three network Sunday News Shows, ABC's *This Week*, mentioned the Minab bombing. NBC's *Meet The Press* and CBS' *Face The Nation* did not.

He concludes, "If 168 people, overwhelmingly little girls, were killed in a school bombing in Israel, there is little doubt it would have been plastered all over major newspapers, led nightly broadcasts, and been asked about on the Sunday News programs."

Thanks to *Middle East Eye* we now have a clearer picture of what happened.

"When the first bomb hit the school, one of the teachers and the principal moved a group of students to the prayer hall to protect them," one of the Red Crescent medics said, citing conversations he had at the time

with survivors.

"The principal called the parents and told them to come and pick up their children. But the second bomb hit that area as well. Only a small number of those who had taken shelter survived."

It points out, "Two strikes on the same target are often characterised as 'double-tap' strikes, particularly if there is a brief pause between them and medics and other civilians arriving at the scene are killed in the follow-up attack."

In the disinformation war a photo of the graves being dug to bury the children in Minab was widely circulated. Many people online – as well as Grok, X's AI assistant – disputed the photo, saying it was miscaptioned and instead showed an aerial shot of graveyards in Jakarta, Indonesia, or Sao Paulo, Brazil, during the COVID-19 pandemic in 2021.

Neither the US or Israel claim responsibility for this attack but a detailed analysis the *New York Times* suggests US forces 'were most likely to have carried out the strike'. So much for precise air power.

MN

New West Yorkshire newspaper on the way

As we went to press over 300 people had signed up to an appeal for subscribers to launch a new West Yorkshire newspaper. The people behind the initiative, Mill Media, already have a great track record building communities of readers and subscribers in Manchester, Birmingham, London, Sheffield, Liverpool and Glasgow.

In the case for a new quality paper for the region Daniel Timms starts off describing the now demolished *Yorkshire Post* building: "It was built to house 1,400 staff as well as an in-house social club and massive printing presses... Today, the thought of 1,400 newspaper staff in this city is fanciful, let alone one building. By my estimate, there are fewer than 100 journalists covering the whole of West Yorkshire these days, including roughly 15 covering Leeds at the *Yorkshire Evening Post*, a fraction of its former strength."

He's asking for our help: "If 500 readers pledge to become paying members in the next few weeks, we'll launch a new outlet in Leeds, hire a couple of great local journalists, and rent our first newsroom in the city centre."

You can sign up to pledge your support. Go to: <https://leeds.ghost.io/welcome-to-leeds-newspaper/>

MN

BBC responds to Charter review consultation

The BBC has published its 100-page response to the consultation on its future, titled *A BBC for All*. It throws down a challenge to the government.

Outgoing Director-General Tim Davie says: "The BBC stands ready to continue to innovate, to do more for audiences and to support our partners across the UK. But the choice here is clear: back the BBC or watch it decline, the status quo is not an option. Clear decisions are needed to ensure the BBC is funded sustainably and fairly so it can

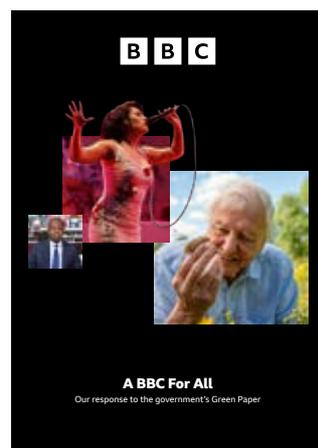
continue to deliver, both for audiences and for the country."

It highlights three key areas for Charter reform:

● **Independence:** The fixed end-date to the Charter should be removed, and changes are needed to board appointments and how funding decisions are made about the BBC.

● **Funding:** A funding model is required to ensure universal funding that is sufficient, sustainable and fair for all. Government should also take back full funding of the World Service.

● **Pace of change:** The Charter



Cover of the BBC document, *A BBC For All*

must allow the BBC to move at the pace of today's media world. The new Charter must reflect the realities of fierce global competition and rapid technological change with a lighter, more growth-focused regulatory framework.

MN

South Yorkshire Festival

MediaNorth runs an annual event at the South Yorkshire Festival held at the stunning venue Wortley Hall in South Yorkshire. This year the festival is on Sunday 9 August and Nick Jones will be speaking, on the fiftieth anniversary of the Grunwick strike, about its significance. It will be in the Unison Room, Wortley Hall at 2.00pm. Put the date in your diary.

