

## Negative and Inaccurate Reporting in The UK Press

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We the British residents here in the kingdom seem to be continually faced with the problem of the press back in the UK creating a completely false scenario of life in Saudi Arabia. It is stated that bad news sells, which presumably is the motive of those writing the articles that are being published in the UK Press.

Frequently news events are sensationalized or blown out of all proportion, not withstanding the inaccuracies that seem to be used to dress up these articles. A case in question was a recent article published on Guardian Unlimited, presumably the Internet outlet of the UK Guardian, this media having a reputation not normally associated with sensationalism and the type of reporting attributed to what can be termed as the tabloid scandal sheets.

Without going into explicit detail, it was a report published in the Observer, penned by Paul Harris, Nick Pelham and Martin Bright. Although I have been in Saudi Arabia for almost two decades I have never met or come across these supposed learned gentlemen.

The report paints a picture of the western community living in fear of whatever. Social events are being quoted as now being virtually non-existent and references are made to a whiskey-driven illicit party scene, casual sex. Random attacks on westerners, harassment etc. There may be certain facts contained in the article, but at the same time there is also a considerable amount of sensationalism and what can only be described as poetic licence in the interpretation of what is the situation in reality.

As previously stated I have been in the kingdom for almost 20 years both as a bachelor and family man, all of this time in Jeddah. I cannot speak for Riyadh but Jeddah bears no resemblance to the picture painted by the reporters concerned.

I lead an active social life, we still camp out in the desert in fact the most recent trip was up to Harithy outside of Taif. We still go shopping to local Supermarkets, we still go scuba diving, and we are not cowering in fear in our compounds. We are not desperately removing stickers from the back of our vehicles and certainly not disguising ourselves as non-westerners.

Personally to date I have never experienced any undue antagonism from locals, far from it. I work for a very large Saudi group whose percentage of Western expatriates numbers less than 1% and have not experienced any antagonism or anti-western in particular anti-British sentiments at work. Outside of the office I am still treated with courtesy by most of whom I meet.

Granted there is an anti-American element and feelings are running high on this, for what they the Arab world sees as an unbalanced and unfair policy that the States has, in the Palestinian-Israeli problem. This though doesn't affect other Westerners and providing that the UK Government holds out a balanced policy and does not follow the US blindly in their policies and decisions, then it should not reflect on other Westerners living in Saudi.

Since September 11<sup>th</sup> obviously there has been a tightening of security, for fear or further outrages. But this is not confined only to Saudi Arabia, it is worldwide. The US is paranoid about its security and has no hesitation in taking what action it deems necessary regardless of world opinion. No civilised person can condone what happened on the 11 September, and it must not be allowed to happen again. But situations have to be faced up to in a logical manner and decisions taken accordingly.

Also can I ask when was the last time the above listed writers walked at night through a UK inner city area or visited these supposed no-go areas. Experienced the traumas and fear held by certain parts of Northern Ireland populace. When did they last visit a popular Disco in Britain where drugs and casual sex seem to be the norm? How safe are the streets of the UK now for or children

Admittedly we are not living in a perfect world, but there are numerous other places infinitely worse and more dangerous, look around parts of Africa, South America, the Far East, or the USA where shootings are taken as the norm. Even such places as Fort Bragg, the very large US military base where in the space of only a few weeks this year there have been 5 domestic homicides. Closer to home how many bombs have exploded in Spain this year, this being a popular destination for UK holiday makers.... So lets get things in Perspective!

So ask what is the cost of this type of sensationalistic type of reporting in the British Press, do these editors actually understand the ramifications of these articles that they allow to be published. Is it sold on the pretext of freedom of speech? Britain has historically enjoyed an excellent relationship with the Saudi Government, Saudi Arabia is one of the UK's largest trading partners, consequently 000's of jobs in the UK rely on a continuing good relationship. Why jeopardize this for the sake of selling a few newspapers. If we want to see change, then we should nurture it diplomatically and not through confrontation.

I would therefore respectfully suggest to those concerned that facts are checked and these supposed reporters speak to a complete cross section of the community, not just those involved in the grievances