

BBC reporter manufactures consent for nuking Iran

The Grayzone's Wyatt Reed joins Max Blumenthal to discuss the scandalous reporting of the BBC's Goncheh HabibiAzad, a correspondent who quoted an anonymous Iranian insisting they wanted Israel and the US to nuke their country – then quietly softened the quote. ||| The Grayzone ||| Find more reporting at <https://thegrayzone.com> Support our original journalism at Patreon: <https://patreon.com/grayzone> Facebook: <https://facebook.com/thegrayzone> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/thegrayzonenews> Instagram: <https://instagram.com/thegrayzonenews> Minds: <https://minds.com/thegrayzone> Mastodon: <https://mastodon.social/@thegrayzone> #TheGrayzone

#Max

It's a senior BBC Iran reporter, Gonche HabibiAzad — a senior BBC reporter exposed as an opposition activist after a top reporter at the BBC drew outrage for publishing a quote demanding that Iran be nuked. She's been revealed as a dedicated regime-change activist whose career was launched by a CIA-founded propaganda network. Serious questions remain about the BBC's editorial process. So this reporter quoted some random Iranian calling for Iran to be nuked, basically manufacturing consent for the deployment of a nuclear weapon on Iran. And then—Wyatt, you're sideways—

#Wyatt Reed

Yeah, it keeps happening every time you switch the camera.

#Max

I'm not sure why. I won't switch the cameras again.

#Wyatt Reed

I just set it to vertical. That's what we're doing today.

#Max

Who the hell is this? She seems less senior than us, let's say, but she's listed as a senior correspondent for the BBC. Who is this shady character? What's going on?

#Wyatt Reed

Well, she's a 27-year-old who, after just four years, has been appointed a senior reporter at the BBC, which is a pretty prestigious role. Most journalists who work at the BBC never reach that level. So that's reserved — it's almost like a management-track position. It involves editorial decisions, and she's been placed in this senior editorial sort of position after just four years in journalism. Now, I looked up a job listing for a similar position, a senior reporter at the BBC, and found that the minimum requirement was eight to ten years in the field of journalism. She has less than half of that. So, you know, it's a great question.

How did she come to this position? The reality seems to be that she was basically hand-selected to insert a bunch of supposed quotes from Iranians into the public discourse. She was chosen, obviously, because she grew up in Iran, she speaks the language, and she can be a much more effective protest whisperer than someone like her colleague we previously exposed — a woman named Deepa Parente, who is supposedly French. I guess she lives in France, but as far as I'm aware, she's not a native French speaker. She's an Indian woman who married a French man and adopted the last name Parente — or "Parente," as she likes to say in interviews.

#Max

She was a fashion blogger in India who came out to basically hype up all these death toll numbers from the so-called protests, which were actually regime-change riots. She was the one pushing the "30,000 dead," which Trump has now inflated to 45,000. She basically multiplied the real death toll by a factor of ten. And she came out of nowhere at The Guardian. It turns out she's collaborated with this woman, Habibi Azad.

#Wyatt Reed

Yeah, they seem like bad boys when you hear them on the podcast.

#Max

By the way, she deleted her Twitter account after you exposed her. But she's collaborated with this woman, Habibi Azad, who, as you can see here, quoted a random Iranian Reddit article. The person said something like, "About them hitting energy infrastructure, using an atomic bomb, or leveling Iran — my honest reaction is that I'm okay with all of these." And then the BBC quietly deleted that quote. But you found that this woman, Habibi Goncheh Azad, had been a dedicated regime-change activist for years.

#Wyatt Reed

That's right. So this all came about yesterday when the account Zay Squirrel and a couple of other anti-imperialist accounts noticed that this quote had been laundered by the BBC — this horrifying quote from a supposed Iranian inviting the United States to nuke their own country. All sorts of

questions were asked: Is this a real Iranian? Does this person actually exist? Or is this just a figment of another regime-change-crazed BBC reporter's imagination? Is this a real person?

And rather than addressing any of these questions, Habibi Azad chose to change the quote without giving any explanation or offering any reason for why they did it. They changed it to something much more anodyne, much less horrifying. No explanation. And then this author, Gautier Habibi Azad, started blocking people all over social media who were pointing out that this was egregious journalistic malpractice — that either she invented the source of the quote or, at the very least, she was inviting a nuclear strike on her own country and trying to manufacture consent for that.

