

Ref: An Official Memo

by Alexis Lykiard

If executions are discussed, BBC staff in Britain and the Middle East must resort to approved euphemism. You may laugh, but journalists need note that there are “lots of other words for death” – and put due trust henceforth in their Assignments Editor. He quotes *assassination* as one term that they should use with “attribution”, “sparingly” – i.e. only if said nastiness happens to be the real “high-profile political” stuff ...

Will this lord of language, Malcolm Downing, perfect wordman who calls the verbal shots, next want to vet the true thrust of the news? His memorandum reveals – vis-à-vis house style – someone not raving but frowning. Remember *termination with extreme prejudice*? The CIA too had words sussed, their terminology an absolute scream, turned to obscure ends, accurate enough.

But when it came to Israeli hit-squads whose every executive zealously sends off to sudden death’s dominion yet another Palestinian, just call the job *active defence* or *targeted attacks*. Each team of specialists takes out alike suspected foes, unwary innocents.

The perpetrators of this sort of thing (killing and culling or a *skilfully orchestrated operational strike*) might be appropriately interviewed. As per directives from the BBC.

And by reporters ever more subdued,
glib-tongued enough to nod, if not collude:
virtuous murderers and virtual gods.

[BBC STAFF ARE TOLD NOT TO CALL ISRAELI KILLINGS
'ASSASSINATION' – Robert Fisk, Independent, 4 August 2001]

From *Unholy Empires* by Alexis Lykiard

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