MN

Why does the *Mail* get away with it?

The top brass at the *Mail* fight back as they finally face phone hacking charges in court, writes **Tim Gopsill**

Move over Rupert Murdoch. After 50 years leading the right-wing forces in the UK national media you've been pushed aside. Murdoch's News Corporation has lost much of its film and TV business in the US – they can't compete with the big boys – and Sky TV here in the UK. Now even its staple London papers are being outsold, by the *Daily Mail*.

Since 1978 the *Sun* had been the top-circulating daily paper. Now it sells 718,000 a day; the *Mail* 780,000.

The *Mail's* owner Daily Mail and General Trust (DMGT) has become the first company ever to control more than half of the national newspaper market, with 50.62 per cent covered by the *Mail*, the *Metro* and the *i*.

Of course, all newspaper sales are plunging fast, and what matters much more are website visits. So in terms of daily visitors, the *Mail* gets 4.1 million to the *Sun's* 3.7 million.

Telegraph takeover?

DMGT is now seeking to expand by taking over the *Telegraph* group (another 5.5 per cent of the market). The media regulator Ofcom has opened an enquiry, but its record concerning right-wing radio, TV and internet is regarded by many as lenient to say the least.

Nothing, it seems, can halt the *Mail's* ascendancy. It sailed serenely through Fleet Street's phone-hacking crisis without a scratch – even though it

was probably the worst offender.

The 'phone-hacking' affair covered three crimes: hacking into voicemail, which was widely practised by journalists from the turn of the century, plus the bribery of public officials and the 'blagging' of personal information on people through bullying and impersonation.

In 2002 the Information Commissioner's Office launched Operation Motorman, searching for data illegally obtained by these means. Inspectors raided the premises of a number of private detectives and discovered more than 4,000 receipts and invoices from journalists for all kinds of dubious enquiries.

In 2005 royal officials reported that Princes William and Harry had somehow been snooped on as stories about their private lives had appeared in Murdoch's *News of the World* (NoW). Police uncovered records of phone-hacking, and the NoW 'royal editor' Clive Goodman and private investigator Glenn Mulcaire were tried and jailed in 2007.

The national press dismissed them as mavericks and closed ranks, denying any illegal activities. With the collaboration of corrupt Metropolitan Police chiefs the denials held until *The Guardian* blew everything up into the air four years later.

It turned out there had been hacking and blagging on a staggering scale; 4,000 victims have been named but estimates range up to 12,800.

The NoW was shut down and 26 senior jour-



SHOWDOWN: Four of the plaintiffs in the case against DMGT, From top left, clockwise: Elton John, Dame Doreen Lawrence, Sadie Frost and Liz Hurley. Below, left: Prince Harry tries again

nalists were charged, eight stood trial and four were jailed. But despite widespread revelations, no-one else was ever charged. The police were stood off, and ICO inspectors who worked on Motorman were instructed to stop. The ICO had given the Met a catalogue of the offences it had discovered, listed by newspaper. Police ignored it, but the ICO also published it.

Worst offender

There were 305 journalists on the list, and the worst offending paper, by miles, was not the NoW, which was fifth. It was the *Daily Mail* group, with 95 journalists implicated – nearly a third of the lot.

There has never been a successful case over phone-hacking, simply because every single claim has been settled out of court, for huge sums: by the Murdoch press for an estimated £1.2 bn, and the *Mirror* group more than £100 million.

The last case, two years ago, was brought against the *Daily Mirror* by a group including Prince Harry, still pursuing the legal vendetta against the national press that he began with his brother 20 years ago.

There were hopes for a definitive judgement, but Harry set-

tled at the last minute for a reported £3 million. However, he has one more shot at them. The final showdown opened in February at the High Court in London and is due to end on 26 March.

The seven plaintiffs include Prince Harry, Baroness Doreen Lawrence, mother of murdered teenager Stephen Lawrence, Elton John, and actors Liz Hurley and Sadie Frost.

The defendant is DMGT. It is mounting a formidable defence, with the former editor of the *Daily Mail*, Paul Dacre, and several past and present Associated Newspapers executives and journalists taking the stand to deny malpractice. Can it cut off the torrent of money for phone-hacking claimants? Will this be its ultimate triumph?