#Max

And blocking — that's a violation of BBC policy, isn't it?

#Wyatt Reed

Oh, well, yeah. So they're only supposed to block social media users under extreme circumstances of personal harassment. It's not meant to—according to their policy guidelines—be a way of reacting to legitimate criticism, which this obviously is. It's been picked up all over the place. This article that I put together late last night and this morning has gone pretty much viral. A number of posts pointing this out have gone viral. The woman in question, Habibi Azad, has kind of locked down her social media. She hasn't posted anything since. Her LinkedIn has been deleted. So they're doing the same thing that Deepa Parent did last time around, which is kind of scurrying away, refusing to address this.

I imagine in a few days she'll start reposting tweets from colleagues, sort of implying that this is somehow sexist or that, you know, we're bad people for pointing this out. But the reality is that, yes, this woman, from the very beginning—immediately after she graduated from a publicly funded university, a four-year degree at Tehran University, a very prestigious university in Iran—immediately after she took tens of thousands of dollars' worth of tuition from Iranian taxpayers, she moved abroad and started working with a subsidiary of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, which is a CIA-founded propaganda outpost that was openly described as an effort to subvert communism, to subvert the Soviet Union, when it was founded in 1949 by Allen Dulles. That's where she went to get her internship in journalism after she graduated.

She got a one-year master's in journalism, and then she was off to the races, right? She was working for RFE, and she was working for an Iranian opposition network called Manjar TV. If you go on their page, on their YouTube channels, and look through the videos they have, it basically looks like a family gallery of Pahlavi family reunions—just a series of photos from different angles of Reza Pahlavi looking inspirational. That's about 50 percent of the content they produce. So, you know, she'

s simultaneously working for a CIA-founded U.S. government propaganda outlet and for an opposition, anti-Iran outlet. Then, when she became involved in the Women, Life, Freedom protests that quickly devolved into riots in Iran in 2022, that seemed to be her big break.

You know, the BBC apparently looked at this woman's materials—what she produced—and I guess they liked what they saw, because they decided to bring her onto their Verify team after her work documenting these protests, whitewashing them, and making them seem less violent than they were. The big break, as far as I could tell, came after this collaboration she did with Deepa Parent, in which they falsely claimed that the Basij, this sort of paramilitary force in Iran affiliated with the government, were shooting female protesters in the genitals because they were sexually frustrated men, and that this was how they decided to take that out on women in the streets. It's a ludicrous story. They did include some evidence, in terms of photos of people who'd been hit with buckshot.

It looked like there were certainly no people shot anywhere near the genital area. There are no photos that show anything like that. There are three photos showing that somebody in Iran during this time period was hit with buckshot, but they provide no evidence for any of the horrifying claims they led with in the headline. That never came up in the interview I described, where Deepa Parent and Gauthier Habibi Azad are sort of reminiscing about what it was like to put this article together. Instead, they describe how they basically just interfaced with this network of doctors—this shady network of doctors. And it's a group we've covered before in our previous exposé on Deepa Parent.

It's a monarchist-linked network of dozens of alleged doctors in Iran who've been behind some of the most incendiary claims, ridiculous quotes, and narratives that have come out of the Western press during this whole post-January Iran moment. This alleged network of doctors was behind, first of all, the absurd death toll—30,000 people supposedly killed by small arms in two days by Iranian police. That's where that figure came from. And now I'm realizing, as I write this report, that's also where the claim about Iranian security forces targeting women by shooting them in the genitals came from. So it's basically a disinformation factory—a conveyor belt that's been set up.

And people like Deepa Parent and Gauthier Habibi Azad are sort of like the mindless wage slaves just churning this stuff out at the end of the conveyor belt, dumping it into Western audiences' faces. And in that regard, it kind of makes sense why they would pick morons with no experience. They don't want legitimate journalists who will actually do the real due diligence it takes to work on a story like that—to go in and say, "OK, well, we have people who..." Because, Max, you and I have worked on a story like this before, where we'd heard some very horrible things, and we said, "OK, well, we have sourcing on this thing." We declined to print that article because we couldn't verify that one of our sources wasn't being ideologically motivated when saying it.

