

The BBC's Newspeak Coverage of the Boston Marathon

by Norman Berdichevsky (May 2014)

The Usual Misreporting, and Effete Snobbery

The BBC news coverage of the recent Boston Marathon in which my son participated and which I enjoyed on practically every other news outlet was even worse than the 2007 criticism by its own "Trust." An independent panel that was set up in 2006 to review the impartiality of the BBC's coverage of the Israeli-Arab conflict cited a "commitment to be fair accurate and impartial" and concluded "that BBC output does not consistently give a full and fair account of the conflict. In some ways the picture is incomplete."

Due to the fact that the BBC does indeed cover a much wider range of international news than almost all American television stations, I frequently watch their coverage and came across one of the worst mistaken statements ever uttered on the air – announcer Lyse Ducett's horrendous hundredfold magnification of Lebanese dead in the 2006 conflict between Hizbollah and Israel claiming that Arab casualties amounted to "100,000; mostly civilians" on the BBC in America August 14, 2007, 8:00 EST transmission.

In reply to a protest and demand for a correction and retraction there was no reply. No correction, No apology (at least not to my knowledge) from the news gathering agency that continues to boast it is the "most accurate in the world." The United States, American society and popular culture are routinely treated by the BBC with scorn and derision. In October, 2006, BBC Washington correspondent Justin Webb said that the BBC is so biased against America that Deputy Director General Mark Byford had secretly agreed to help him to "correct" it in his reports.

A report commissioned by the BBC Trust, "Safeguarding Impartiality in the 21st Century" published in June 2007, stressed that the BBC needed to take more care in being impartial. The Evening Standard claimed that a new report on media bias showed the BBC "is out of touch with large swathes of the public and is guilty of self-censoring subjects that the corporation finds unpalatable."

My own personal confrontation with the BBC began in London in 1993 when I was called upon to translate and voice-over in English of a speech of then Prime Minister Rabin in the Israeli

Parliament (Knesset) in which he delivered a stern warning to terrorists. I was chauffeured in a limousine to the studio at White City to listen to a recording of Rabin's speech which promised harsh retribution for further acts of terrorism. I had to be content with only a 19 second clip in which I practiced 4 separate times at imitating a "particularly harsh and cruel" voice, as requested by the BBC news manager overseeing the recording. He wasn't satisfied until the last rendition when I gave it as much cruelty as I could imagine was Hitler-like.

But the nail in the coffin of the BBC's claim at being a reliable source of information was the recent Boston Marathon – hardly a "controversial topic" or was it? Does the BBC claim to have the authority to change the English Language? This is a subject that has sometimes figured in casual desultory remarks by guests about the way most Americans speak on BBC programs.

In order to understand the colossal difference in mentality between the 36,000 participants in the marathon along with the tens of millions of on the spot observers in the crowds and those at home viewing the event on television, one has to pay attention to the April 23rd BBC News telecast shown in an interview by presenter Katty Kay and their correspondent at the event, Laura Trevelyan.

Before doing so, it is worthwhile to understand the event not simply as a great sports competition but in the context of what happened, why it happened and how any repetition of last year's murderous attack was prevented. Practically nothing of this type of information was presented by BBC commentator Trevelyan who waxed ecstatic with a fondness for alliteration by grinning from ear to ear and proclaiming that ... "The mood was one of Reconciliation, Recovery, Remembrance, Resilience and now that the 2014 event had ended without incident... of Relief."

She certainly gets an A for proper use of Alliteration but to speak of "reconciliation", she uses her own BBC definition that is not just at odds with how Americans understand the term but is typical of the BBC vocabulary of excusing, or diminishing or avoiding any confrontation with the reality of JIHAD – the message that inspired both assassins – Dzhokhar Tsarnaev, now 20, and his brother Tamerlan, who was killed in the chase after the murder of a Boston policeman. No, they were not mentioned by name or what had inspired them. Were they involved in the reconciliation Laura Trevelyan listed as the first of her five R's? Was Tsarnaev the younger waiting at the finish line to embrace the winner to demonstrate his reconciliation?

The indictment against the surviving brother cites how the two of them test-fired guns and

bought fireworks that held 8 pounds of explosives. The message found scrawled inside the boat where Dzhokhar was found, accused the United States of killing “innocent civilians” and warned, “Stop killing our innocent people and we will stop.” The Tsarnaev family are from Chechnya in southwestern Russia where Islamist guerrillas have been battling government forces for the past 15 years. In 2011, Russian intelligence had requested the FBI to keep an eye on Tamerlan, who had become an increasingly devout Muslim. Moscow believed “that he was a follower of radical Islam and was preparing to head for Russia.” Neither the names of the brothers, or their motives figured in any of her remarks.

Just to reassure myself – I went to the dictionary and reread the definition of reconciliation – a situation in which two peoples, countries, etc. become friendly with each other again after quarreling. Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English (Pearson- Longman, Edinburgh, New Edition. 2003). Had I missed something? Had Dzhokhar expressed some remorse? That would certainly have been the first item of Laura Trevelyan’s ecstatic wishful thinking about reconciliation.

In the week before the race, the American and much of the world press reported on the stringent security measures being adopted in Boston in preparation, The Massachusetts State Police Colonel Timothy Alben had told reporters...”In this world, you never eliminate risk; you never bring it down to zero but we are working very hard at reducing that risk level and managing it to the best of our collective abilities.” Authorities admitted that the budget for security was much greater for the 2014 event than for the previous year. Many newspaper, radio and television reports carried stories describing the “unprecedented security” for the 2014 race – 4,000 police officers (more than twice the number of 2013), 500 undercover plain-clothes detectives, an unspecified number of police bomb-sniffing dogs and hundreds of cameras monitored in an underground bunker.

Listening to Laura Trevelyan and Katty Kay’s seven minute coverage – the picture that emerged was BBC slanted appropriately.

Katty Kay: There was a lot of security today but that didn’t impinge on the race at all?

Laura Trevelyan: “It didn’t at all and I spoke to police Commissioner William Evans.” He said that he didn’t want to have snipers on the roof (Were there or not? – she isn’t interested in that); “We don’t want to terrify the children who are coming to watch the marathon” (who would?) ...“We don’t want to change the atmosphere of the Boston Marathon” – (at this juncture, instead of paraphrasing the Police commissioner, she inserts her own commentary) –“One of the most prestigious in the world because WHAT WOULD BE THE POINT?” (for the BBC there is no point

in a show of force),..."If we are going to run it as some kind of para-military operation." (An absolute provocation for the BBC but what else could it be called, given the massive security arrangements?)

"So he said...(here she appears to resume her paraphrasing), to the public: "Be reassured – we have the tactical assets if we need them and if we need them we will get them out (apparently she thinks they are all not just out of sight but in a locked closet), but I sincerely hope we don't have to." She then reassures her viewers that according to the police commissioner..."The really beefed up police presence and SWAT teams there were kept behind closed doors." If the BBC had its way, the doors would also have been locked.

To ask "What would be the point?" is an asinine and inane comment. The point as anyone knows was to ensure that similarly minded Jihadists are prevented from trying again? Who else would bomb the marathon or kill Olympic athletes? This is the critical point.

Am I an Anglophobe? Definitely not! I lived in the UK for seven years and respect and admire many British institutions (see NER article "[The Left is Seldom Right](#)" for New English Review Press.

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