STOP PRESS: Axel Springer has agreed to buy *The Telegraph* for £575m in cash.

Springer said it will 'turbocharge' *The Telegraph's* expansion in the US and help it become 'the leading centre-right media outlet in the English-speaking world'.

The big loser from this announcement is *Daily Mail* owner DMGT which thought its own deal to buy *The Telegraph* was essentially done and dusted. **MN**



Nick Jones recalls his battles with Labour's spin doctors

The fall of Mandelson

When reflecting on the fallout from the downfall of Peter Mandelson, an all too evident faultline was the boys' club ethos which developed among those that he worked with and their addiction to besmirching anyone perceived to have been a threat to the New Labour project.

Tony Blair failed to exercise control over the culture of toxic anonymous briefings which spiralled out of control under the malign influence of Mandelson and Alastair Campbell and became a stain on his leadership.

The departure of the last of the Blair era acolytes, Morgan McSweeney and Tim Allan – and the demise of their ennobled colleague Matthew Doyle – is an opportunity for a reset in the way Downing Street and the Labour Party brief the news media.

The influx of women into top jobs in the Prime Minister's press office might be a positive step towards ending the briefing wars which have done the Labour movement so much harm.

Policy guidance

In future those who brief on behalf of government and party should be made to adhere to a clear diktat. Guidance on policy issues and timing often needs to be given off-the-record. Journalists do have to be advised on how to interpret and assess government decisions. However, there is no excuse for any adviser fuelling factional infighting. Briefings to the detriment of an individual minister or MP should be banned. Any adviser caught speaking anonymously like that should face the sack.

Political journalists have had a field day since Campbell oversaw a doubling and then trebling in the number of ministerial special advisers charged with the task of engineering the best possible

publicity for their ministers and departments.

Labour's SPADS, as they are known, have effectively had a free rein to adopt the macho demeanour and below-the-belt tactics championed by the Mandelson-Campbell axis.

Their misogynist briefings caused distress among the legions of women MPs and ministers who over recent decades have fallen foul of Downing Street or the party leadership.

For correspondents at Westminster, many of whom have excelled in their own 'boyo' attitudes, the briefing wars have allowed and encouraged an unprecedented degree of journalistic licence. Who knows who the 'sources' might possibly be who are quoted at inordinate length, that is, if they ever existed.

Political stories based entirely on anonymous quotes are now the norm, a far cry from the standards of accuracy which applied at the start of my career.

Having reported on the birth of New Labour, and after having come off the worse for wear after confrontations with Mandelson and then Campbell, I am full of admiration for the sheer artistry of their character assassination.

My decade as a BBC labour and industrial correspondent meant I was damaged goods from the word 'go' once Mandelson was taken on by Neil Kinnock. A journalist with an affinity for the trade union movement was judged to be part of the enemy.

"Once a labour correspondent, always a labour correspondent. Never trust labour correspondents"



Above: Peter Mandelson is no longer shaping the agenda, ending male domination in the Downing Street press office. Left: Mandelson threatened with court



Mandelson was contemptuous from the start: "Once a labour correspondent, always a labour correspondent. Never trust labour correspondents."

My ability to break stories, especially those which could be considered damaging to Kinnock and then Blair, required firm rebuttal. There was no better way than to go over my head and complain directly to BBC editors: "You do know that his shorthand note is unreliable" was one of Mandelson's favourite ploys when encouraging the newsroom to drop one of my offending reports.

When it came to rubbishising my stories if they were being followed up by other correspondents, Mandelson's put downs were in a league of their own.

"There is nothing in this story. It is just Nick Jones and Jeremy Corbyn at it again," was Mandelson's riposte to newspaper correspondents when seeking to rubbish one Saturday evening news story.

Mandelson's menace could be intimidating. "You do realise I am having lunch with John Birt (then BBC director general) later this week."

His readiness to go right to the

top got results. After having been dispatched to interview Harriet Harman my conduct was later called into question and an apology was required. The following Monday morning I was instructed from on high at BBC Westminster to write an immediate apology and deliver it in person.

Two days later the *Daily Express* had a splash exclusive that BBC had been forced to make yet another grovelling apology.

