

To the Editor of Lancet,

This is to express our collective outrage at your decision to publish what amounts to a compendium of defamatory lies and distortions about the present crisis in Israel and Gaza. The "Open Letter for the people of Gaza" is nothing but an unsubstantiated diatribe against the State of Israel which shamelessly belies objective facts as to the sequence of events and thus cause of the humanitarian crisis you feel compelled to highlight. To allow the forum of a presumed prestigious peer-reviewed medical and scientific journal to be a disseminator of such a skewed version of reality eviscerates what one would think is the Journal's most valued attributes- its integrity and credibility. You appear to have learned nothing from your publication of a like-minded article in your online journal in 2009 that claimed that Israel used silent bombs to vaporize, without detection, all living things and objects.(See Abu Sittah G, Ang S, The Wounds of Gaza, Lancet Global Health Network, www.thelancetglobalnetwork.com/archives/608)).

In your reply to an email from Bernard Gonik, MD challenging this decision, dated 7-30-14, you aver two bases: 1) the right of concerned physicians to freely express their views on health and humanitarian issues, even if politically divisive; and 2) the actual humanitarian suffering in Gaza, while placing primary responsibility for that circumstance on Israel. . Lancet holds itself out as" an international general medical journal that will consider any original contribution that advances or illuminates medical science or practice, or that educates or entertains.." It is stringently edited and peer-reviewed to ensure the scientific merit and clinical relevance of its diverse content..." (See Lancet website) Consequently, there purports to be a rigorous process to which ethical standards for editors, authors and reviewers are subject. The language regarding stringent editing and peer-review appears after the presumed rubric of "educates or entertains," and thus applicable to even non – scientific articles. It is highly dubious that the "Open Letter.." underwent any such process. Perhaps your procedures need tightening up to preclude the editorial malpractice demonstrated in this case.

As to the "rights' issue, you must agree that no rights are unfettered. The logic of this faux justification would allow any physician to have any article published without regard to its content. Even you would concede the oddity of the Lancet being used as a forum for such a blatantly politically charged issue. So one has to be skeptical of the motives. Assuming, you saw fit to give voice to the humanitarian crisis in war zones, per se, why not highlight the barbarism being played out a few kilometers from Gaza in Syria. Over 150,000, mostly non-combatants have been slaughtered with not only indiscriminate regard for civilians, but a government's intentional use of conventional weapons being deliberately directed at its own civilians. Could it be that when Arabs murder Arabs by an order of magnitude 150 times greater than what is happening in Gaza, such is not worthy of your humanitarian barometer? Is it only when Jews attempt to defend themselves against a rocket onslaught across the breadth of its body politic with unavoidable loss of innocent lives contiguous to those firing those rockets triggers your humanitarian

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impulse. And of course there is the “disproportionality “ mantra- 1,000 plus Palestinians dead; 58 Israelis – how unfair! It’s as if the world thinks it is unsportsmanlike that Israel has the Iron Dome without which the terrorist rocket onslaught would result in hundreds to thousands of Israeli deaths as intended! It appears the only way for Israel to win the PR war is for more Jews to die!! Well, been there; done that- 6,000,000 was enough!

As to the human tragedy in Gaza none would fail to feel compassion for the loss of innocent life, as in all war zones around the world. But you clearly published the article because you sympathize with the premise that the responsibility lay at the feet of Israel. You erroneously characterize Israel’s sole motive for entering Gaza as eliminating the tunnels, which you assert can not justify the loss of life beyond that objective. In doing so, you mimic the lie of the authors by omitting the sequence of events. This crisis started with the murder of three Israeli teenagers. In response to the search for the murderers, Hamas rained hundreds of rockets at Israel’s population centers with the deliberate intent of killing civilians- a clear war crime. Israel attempted to stop these attacks at first by an air campaign. After a couple of weeks, Egypt supported by the Arab League and the Palestinian Authority proposed a cease fire. Israel accepted. Hamas rejected! This is all PRIOR to Israel’s entry into Gaza which was triggered by a Hamas operation emanating from tunnels into Israel intended to kill civilians. Thus all casualties ensuing must be laid at the door of Hamas not Israel. Hamas has rejected every repeated cease fire proposal since. At the time of this writing over 3,000 rockets have been fired at Israel! And terrorist attacks from the tunnels continue. Israel has no interest in Gaza. There is NO occupation of Gaza which Israel evacuated 9 years ago! The embargo, which even the UN gave its legal imprimatur, was necessitated after Hamas killed Fatah members, took control and began smuggling rockets into Gaza to fire at Israel. Israel’s sole interest is to be left alone. Israeli military action in Gaza is purely defensive to deter or prevent Hamas from killing its citizens. This is purely and simply textbook self-defense. A recognized terrorist organization unabashedly is attacking a democracy to destroy it. Israel’s apparent crime is not going along.

Just what would you have Israel do? You say it has the right to defend itself but apparently it must wave some magic wand and avoid killing innocent lives in doing so. Such is impossible, so to advance that proposition really argues that Israel should not defend itself. Unlike any country in the region when fighting its own citizens, Israel has employed unprecedented measures to limit the so called “collateral damage,” – leaflets warning of attacks, cell phone texts and calls, dud ordnance. In testimony before the UN Human Rights Council, regarding the last war with Hamas, Colonel Richard Kemp CBE, Commander of British Forces in Afghanistan testified that the IDF has done more to safeguard the rights of civilians in combat zones than any other army in history of warfare, including the US and Britain. He further documented Hamas’ use of civilians to assist and shield their operations.

The mindset which you reveal in your decision and platitudinous justification for it, is at the heart of this recurring cycle. It feeds the dynamic which Hamas engenders and relies upon to stay in power, i.e.

defining success by a disproportionate body count and thus have world opinion pressure Israel to cease defending itself by agreeing to cease fires that insures the status quo ante. Hamas then uses the interim to restock, buy more rockets with increasing range and lethality and build more tunnels to attack Israel.

Hamas is a terrorist organization .Its raison d'être by its own charter and unapologetic statements is not only the destruction of Israel but the killing of all Jews. It uses the monies given to them naively and inexplicably by the UN and Europe and even the US ostensibly for humanitarian relief, and uses it to buy more rockets and concrete. It doesn't build schools, homes, hospitals- it builds terror tunnels. This is the organization which you claim you do not support but enable its narrative to degrade the pages of your Journal.

If your intent is to bring attention to the plight of the Gazans from a humanitarian standpoint, to the exclusion of 80% of the Israeli population who have to run to bomb shelters within 90 seconds on a daily basis, providing a mouthpiece for those who support a terrorist organization which is blatantly immune to the cries of its own people's loss of life, is a most dubious way to do so. The carnage unfolding is solely due to the unprompted incessant rocket attacks into the heart of Israel and the now uncovered labyrinth of terror tunnels from which Hamas launches attacks to murder Israelis. When Hamas stops the rockets and the tunnels are eliminated, this war will end.

The fact that you are blind, ignorant or naïve to all of the above reveals either a bias or incompetence. You have allowed this once prestigious journal to be hijacked by terrorist sympathizers. You have done great damage to the integrity of Lancet. It is one of those gross errors of judgment which should prompt a resignation.