

Protest Anti-Israel BBC Drama on PBS

November 11, 2011

IN BRIEF

Attention CAMERA E-Mail Team:

CAMERA's focus is obviously on news coverage and commentary about Israel and the Middle East, but from time to time highly distorted fictional works, ostensibly drawn from reality, warrant attention and response ? especially when American tax dollars are involved.

Such is the case with *Page Eight*, an inflammatory, anti-Israel BBC espionage drama by David Hare, a prominent British playwright known for his controversial and false depictions of Israel in numerous earlier dramatizations. The segment is being aired on PBS's "Masterpiece" program and is being rebroadcast intensively from November 7 through December 6. The cast and production are prestigious and its distribution first in the UK and now across America via the PBS network assure it a large audience.

You can find the broadcast schedule [by clicking here](#) and you can view the program online [by clicking here](#).

The story line includes a sub-plot that's an amalgamation of canards about allegedly brutish Israelis killing an innocent, peace-loving protester intent only on halting the Jews' callous seizure of land and construction of a wall through an Arab home.

One of the two main characters in the drama is the fictional Nancy Pierpan, a British woman of Syrian origin (actress Rachel Weisz) whose brother is said to have been shot in cold blood at a peace demonstration in the occupied territories by the Israelis while waving a white flag. Israel's supposedly ruthless intelligence services have covered up the truth, withheld justice and caused great suffering

for the dead man's family.

The narrative concludes with the program's hero acquiring documented proof that, indeed, the Israelis murdered the innocent protester in cold blood. The closing scenes present the British prime minister lecturing the Jewish state on its behavior and British politicians "on all sides" expressing "shock" at the discovery of the Israeli coverup.

It's noteworthy that there isn't a single word in the broadcast that defends Israel in any way whatsoever. There is no reference to terrorism or threats of any kind to Israel from neighboring states. There isn't a hint that the "wall" mentioned (actually a *fence* over more than 95% of the area covered) has served the purpose of saving Israeli lives after an onslaught of Palestinian terror against Jewish innocents.

Israel is simply demonized.

ACTION ITEMS

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Please use the information in the alert as background for your own letter. Do not copy and paste directly from the alert and do not forward it to the media.

Protest the airing of the blatantly anti-Israel program by a writer well known for his enmity toward the Jewish state. The BBC and many British media are flagrantly biased against Israel. PBS should not be a funnel for such material to American audiences.

Call for the addition of a prominent statement to be aired prior to future broadcasts of the controversial program clearly asserting that the events presented are entirely invented and have no basis in fact. Indeed, the events are contrary to the realities.

Protest the use of tax dollars to underwrite the propagandistic broadcast.

Reconsider contributions to PBS and its affiliates. Why *support* the defamation of the Jewish state?

- Contact PBS

President and CEO Paula A Kerger

Email: pakerger@pbs.org

Tel: 1- 703-739-5000

Senior VP, Chief TV Programming John F Wilson

Email: jfwilson@pbs.org

Tel: 1-703-739-5155

- Call and email your local affiliate stations and reiterate the points above. You can [find the station here](#).
- Contact the PBS Ombudsman, Michael Gettler
this [online form](#) or
739-5290
- Contact BBC directly, the producers of the program
their [complaint page](#).
- **Please send blind copies (bcc) to letters@camera.org**

With
Tel: 703-

On

IN DETAIL

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Page Eight was panned by the New York Times' Alessandra Stanley for its hackneyed characterizations of Israelis (and Americans) as brutish and callous. ([Read the review here.](#))

She wrote:

Maybe, just maybe, Israeli soldiers didn't deliberately kill an unarmed pro-Palestinian demonstrator.

Of course not. None of those scenarios are possible because "Page Eight" was written by the British playwright and filmmaker David Hare...

Clive James at Britain's *Telegraph* newspaper had similar observations about the program bashing Israelis. ([Read the review here.](#))

He wrote:

[I]t was interesting to note that the Israelis were dragged in as automatic villains. There was a time when a few words on their behalf would have had to be included, but by now no argument needs to be made against them: rhetoric will do fine.

The transcript of *Page Eight* includes these lines:

Pierpont: "My brother was killed by the Israelis.

[He was] "waving a white flag, trying to stop the Israelis from knocking down a house. The Israelis were trying to build a wall through the occupied territories and the wall went right through the house."

"My life was changed when my brother was killed. He was killed by the Israeli defense force. Nothing they say makes any sense I don't believe a word of the official inquiry. It's hard enough to grieve I mean grief is hard enough anyway. But when you don't know the truth everything freezes and you can't move on.

Since Jake died, I haven't been interested in making friends.

.....

British Prime Minister:

"Even at times of national crisis certain basic human freedoms have to be protected. We must never stop insisting on telling to the truth to our enemies but sometimes we have to tell the truth to our friends as well. That's a difficult duty but between democracies with shared values it's an essential one."

Radio broadcast:

"Politicians on all sides in Britain are today expressing their shock at the news the Israeli army suppressed a highly critical Shabak report which established the truth about the death of a British peace campaigner in the occupied territories..."

BBC responds

In reply to protests about *Page Eight* when it was first aired in Britain in September, the BBC defended its production suggesting it does, in fact, resemble reality. The BBC statement serves to underscore that the thoroughly negative depiction of Israel was rooted in radical perceptions of the Tom Hurdall and Rachel Corrie events.

This is the statement quoted on the [Web site of the Zionist Central Council of Greater Manchester](#):

The subplot you have referred to was not unlike the Tom Hurdall story or that of Rachel Corrie (both killed in Palestinian occupied territories in 2004 and 2003, respectively) and, therefore, not at all in the realms of 'fantasy' or beyond credibility. David commented that it was notoriously difficult to get justice from the Israeli army and that families who have suffered losses like the one depicted in the drama have, as a result, become politicised. To take one small strand of

the drama and derive from it that 'Page Eight' is an anti-Israeli diatribe is to deliberately misconstrue the subject of the piece.

As the Manchester group correctly notes:

"There has not been any case of an Israeli killing anyone with a white flag. Both the Hurndall and Corrie incidents were investigated by the Israelis. The soldier who killed Tom Hurndall was jailed, and the death of Rachel Corrie was deemed to be an accident."

With thanks,

Andrea Levin
Executive Director
CAMERA