Mandelson had wilfully traded my misdeed and then taken delight in informing BBC colleagues that my punishment was well deserved.

Alastair Campbell should have the last word. From the start he treated me with contempt, accusing me of being only interested with the process of politics, obsessed with stories about spin.

An entry in *The Alastair Campbell Diaries* includes a telling footnote which explains why he found my exploits so irritating.

When a correspondent was needed urgently one Sunday afternoon to film a pooled interview with Blair at Chequers, I was dispatched with the crew, only to read years later of Campbell's annoyance that the BBC had fobbed him off with that 'tick Nick Jones'.

* A tick is a blood-sucking parasite!
MN

The BBC has announced a landmark deal with YouTube to make content aimed at its digital-native younger audience. **Indigo Crane** highlights the challenges it faces

Losing traction: The BBC and young viewers

As the United Kingdom approaches the renewal of the BBC's Royal Charter, questions regarding the broadcaster's relevance have developed into a pressing political issue.

A recent review by the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) warns that the BBC's mission to 'serve all audiences' is under growing strain, particularly among younger viewers who favour digital short-form media over traditional broadcast content. This demographic shift has implications not only for viewership, but for the very legitimacy of the license fee model that funds the BBC's public service remit.

The BBC's current funding model relies on an annual license fee, with £3.84 billion collected in 2024-25 from around 23.8 million households. However, license ownership is falling, despite enforcement attempts. Two million visits were made to unlicensed homes in this period - 50% more than the previous year - yet this did not lead to proportionally higher license uptake or prosecution.

Fiscal challenge

These figures have real financial implications. The PAC's analysis shows that license fee evasion, combined with households legally declaring they do not need a license, represents over £1.1 billion in potential lost income in 2024-25. Of this number, £550 million is estimated to stem from evasion, and £617 million from households opting out.

Beyond the fiscal challenge, these reports elucidate a broader cultural one: the BBC is losing traction with younger audiences. The BBC's figures report their weekly reach among 16 to 34 year-olds has dropped from 71% in 2023-24 to 67% in 2024-25.



Bluey, a popular programme aimed at pre-school children, was co-commissioned by the BBC and Australian Broadcasting Corporation

To add texture to these figures, I interviewed a group of university students about their attitudes towards the BBC and its funding model.

When I asked one student what he thought the UK would look like without the BBC as we currently know it, he responded, "It would be a completely commercialised, partisan news system. In terms of other areas of the BBC, like sports, you'd just have Sky forming a monopoly and charging ridiculous prices for watching their stuff.

"It is meant to be the national broadcasting service. I don't think it (the license fee) should be a Netflix style subscription. We all need it."

When asked whether the BBC reflected her interests, another

There exists the sense that the BBC is still, despite lower engagement from younger audiences, a national institution that should be preserved

student said: "I think as a university student, yes, but if I was a kid, no. I think it's really sad. When we were kids, everyone watched the same TV shows, often created by the BBC. That doesn't happen so much now."

A particularly revealing dimension of the BBC's relevance problem lies in children's television, historically one of its strongest cultural assets. For decades, publicly funded programming on channels such as CBBC and CBeebies formed a shared media experience for British childhood, often praised for educational value, diversity, and lack of advertising.

Yet viewing habits among children are changing rapidly as streaming platforms and on-demand video compete for attention from an increasingly young age. The shift matters because children's engagement has traditionally functioned as the BBC's pipeline audience: viewers who grow up with its content are more likely to trust and use its services as adults. If that early relationship weakens, the long-term consequences may extend far beyond youth demographics, affecting the corporation's future audience base and, ultimately, its

claim to universality.

Despite her acknowledgment that the BBC may not be serving the interests of its very youngest audiences, this student agrees that any major changes to the license fee system would be negative: "It would actually be very bad. It would turn into a competition, things could become more polarised and that is dangerous, especially for the youngest audiences."

Formative entry points

There exists the sense that the BBC is still, despite lower engagement from younger audiences, a national institution that should be preserved. Whilst a sample of university students is unrepresentative of the entire younger generation, their responses are still valuable. Disengagement from BBC output does not necessarily equate to hostility toward the institution or its model of funding. The broadcaster still represents something valuable, even if they do not solely rely on it.

