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Ombudsman, The Lancet
360 Park Avenue South
New York, New York
USA 10010 - 1710

August 14, 2014

Dear Ombudsman,

As co-chairs of the physician subgroup of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Center for Holocaust Studies (FSWC), we are compelled to respond to the article entitled "An Open Letter for the People of Gaza," by Manduca et al. published in the Lancet on July 23, 2014. FSWC is a non-profit human rights organization committed to countering racism and anti-Semitism, and to promoting the principles of tolerance, social justice and democratic values through advocacy and education.

Like many others in the scientific and medical community, we were dismayed by the Lancet's choice to publish a partisan political advocacy piece under the auspices of a peer reviewed scientific journal. The Lancet's policy on declarations, transparency and best practices in scholarly publishing states that a conflict of interest exists when professional judgment concerning a primary interest may be influenced by secondary interests such as financial gain or intellectual beliefs. We join many others in noting that the article's authors failed to disclose conflicts in the form of affiliations with and having received funding from known pro-Palestinian non-governmental organizations. Accordingly, we call on the Lancet to retract the subject article and for you to investigate the process that led to its publication.

We reject the premise that Israel is an aggressor state that has somehow manufactured a pretext for an unprovoked assault on the Gazan civilian population. What motive would the Israelis have had to engage in a brutal war, costly in both lives and treasure, but to eliminate an external threat from a terrorist organization whose openly stated objective is the destruction of Israel and the murder of its Jewish inhabitants? Israel had to have known that its campaign would draw widespread international criticism so to deny its purpose in eradicating terrorism is disingenuous in the extreme.

In contrast to the authors' breathless account of a "ruthless assault of unlimited duration, extent and intensity", ultimately it was the Israelis who unilaterally withdrew from Gaza after their military objectives had been met. The conflict has been both initiated and perpetuated by Hamas as Israel only engaged in Gaza after relentless provocation in the form of indiscriminant rocketing of civilian population centers. Hamas could end the Israeli incursion at any time merely by terminating its rocket fire. It is also worth noting that during the course of the conflict, Hamas has either rejected or violated multiple ceasefire arrangements.



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We are confused by the authors' assertion that Gazans have been denied and prohibited from receiving external help and supplies to alleviate their dire circumstances. The Israeli quarantine of Gaza is and always has been military in nature and the inflow of food, medicine and humanitarian goods has not been impeded. Even during the course of operation Protective Edge, the Israeli Defense Force has been as merciful as it has been strong. From July 8 to August 5 the IDF transferred 1,856 trucks carrying 40,550 tons of supplies into Gaza including 37,178 tons of food, 1,694 tons humanitarian goods and 1,029 tons of medicine and medical supplies. All of this was notwithstanding unrelenting rocket attacks by Hamas. The IDF even established a field hospital to treat wounded Palestinian civilians - a hospital, it is worth noting, that Hamas authorities have discouraged civilians from availing themselves of and have targeted with rocket fire.

Palestinians have received more aid per capita than any other population on Earth but this has been systematically stolen and misappropriated by corrupt leadership for the purposes of personal enrichment and financing of terrorism.

The authors of the Lancet article bemoan the harm done to Gaza's agriculture sector and its capacity to export produce. Apparently lost on them is the irony that when Israel withdrew from Gaza in 2005, they abandoned a valuable horticultural industry complete with a network of greenhouses that supported a valuable export business. The Palestinians literally razed and burnt these assets to the ground and subsequently elected to power a terrorist organization that has diverted vast amounts of foreign aid not to building the infrastructure and institutions that are required for a viable state, but rather to the construction of a warren of tunnels and bunkers in which to hide vast storehouses of offensive missiles. Similarly, the authors note that factories and infrastructure destroyed during the Hamas' last engagement with the IDF in 2008-09 have not been rebuilt, thereby compounding the problems with unemployment and destitution. Perhaps things might have been different had thousands of tons of concrete and building materials been utilized for the reconstitution of civilian infrastructure rather than for terrorist projects. As but one example, a 1.7 km terror tunnel discovered in February 2013 was estimated by Israeli engineers to have required 500 tons of concrete to construct, or enough to build a three-story hospital according to a senior Israeli Health Official. The people of Gaza are prisoners of their own leadership, not of Israel and the deplorable conditions are a direct result of their own terrible governance.

