



**FINANCIAL
TIMES**



ADJUDICATION

by

GREG CALLUS

EDITORIAL COMPLAINTS COMMISSIONER

Financial Times Limited

1. This is an Adjudication of a complaint made by Dr Colin Leci about an article in *Financial Times* written by its Defence and Security Editor, Sam Jones, which was first published online on 22 March 2017. The article remains available online at: <https://www.ft.com/content/194c8298-of28-11e7-a88c-50ba212dce4d> .

2. The central contention of the article is given in the first two paragraphs:

“The terror attack in Westminster on Wednesday fits an increasingly familiar pattern.

An attacker, using a car to mow down pedestrians and a knife to assault police, went on a deadly rampage at the heart of one of Europe’s great cities, seizing headlines and putting terrorism centre-screen once more.”

3. Noting that the attack came on the anniversary of suicide bombings in Brussels, the article continued by drawing a comparison between the methods used in the Westminster attack (vehicular murder, followed by a knife attack by the driver) with similar attacks in Berlin and Nice:

“The Westminster incident recalls those claimed by the group in [Berlin last December](#) and [Nice last July](#). In those circumstances, lone attackers, without active support networks to easily arm or train them, were manipulated and radicalised rapidly in communications with Isis to act. They used trucks to ram into crowded gatherings of civilians.

Such attacks may be the pattern for the future.”

4. The article also drew a contrast between these vehicle attacks (which are simpler to plan and execute without detection) as against those requiring higher degrees of sophistication, such as the marauding gunman attacks in Paris.

5. In an email to the Editor, Lionel Barber, dated 23 March 2017, the complainant said:

“I read the above report and note that your Defence and Security Editor has only made reference to similar attacks in Berlin, Paris, Brussels and Nice.

As I was watching the BBC Channel 1 News last night during their extensive coverage, their correspondent rightly referred to similar attacks being carried out in the last three years on a constant basis in Israel. However, nowhere in the article by Sam Jones was any mention made of these attacks being perpetrated against the CIVILIAN population in Israel, as if it was no concern or interest to your readers. It appears that the Financial Times chooses to ignore the barbaric murder of Jews on a similar basis, but attempts to draw its readers attention to questionable financial dealings by Jews/Israelis which it does NOT give to any other national/religious groupings to the same degree.

The UK, together with European countries, have been involved on a military level in numerous countries in the Middle East, some of these same ME countries also consider themselves at war with Israel.

Under the circumstances, I must question why your Defence and Security Editor considered it was not appropriate to give even a fleeting mention that the tactics by the terrorist(s) in London had been used against Jewish targets in Europe and Israel.”

6. The Editor responded within an hour saying:

“Thank you for your email

Sam Jones was referring to lone wolf terror attacks in Europe. There was no reason therefore to refer to lone wolf attacks in Israel, the US or any other county outside Europe.”

7. The complainant responded within 4 hours:

“I read with concern your reply which was far from accurate.

It appears that in terms of accuracy your Defence & Security Editor chose to ignore the following in events in Europe (just a partial list)

Toulouse 19 March 2012 <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-17426313> - <http://www.haaretz.com/world-news/europe/.premium-1.779171>

15 March 2015

Paris <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/france/11473334/Jewish-supermarket-in-Paris-attacked-during-siege-in-French-capital-reopens.html>

24 May 2014 Brussels <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2638282/Three-people-shot-dead-anti-Semitic-attack-Jewish-Museum-Brussels-man-backpack-opened-fire-fled.html>
<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-27558918>

Bulgaria Bugas Airport attack July

2012 <https://www.algemeiner.com/2016/07/07/bulgaria-putting-suspected-burgas-attack-accomplices-on-trial-in-absentia/>

Paris 25 Feb

2017 <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/europe/jewish-men-attacked-paris-hacksaw-fingers-anti-semitic-bondy-france-police-kippas-a7599516.html>

All these attacks were against JEWS and were typical of the lone wolf terror attacks. Your response was a lame excuse for your editors failure and as such is not acceptable and I hereby request that it be passed to your FT's editorial complaints commissioner for investigation."

8. The complainant being dissatisfied, the matter was appealed to me on 9 April 2017, with the complainant saying:

"As you will see from the correspondence below there has not been a proper response to my email of the 28 March 2017. It appears to have been ignored. Under the circumstances I hereby request a formal investigation regarding both the article and the editor' response. The article was NOT headlined or the text referred to "lone wolf" attacks in Europe as the editor claims."

9. The FT Editorial Code of Practice incorporates the IPSO Editors' Code. Clause 1 of the IPSO Code concerns 'Accuracy':

"1. Accuracy

1.1 The Press must take care not to publish inaccurate, misleading or distorted information, including pictures.

1.2 A significant inaccuracy, misleading statement or distortion once recognised must be corrected, promptly and with due prominence, and - where appropriate - an apology published. In cases involving the Regulator, prominence should be agreed with the Regulator in advance.

..."