The key issue in the future is, if formative entry points such as CBBC and CBeebies continue to lose their viewers, the BBC risks the erosion of the future audience on which its funding model depends.

While interviews with students may uncover more positive attitudes toward the BBC, statistics do not lie. If only 51% of young people engage with their output, the broadcaster's options are limited, despite what these young people may actually have to say. Younger audiences may support the idea of the institution in principle whilst neglecting it in practice. **MN**

Indigo Crane is in her final year of an English degree at Durham University and will study for an MA in Journalism at Salford University next year.

Nick Jones reflects on the Marx Memorial Library Event held on 24 January

Wapping – forty years on

Revisiting the 1986 Wapping dispute brought back no sense of journalistic achievement. As one of the labour and industrial correspondents who reported the strike by 5,500 sacked printworkers, my recollection is one of failure. I fear my coverage on BBC Radio did not get across the magnitude of the brutality and implications of Rupert Murdoch's covert decision to switch production of his newspapers from Fleet Street to what became known as Fortress Wapping.

Memories of the challenges we journalists faced came flooding back when listening online to a symposium marking the 40th anniversary of the dispute which was held at the Marx Memorial Library in Clerkenwell.

Murdoch was accused of being in league with Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the Metropolitan Police, backed by the national news media, with the BBC, 'a propaganda arm of the government', falling into line.

Like the National Union of Mineworkers, the two main print unions – National Graphical Association and Society of Graphical and Allied Trades – retained great confidence in their industrial strength. They believed – as they continued to demonstrate night after night – that eventually the might of their mass picketing would succeed in halting Murdoch's new printing presses and in forcing the management and government to backdown.

Ruthless crackdown

A ruthless crackdown had effectively corralled the miners' pickets at pitheads across the coalfields, and two years later the same expertise would ensure free passage for the TNT lorries leaving Wapping to distribute copies of *The Sun*, *News of the World*, *The Times* and *Sunday Times*.

My assessment was that six months into the Wapping dispute the print unions needed to change tactics if they were to have any hope of winning over wider public support.

In an article for *The Listener*



Photo: Nic Oatridge

A day-time vigil was maintained by sacked print workers before pickets assembled each evening in their vain attempt to stop lorries leaving Fortress Wapping. A heavy police presence and fearsome security ensured there was no disruption to the delivery of Rupert Murdoch's newspapers

(5.6.1986) I wrote that the printworkers' fight against Murdoch had one unique characteristic: the public were not merely innocent bystanders, powerless to respond, as was so often the case in industrial disputes:

"On this occasion, over four and a half million people who buy *The Sun* and *The Times* (plus another six million on Sunday) were exercising their choice each day of the week by purchasing one of Murdoch's newspapers.

"Therefore, the print unions did have an opportunity to inflict real damage on News International if sufficient readers could have been persuaded to buy alternative newspapers."

Illustrating my report was a photograph of a lone news vendor at King's Cross Station selling the first editions of next day's newspapers with handwritten signs on his stall declaring 'No Sun sold here'.

On some Saturday mornings

Amid mounting anger and frustration as the dispute continued, the sacked workers had no hesitation when apportioning blame

at Watford (a town with a strong affinity with the printing trade) a printworker paraded outside the main newsagent's shop with a 'Don't buy' poster.

"If there had been national co-ordination behind such protests, with printworkers parading throughout the country, this might have had more impact on the public than a mass picket late each Saturday night at Wapping."

Amid mounting anger and frustration as the dispute continued, the sacked workers had no hesitation when apportioning blame. Journalists and broadcasters were criticised for failing to report the 'real facts' and for not 'telling the truth' about what was happening on the picket lines.

Half a dozen journalists from *The Times* had joined the strike from the start, becoming celebrated Refuseniks, but in the opinion of the 'inkies' members of the National Union of Journalists could not be called into aid as it only provoked fresh taunts of us being members of the 'National Union of Judases'.

There was little recognition or understanding within the union hierarchy of the weariness in newsrooms about daily round-ups about picketing and the dilemma over how much space and time to devote to them.

To the strikers' dismay, unless

there had been a major disturbance, all that tended to be considered newsworthy was a line or two about the number of arrests or the extent of any injuries, prompting the inevitable accusation that the media were only interested in reporting violence.