This is what journalism is meant to be. And for me, this is probably why these people have been elevated to these positions of authority—because the people calling the shots at the BBC understand that they don't know anything, that they're morons. They're young twenty-somethings who picked this field because it seemed like something to do, something fun. Deepa Parent, a fashion blogger—

she likes writing about dresses. And then a few years later, she's dropped into the midst of a new Cold War. It doesn't inspire much confidence, but I think that's kind of the point.

#Max

And Deepa Parent was subsidized by regime-change, CIA-adjacent billionaire Pierre Omidyar through this cutout at The Guardian, Humanity United. If you look at her articles, you can see in the upper left-hand corner that an NGO called Humanity United sponsors them—and that's Omidyar. It's run by his wife. So The Guardian itself has a lot to answer for, as does the BBC—violating its own stated hiring practices, violating its own editorial policy, and then violating established editorial guidelines by quietly editing out a random quote, manufacturing consent for nuking Iran, and softening it without acknowledging that at all. It's a huge scandal.

And it speaks to what the BBC has been doing in Iran through BBC Persia. It's a sophisticated regime-change propaganda mechanism, run under the auspices of the British Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office—basically their version of the State Department—which itself interfaces with MI6. You know, you have the kind of ratchet, backyard-wrestling, hardcore monarchist regime-change network, Iran International, which seems to be pretty much controlled by Israel at this point. But BBC Persia—that's the sophisticated wing. And the BBC's main English wing has hired this monarchist activist, as you've exposed, as its senior correspondent, who said, Wyatt, that she only interviews opposition activists.

#Wyatt Reed

Didn't she say that openly in an article she published on the BBC website? The second sentence was describing the reaction of Iranians to the downing of the U.S. jet. I'll just read the first paragraph for you: I've been asking some of my contacts inside Iran what they think about the U.S. jet downing. All those I talked to are against the current establishment. And look, you've seen the videos of these marches going on every night all across Iran—millions of people out in the streets, many of whom were against the current establishment, or at least they were until the U.S. began indiscriminately bombing their country.

But I'm trying to emphasize here—do you understand how hard it is to interact only with Iranians who hate their government? You have to go way out of your way. There are tens of millions of Iranians who do support their government. You have to be either extremely isolated socially, living in this bubble of extreme wealth, or you have to deliberately avoid and isolate yourself from the majority of Iranian people in order to only know people who are against the current establishment. It's a damning indictment. It tells you exactly who she's talking to, exactly what perspective you're getting. You're never going to hear from anyone who supports the government, because you can't—she refuses to interact with any of them. So that's not journalism; that's propaganda.

That's laundering regime-change talking points. That's laundering war propaganda. And it really gets to the entire purpose, as you've noted, of groups like BBC Persian, which are directly managed by the British Foreign Office and tied at the hip to the British intelligence services. So this is, I think, a perfect distillation of how the war propaganda industry operates and how it works to manufacture consent for what is otherwise an extremely unpopular war. It goes back to what you and Aaron were discussing earlier about the responsibility to protect. If you can convince Western audiences that Iranians hate their government so much that they're willing to endure a nuclear blast on their own homes, well, then why shouldn't we give them what they want?

#Max

Well, this is fantastic reporting, Wyatt. It really highlights the importance of independent media at a time when state media outlets—state propaganda outlets like the BBC, legacy pseudo-left outlets like The Guardian, and pretty much the whole of Western media—are exposing themselves. We can see their failure in how they're playing catch-up. If you go back to our interviews with Professor Mohammad Marandi, who gets maligned so much in Western media as he eviscerates his interviewers, he warned of all the consequences of launching a war on Iran—completely accurately—here and on so many other independent and counter-hegemonic channels. Everything he predicted has come true. But we weren't seeing this from those outlets.

And now you have the BBC manufacturing consent for a nuclear strike on Iran and violating all of its editorial policies. These networks are infested with monarchist opposition activists posing as reporters. And it's just as we exposed during the Gaza genocide—working under Jeffrey Gettleman, the disgraced New York Times reporter responsible for **Screams Without Words**, that discredited, debunked article advancing the Hamas mass-rape October 7th hoax on the cover of the New York Times. Who was working directly under him? It wasn't a pro-genocide Israeli with no reporting experience—Anat Schwartz. And then they quietly fired her. Will the BBC mete out any consequences to this reporter? I doubt it. But through your reporting and your analysis here, more and more people can actually see how the sausage is made.