10. I explained how Clause 1 is properly to be construed in my Adjudication dated 29 May 2015 at paragraphs [23] to [27]¹. In short, it concerns three different types of error: whether the article in question is 'inaccurate', 'misleading' or a 'distortion'.
- a. 'Inaccurate' is judged by comparing the published information to a provably true version of the information and seeing whether they differ;
 - b. 'Misleading' is where a statement is technically accurate, but would cause a reasonable reader to take away an erroneous belief *about the subject of the statement itself*;
 - c. 'Distortion' refers to an assembly of statements that are not inaccurate or misleading, but nonetheless taken together would give an impression that no reasonable and fair-minded reader in possession of all the facts would have.
11. There is no complaint in relation to this article that any of the facts or statements are themselves 'inaccurate' (in the technical sense used above). Nor is there a complaint that any of the sentences in the article are themselves 'misleading' (in the technical sense) in that no-one reading them would form a misapprehension as to what happened in the Nice and Berlin attacks, or those in Paris or Brussels.

¹ https://ft1105aboutft-live-14d4b9c72ce6450cb685-1b1cc38.aldryn-media.io/filer_public/60/9f/609fb246-1319-4841-8d2f-a7a9b2c5ee2f/2015-05-11_ferguson-adjudication-with-ps.pdf

12. Instead, this complaint concerns the omission (said to be willful on the part of the author) of additional examples of attacks in Israel to which the Westminster attacks could also be compared. If this is addressable at all under Clause 1, it falls to be considered as a 'distortion'.
13. 'Distortion' requires me to assess, not objective facts (as in complaints about 'inaccurate' and 'misleading' statements), but rather editorial judgment. Freedom of expression and the nature of my role requires me to give a healthy degree of latitude to the Editor and his staff in how they choose to tell stories (although that latitude will be more limited in news stories than in opinion pieces). Only if an article gives a view of the facts that would not be held by a reasonable reader in possession of all the facts will I find that it was a 'distortion'. It follows that an alleged 'distortion' by omission must concern the omission of facts so intrinsic to the story that they could not help but affect the way the reader would understand the story.
14. This complaint falls well short of that test. The Westminster attack was compared to similar vehicular terror attacks in Nice and Berlin. Certainly other examples could have been cited: see, for example, the list on Wikipedia under the title 'Terrorism': https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vehicle-ramming_attack#Terrorism . The article was published prior to similar attacks in Stockholm and at London Bridge.
15. It is true that there was an 8 January 2017 attack on a group of IDF soldiers in Jerusalem, killing 4 and injuring at least a dozen more, although those attacked were able to respond by firing their weapons: <https://www.ft.com/content/6339ac4c-d5bb-11e6-944b-e7eb37a6aa8e> . There were also 3 such attacks in Jerusalem in 2014 and 2 more in the same city in 2008. It would not have been wrong or unusual to mention these facts in the article, but that is not the question I must consider: the question is whether their omission constitutes a 'distortion' & so breaches the Code.
16. My very clear view is that it does not. There is a broad editorial discretion to include examples and ancillary facts in a news story, and this story comes nowhere close to constituting a breach of Clause 1 of the FT Editorial Code. The Nice and Berlin attacks were chosen as comparators in a 'trend' story, because they are European cities which had faced vehicle attacks on civilian populations in the 9 months previously. Whilst it would have been *permissible* to include an attack on IDF soldiers in Jerusalem, it cannot be said to be *necessary* to prevent a distortion.

17. The security climate in Israel is markedly different to that in most Western European cities, and it is the growing frequency of such vehicular attacks in French, German and British cities, and the vulnerability of unarmed civilian populations in such cities, which is the comparison the author chose to draw. There are always additional facts, additional comparisons, additional views which could have been included in an article, but were not. I don't think that the entire premise of the article could possibly be said to be distorted by failure to include examples from Israel.
18. The Editor's response focused on Europe, and so the complainant further complains about his response, illustrating other European attacks that could have been included. Yet four of these were gun or bomb attacks, so would not have been as appropriate comparators as Nice or Berlin (although they could have been used, as the Paris and Brussels attacks were, to draw a distinction between more and less sophisticated terror attacks). The fifth attack cited by the complainant in his second email, also in Paris, was clearly an anti-Semitic attack, but it is not clear that it was a premeditated act of terror and the vehicle itself was not used to kill.
19. It should be clear that much of the terrorism in Europe at the moment is focused on its Jewish population. Similarly, there has apparently been an uptick in anti-Semitic violence, both by Islamists and by other political extremists, which is also of concern. However, those facts cannot mean that no article can be written about a form of terror attack in Europe without making reference to anti-Jewish attacks or terrorism in Israel. Such a position would be manifestly unreasonable, and the FT Editorial Code could not possibly be construed to be so restrictive of editorial discretion.
20. For all these reasons, I must reject this complaint under Clause 1.

GREG CALLUS
Editorial Complaints Commission
Financial Times
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