Queen's solicitors

In the first two weeks of the strike there was a major missed opportunity to capture the news agenda after a damaging revelation. Farrer & Co, the Queen's solicitors, had advised News International that the 'cheapest way' to dispense with their workforce was to dismiss employees while they were 'participating in a strike or other industrial action'.

If breakfast-time radio and TV programmes had been invited to a 7.30am news conference at which SOGAT leader Brenda Dean intended to make 'a major announcement about the involvement of the Queen's solicitors in the Murdoch dispute', there might have been live coverage. Miss Dean could easily have asked listeners and viewers to think carefully about the newspaper they intended to purchase that morning. With a little advance planning, her appeal could have been backed up by printworkers parading outside news agents.



GB News boasted its 'agenda-setting world exclusive' became its most watched interview

Goodbye impartiality

Julian Petley on the GB News interview which breached all broadcasting guidelines on impartiality, but Ofcom took no action

Ever since GB News began broadcasting in June 2021, it has been accused by many of repeatedly driving a coach and horses through the requirements for 'due impartiality' in Ofcom's Broadcasting Code.

Thousands of complaints have resulted in the occasional smack on the wrist, but now the regulator appears finally to have completely abandoned any pretence of upholding its own rules.

On 15 November 2025 Donald Trump granted a 'world exclusive' interview to GB News. This was conducted by Bev Turner, who had already been invited by him to travel on Air Force One and had also been given the first question in a White House press conference, something traditionally reserved for the big US broadcasters.

Pernicious nonsense

In the course of the interview (if one can really call it that) Trump was allowed repeatedly to spout the most pernicious nonsense. For example, he claimed that London has no-go areas for the police, that its Mayor is a 'disaster' and a 'nasty person', and that in parts of the UK 'you have sharia law where they don't even want to obey the laws of your country'.

Mounting another hobby

horse, he alleged that taxation levied on North Sea oil drilling is 'almost 100%', wind power is 'the most expensive energy you can get', China has almost no wind farms, and human-induced climate change is a 'hoax', with Britain being one of its worst perpetrators.

Far from challenging this outpouring of misinformation, Turner either egged on Trump or indulged in toe-curling adulation. To his allegation that people are 'being stabbed in the ass or worse', she cooed: "It's true ... It's awful. It is. And it feels much safer here [in the US]"

Ofcom received 32 complaints claiming that the interview was either misleading or partial.

Entirely true to form, Ofcom decided not to investigate the complaints, stating that 'while we acknowledge that President Trump's views were not challenged during the interview itself, the surrounding panel

Trump said London has no-go areas for the police, its Mayor is a 'disaster' and a 'nasty person', and that in parts of the UK 'you have sharia law ...'

discussion and other guest interviews offered a range of alternative perspectives which strongly challenged his position'.

Drawing conclusions

However, many of the issues raised by Trump simply weren't dealt with at all. And nor did Ofcom publish its reasons for not investigating the complaints and explaining why the programme did not breach the Broadcasting Code.

It was left to Chris Banatvala, Ofcom's former director of standards who had actually drafted the Code and established its investigation procedures, to draw the all-too-obvious conclusions. In his view, allowing Trump to make unfounded allegations without challenge and with the potential to mislead viewers 'undermined the most basic standards expected of broadcast journalism and regulatory requirements. This was a test case for how Ofcom regulates broadcasters on due impartiality. It has failed that test'.

At a time when trustworthy news is needed more urgently than ever in order to counteract the ever-swelling tsunami of disand mis-information (and by no means only online) Ofcom's actions (or rather, inactions) are not only incomprehensible but profoundly irresponsible. **MN**

BBC Charter review

Updates on the consultation on the BBC Green Paper which closed on 10 March

Media Unions

Equity, the performing arts and entertainment union, has boycotted the government's BBC Royal Charter consultation, saying it is 'unfit for purpose in both detail and scope'. Union general secretary Paul W Fleming said, "The fact that responses may be processed using artificial intelligence adds insult to injury."