The notion that reconciliation between Palestinian factions has been somehow prevented by Israel is absurd. Israel merely rejects dealing with those who openly espouse eliminationist anti-Semitic ideology. We might also ask where the Lancet authors' humanitarian concern was when after their takeover of Gaza in 2007, Hamas was busy expelling, kneecapping and otherwise brutally torturing and murdering Gazan members of their erstwhile Palestinian Authority rival?

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The article laments disproportionate use of force and asymmetric casualty figures. Absent from the analysis however, is any discussion of what Hamas itself acknowledges are crimes against humanity in the form of directing missiles at civilian targets and concealing weapons in hospitals, schools, and civilian areas thereby exploiting non-combatants, women and children as human shields.

Israel goes to unprecedented lengths to avoid casualties including leafleting, telephone and texts warnings of attacks, and the use of dummy bombs. Conversely, Hamas encourages and coerces civilians to remain in their homes in the apparent hope of maximizing carnage and then declaring moral victory as the credulous media tally the dead and rush to accuse Israel of employing disproportionate force. The disparity of deaths in this conflict is a function of Palestinian's deliberate use of human shields, and the fact that Israel has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in missile defense and bomb shelters for its civilian population. It has been said that Israel uses its weapons to protect its civilian population, but that the Palestinians use their civilian population to protect its weapons.

The authors characterize Israeli use of precision weaponry as indiscriminant. This is an inversion of reality as Hamas routinely lobs unguided missiles and shells toward civilian population centres without even bothering with the pretext of targeting military objectives. Hamas has stated that they *only* wish to kill Jews living in Israel, but not its Muslim inhabitants whom, we might add, happen to enjoy more political freedom than those living anywhere else in the Arab world. Hamas has even targeted civilian aircraft at Ben-Gurion International Airport.

We were dismayed at the Lancet authors' insinuation that Israel has used chemical weapons against Palestinian civilians. This is completely unsubstantiated and constitutes the absolute height of calumny by authors who have clearly abandoned even the pretense of objectivity. If the use of poison gas is their concern, perhaps they have confused Israel with Iran, Iraq or most recently Syria, where the regime has slaughtered an estimated 200,000 people, including thousands of Palestinians who have been starved and murdered. Or is it only the imagined use of such weapons by Jews rather than their actual use by others that attracts the authors' condemnation?

As physicians and human beings, we too are appalled by the human agony and loss of life in Gaza. Unlike the authors of the Lancet article however, we are moved by the suffering on both sides of the clash. We share the authors' concern for the effects of conflict and war on a young generation of Palestinians, but we also fear that this same generation has been reared on a steady stream of murderous and dehumanizing anti-Semitic propaganda. This is to say nothing of recent evidence that up to 160 children were killed in the construction of Hamas terror tunnels.

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The authors conclude based on the fact that only 5% of their Israeli colleagues signed an appeal to their government to halt military operations in Gaza, that the preponderance of Israeli medical academics are complicit in what in their view is a massacre. We note that this 5% is higher than the 0% of Palestinian academics that we are aware of who have registered concerns with thousands of rockets being rained down on Jewish civilians or with their own public health resources being diverted to terrorist activity. Or perhaps there are Palestinian academics who would speak out but fear meeting the same fate as the 20 Palestinian civilians who were shot for protesting against *Hamas* for the destruction that they had brought upon their neighborhood in Sejaiya or the dozens more Gazans who, according to Palestinian news sources, have been executed as collaborators by *Hamas* after having been accused of collaborating with Israel.

As physicians and representatives of the Friends of Simon Wiesenthal Centre, an organization dedicated to human rights and social justice, we will yield to nobody in our concern for the human suffering currently unfolding in Gaza. The Lancet article however, is so far exiled from the known limits of scientific method, so devoid of clinical objectivity, and so divorced from rational and fair critique that it could scarcely be more biased had it been authored by *Hamas* itself. By allowing itself to be co-opted as a platform for professional anti-Israel political advocacy thinly veiled as public health literature, the Lancet undermines its own scientific credibility and causes harm to true victims of political oppression everywhere.



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