

When Pigs Fly: BBC Admits It was Wrong About Israel's 'Duty' to Vaccinate Palestinians

by Hugh Fitzgerald



It took exactly a month: from January 16 to February 16. On that date in mid-February, the BBC did the unthinkable: it admitted it had been wrong. It was on Shaun Ley's BBC show on January 16, when he accused the journalist Jonathan Sacerdoti of being wrong in insisting that Israel had no duty – according to the Oslo Accords – to inoculate the Palestinians with the coronavirus vaccine. What should have been checked on right away – it would have taken no more than a few minutes to do a simple internet search for the necessary information – took the BBC several weeks. Why? one wonders. The satisfying story, of chagrin and embarrassment at the BBC, which had been proven unfair to Israel yet again (Example #11,863), is here:

“BBC Admits Claim That Israel Is Responsible for Vaccinating Palestinians Is Wrong, [here](#) is what, one second later, appeared on my screen, and could have come up for you, too, at Bush House, had you only tried, way back on January 16, when the subject was first brought up on the BBC, or at any time in the weeks following. I repeat: it took five seconds.

Here’s what came up:

The Oslo Accords that were signed by Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organization in the 1990s established the Palestinian autonomous governing body, the Palestinian Authority (“PA”), divided Judea and Samaria into three distinct areas and set out the jurisdiction and responsibility of each party in the governance of the area.

Article 17 of the Israeli-Palestinian Interim Agreement on the West Bank and Gaza Strip (“the Interim Agreement”), signed in September 1995, establish the respective duties of each party in terms of health care (cf. Israel-Palestinian Negotiations: Interim Agreement on the West Bank and the Gaza Strip (Oslo II) (September 28, 1995), Article 17). Health care, and specifically the vaccination of the Palestinian population, is under the purview of the PA. Israel and the PA agreed to cooperate and exchange information between health systems, and specifically with regards to epidemics and contagious diseases:

1. Powers and responsibilities in the sphere of Health in the West Bank and the Gaza Strip will be transferred to the Palestinian side, including the health insurance system.

2. The Palestinian side shall continue to apply the present standards of vaccination of Palestinians and shall improve them according to internationally accepted standards in the field, taking into account WHO recommendations. In this regard, the Palestinian side shall continue the vaccination of the population with the vaccines listed in Schedule 3.

Got that? **Oslo Accords, 1995, Article 17, pps. 1 and 2.**

Algemeiner concludes:

The BBC correction was issued after anchor Shaun Ley, in an interview with journalist Jonathan Sacerdoti for the program Dateline London broadcast on Jan. 16, criticized Sacerdoti for saying that the PA alone was responsible for vaccinating Palestinians.

A puzzlement: when did Shaun Ley himself find out that he had wrongly criticized Jonathan Sacerdoti “for saying that the PA alone was responsible for vaccinating Palestinians”? We’d like to know the exact date. And why didn’t Shaun Ley himself, once he knew, apologize on the air for his misinformation on a matter of such importance, one that could – and in fact did – lead to a spread of a variant of the antisemitic “blood libel,” with Israel in the dock, accused of “withholding vaccines” it had a duty – so it was claimed – to provide and, therefore, the Jewish state was guilty of the murder of innocent Palestinians? Is such sloppy journalism to be forgiven quite so easily? Will there be any consequences for Shaun Ley?

Meanwhile, I hope there is weeping and wailing and gnashing of teeth at Bush House (that’s BBC headquarters). There have been so many things the BBC ought to have apologized for, when it comes to Israel, but so rarely does it do the right, the handsome thing. In my next installment, I’d like to describe a representative handful of BBC employees who over many decades have been particularly unjust to Israel. Lest we forgive. Lest we forget.

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