

KINSELLA: 9/11 wasn't a 'terrorist attack,' according to the CBC

The edict is in a memo from the Senior Director of Journalistic Standards and Public Trust at CBC News

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Hijacked United Airlines Flight 175 from Boston crashes into the south tower of the World Trade Center and explodes at 9:03 a.m. on Sept. 11, 2001 in New York City. PHOTO BY SPENCER PLATT /GETTY IMAGES

Terrorism.

The definition of that word is widely known and widely accepted.

The Encyclopedia Britannica people define it this way: “Terrorism is the calculated use of violence, or the threat of violence, to create general fear in a population and coerce a government or society to achieve political, religious, or ideological goals.”

By any reasonable and objective standard, that is what happened nearly 25 years ago, on September 11, 2001: Terrorism.

On that terrible day, four airplanes were hijacked by 19 terrorists. They piloted two of those planes into New York City’s World Trade Center, destroying both buildings and murdering 2,753 innocent people. Two dozen of them were Canadians.

A third plane hit the Pentagon in Washington, D.C. There, 125 people were slain — military and civilian. The 59 people on board the hijacked American Airlines flight were also killed.

A fourth plane, a United Airlines flight, slammed into a field in Pennsylvania after the hostages attempted to seize control from the four terrorists. Thirty-seven passengers and seven crew members were murdered.

Around the world, pretty much everyone accepts what the word terrorism means. The government of Saudi Arabia — where the majority of the 9/11 killers came from — officially call what happened on that day “terrorism.” No less than Osama bin Laden, who conceived of 9/11, used the word “terrorism” too — although, in his case, he usually applied it to those of us in the West, not him.

So, the word is understood to mean what it means: The use of violence to achieve some goal, political or religious or ideological. That is what 9/11 obviously, unarguably was: Terrorism by terrorists.

Memo sent to CBC News staff

Except, not at the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).

This week, I received a memo — presumably confidential — addressed to CBC News staff. It is authored by one Basem Boshra, who is the “Senior Director of Journalistic Standards and Public Trust at CBC News.” In Boshra’s memo, reporters and editors are told this:

“Do not refer to the Sept. 11 attacks as terrorist attacks.”

Boshra states that all in bold letters, italicized, as if to emphasize the point. To make clear it is a directive, not a suggestion.

It goes on. “The hijackings led to passenger jet crashes,” it reads, again in italics. There is no recognition in the CBC memo — none — that “hijacking that leads to passenger jet crashes” is not a protest, or a vote. It is a terrorist act, full stop.

I have never been among those who hate CBC. I still occasionally listen to CBC radio, and I admire some of the veteran journalists there — I send them notes, telling them so. I thought the Conservative Party's pledge to eliminate the CBC was stupid. In remote parts of a vast country, we need a broadcaster that fairly and accurately represents the news.

Except this direction from CBC management is not that. It is not fair and it is in no way accurate. It is rewriting the historical record. It is manipulating facts to fit an ideological perspective. It is cruel and despicable. It is Orwellian.

I contacted a couple of CBC's designated spokespeople to ask them why CBC has decided that terrorism is no longer terrorism. To ask them why "hijackings [that] led to passenger jet crashes" is not considered terrorism. I thought about asking them, too, if "murder" is considered involuntary cessation of biological functions at CBC. But I didn't, because that might offend their sensibilities.

What CBC said in response

Kerry Kelly, the poor woman assigned to defend the insensible, said she'd get back to me. She did. Here is what she said: "CBC's longstanding language guidance regarding the terms 'terrorist' and 'terrorism' is a preference for the use of these words with attribution, a practice shared by many of the world's top journalistic organizations. Our general manager and editor in chief has written publicly in the past on the subject."

On this, Kerry Kelly is actually right. In my new book *The Hidden Hand: The Information War and the Rise of Antisemitic Propaganda*, I describe how too many news organizations do not use the word terrorism to describe terrorism. Other news organizations have called terrorists "activists" (BBC), "attackers" (CNN), "fighters" (New York Times), and "militants" (Time).

As we all like to remind our children, however, just because someone else does it doesn't mean it is right. And — in particular — a lie is always a lie. A falsehood is a falsehood. We tell our kids that, too.

The Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, which all of us gave \$1.57 billion in 2025-26, operates under different rules. It tells us lies about history and reality.

And the historical reality is that thousands of innocents were murdered 25 years ago, by terrorists.

We all know that, we all call it that. At CBC, they don't care.

They do and say whatever the hell they want to.