

BBC Does Something Right – Again

Two swallows do not a summer make. Nevertheless, it has to be admitted that the BBC has **done something right again** in regard to its Middle-East News coverage:

The BBC has appointed a "Middle East policeman" to oversee its coverage of the region amid mounting allegations of anti-Israeli bias.

Malcolm Balen, a former editor of the Nine O'Clock News, has been recruited in an attempt to improve the corporation's reporting of the Middle East and its relationship with the main political players.

[...]

Relations between the corporation and the Israeli government hit a low point this summer when the latter "withdrew co-operation" in protest at a BBC documentary about the country's weapons of mass destruction.

Ariel Sharon, the Israeli prime minister, later barred the BBC from his meeting with the British press during a visit to London.

The BBC has also been the target of Downing Street accusations that it toed a pro-Baghdad line over the Iraq war and that it influenced the Today programme's handling of the dossier story that is the subject of the Hutton Inquiry.

[...]

The BBC denied that the appointment amounted to an admission that it had "got its coverage wrong" but conceded the corporation was sensitive to criticism. He said it was "no longer the case" that the Israelis were refusing to co-operate with BBC journalists.

An accusation frequently levelled against the corporation is that it reports the Arab-Israeli conflict too much from a Palestinian point of view.

Its reluctance to describe suicide bombers as "terrorists"

has proved particularly controversial, recently prompting the Simon Wiesenthal Centre to pull out of a BBC series about Nazi genocide.

The corporation faces increasing scrutiny of all areas of its activities during the run-up to the renewal of its royal charter in 2006.

It's of course too early to tell whether there is anything of substance in this step. And the BBC has a long way to go, both morally and factually. But, taken together with **this** story, it is a hopeful sign.

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