

Palestine advocates decry MSNBC's cancellation of Mehdi Hasan news show



New York, December 1 (RHC)-- MSNBC has cancelled Mehdi Hasan's weekend TV programme, sparking anger from many Palestinian rights supporters who consider the progressive host a rare critic of Israeli policies on United States cable news.

The decision, first reported by the news website Semafor on Thursday, came amid what advocates describe as a crackdown on criticism against Israel in the media, at universities and in the arts. The country is currently conducting a military offensive in Gaza that has killed more than 15,000 Palestinians, prompting human rights concerns.

U.S. congressman Ro Khanna said cancelling the show during the conflict is “bad optics” for the network. “As a strong supporter of free speech, MSNBC owes the public an explanation for this decision,” Khanna wrote in a social media post. “Why would they choose to do this now?”

Semafor reported that Hasan’s show will be replaced by extending news anchor Ayman Mohyeldin’s self-titled programme to two hours. Mohyeldin, who is Arab American, is also a critic of the Israeli government. Hasan will be retained by the network as an on-screen analyst, U.S. media outlets indicated.

In a note to staff quoted by the publication The Hill, MSNBC President Rashida Jones said the reshuffle aims to “better position” the network as it heads into the 2024 US elections. MSNBC did not immediately respond to Al Jazeera’s request for comment.

Palestinian American human rights lawyer Noura Erakat called the programme “more needed than ever.” “He should be amplified, not shut down,” Erakat wrote in a post on X, formerly Twitter.

A persistent interviewer known for confronting guests about false claims and past statements, Hasan previously worked as an Al Jazeera host. He also was a senior columnist at The Intercept, a news website.

This month on his programme, he deployed his trademark interviewing style to question Israeli government adviser Mark Regev about false claims promoted by Israeli officials. In one example, Hasan pointed to an instance in which a calendar in a Gaza hospital was presented as a list of Hamas operatives.

“We shouldn’t blindly believe anything Hamas says. But why should we believe what your government says, either?” Hasan asked. After a lengthy back-and-forth, Regev acknowledged that Israel may have committed “mistakes” in putting out such information.

Author Sarah Kendzior pointed to that segment as she questioned MSNBC’s decision to nix Hasan’s show. “They canceled Mehdi Hasan for interviews like this — evidence-based and willing to challenge power — and it is doubtful he will be the only journalist pushed out for daring to practice journalism,” she wrote in a social media post.

On Thursday, U.S. journalist David Sirota noted that Hasan has reported critically on both Republicans and Democrats. “Canceling him is another step in the deliberate homogenization of news content into pure red-vs-blue infotainment,” Sirota wrote on X.

There is a history of U.S. journalists being penalised for their criticism of Israel. In 2018, CNN sacked Marc Lamont Hill as a contributor over a speech at a United Nations meeting in support of Palestinian rights. Hill now hosts the programme UpFront on Al Jazeera.

In 2021, The Associated Press news agency also fired a young reporter over social media posts in support of Palestinian rights.



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