The NUJ has however encouraged its members to individually respond to the consultation and published the union's response: <https://www.nuj.org.uk/resource/members-encouraged-to-respond-to-bbc-charter-review-consultation.html>

MediaNorth

MediaNorth sent in four policy proposals to the Alternative Green Paper initiative by the Media Reform Coalition. You can read the document here: <https://www.mediareform.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2026/03/The-Alternative-Green-Paper-March-2026.pdf>

We have submitted a response to the consultation – it's on our website: www.medianorth.org.uk

British Broadcasting Challenge (BBC)

The BBC produced two guides to help organisations and individuals respond. They said, "This is not a routine renewal. The threats to the UK's information environment are more serious than at any point since the BBC was founded... The decisions made will determine whether the BBC has the independence, the funding and the mandate to respond to these threats for the next decade and beyond."

Voice of the Viewer and Listener (VLV)

The VLV has a Public Service Media Forum which **MediaNorth** is a member of. More information here: <https://vlv.org.uk/news/vlvs-citizens-psm-forum-unveils-joint-statement-ahead-of-bbc-charter-renewal/> **MN**

Will Ofcom bow to STV?

Bruce Whitehead
on what will happen
if the cuts to news
that STV wants
get the green light

TV viewers in northern Scotland could be about to lose their nightly news programme if cash-strapped STV gets its way. And from remarks made by Ofcom's broadcast head, ex-News at Ten editor Cristina Nicolotti Squires, it looks like it will.

Only last year the company, which holds the Central and North Scottish ITV licences, bullishly invested £1.5m in studios at its Glasgow HQ and in Aberdeen, where the Northern show is made. CEO Rufus Radcliffe boasted of a 'cash-rich' business with 'no ceiling to growth' in its lucrative production arm, STV Studios. It even bet half-million on the new STV Radio station (yet to make a profit).

Problems began in July with a profits warning which halved the share price, spooking investors. STV Studios' income also halved and CEO Radcliffe announced 30 news job cuts. The firm announced it would ask Ofcom, the UK authority which controls Scottish broadcasting, for approval to merge its two ITV licences, diluting costly public service obligations.

Viewers opposed proposals

STV wants 70% of news coverage shared between Central and North, scrapping local news opt-outs. The NUJ calculates that Northern local news content would drop from about 17:30



NUJ picket outside STV's Glasgow headquarters

minutes currently to just 7:30 minutes. In January the union held a one-day strike against the cuts and future redundancies.

STV's attempt to prune tailored local coverage is at odds with its public stance. Its website states: "...to remain relevant to our viewers and advertisers, we must reflect the communities we serve.. and use our Public Service Broadcaster status to share important topical, social and environmental issues."

Pollsters True North found 83% of viewers were opposed, and the Scottish Government

STV are trying to explain the cuts by claiming that audiences are getting their news on watches, phones and tablets

said the proposals failed to ensure 'high-quality news across both STV's licensed areas'.

It's hard to see how a Glasgow reporter can package a breaking Scabster fishing story, or an Inverness murder case, in time for 6pm. Or why advertisers would spend on local slots if there was less local news.

STV are trying to explain away the cuts by claiming that audiences are getting their news on watches, phones and tablets. That's true, but it's been true for about twenty years. So why did STV invest £2m last year on TV and radio broadcasting?

The NUJ smells a rat. Their Ofcom submission rubbishes the 'changing audience habits' excuse as window-dressing, instead accusing Radcliffe of gross financial mis-management, with STV Studios' £70m 2023 order book more than halved this year to just £33m.

The union warns of a 'ratchet'

precedent, where Ofcom, by allowing dilution of STV's public broadcasting commitments, encourages other licensees - plcs after all - to seek further cuts to boost profits. Once gone, the NUJ believes, there's little prospect of a recovered STV seeking to reinstate the lost programmes.

Ofcom buying STV's story

Ofcom broadcast head Cristina Nicolotti's LinkedIn page says she is passionate about 'making sure people can get impartial, accurate and impartial (sic) news, wherever they consume it...' (my italics).

It's difficult to reconcile that with Ofcom's statement that it is minded to approve the axing of north Scotland's own evening news programme, and seems to be buying STV's story.

Consultations ended last month. Locally made ITV news programmes across most of Scotland will end in a few weeks unless Ms Squires has a change of heart.

And with the SNP re-affirming its pledge to demand a second Independence referendum after May elections in which it is expected to hold most seats, Scottish highlanders watching their telly might well ask themselves: why is an official in London deciding what they watch anyway?

Photo: NUJ