

A response to the "Open letter for the people in Gaza"

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The Lancet

To the Editor,

The recent "Open letter for the people in Gaza"¹ is a political manifesto without any medical connection that has found its way to a prestigious academic medical journal. It is a reminiscent of another article printed in a respected scientific publication. In the April 30, 1938 just half a year before *Kristallnacht*, Prof. J. Stark of Berlin, described in *Nature* his efforts to curb the crippling and damaging effect of the dogmatic spirit on physical research in Germany, and stated that "in this conflict I have also directed my efforts against the damaging influence of Jews in German science, because I regard them as the chief exponents and propagandists of the dogmatic spirit."²

It appears that the practice of publicizing a political, unsubstantiated article in an ostensibly respected scientific publication is not new, although that makes it no less odious. It is shocking, if not surprising, to us that the Lancet would allow the publication of such a clearly political, as well as biased, article. This is the same journal that in 2009 published in one of its online journals an article claiming that Israel uses silent bombs that vaporize all objects and living things without a trace.³ This time the Lancet has gone one step further and has even solicited signatures for the article. Any pretense of being an objective, credible professional publication has clearly been dispensed with. Still, readers of the Journal deserve to receive information on the issue the authors addressed.

The only credible point in the letter was the fact that the people in Gaza are suffering. Despite the authors' attempt to paint Hamas as a peace loving organization, they are a vicious terrorist organization committed to the destruction of Israel and with no regard for the lives of their own citizens. The Hamas government has put billions of dollars into constructing tunnels intended for terrorist attacks and purchasing rockets, instead of building infrastructure for the prosperity of Gazan citizens.

The Israeli military entered Gaza this month only after it was left no choice and could no longer exercise restraint, faced as it was with hundreds of missiles shot into its territory. It is well known that Hamas shoots from homes, schools and hospitals,⁴ encourages its population not to evacuate in order to better serve their propaganda interests and uses women and children as human shields.⁵

UNWRA itself has condemned the storage of rockets in its schools on two separate occasions.⁶ Similarly, the World Medical Association has "unreservedly condemned those who are abusing health facilities by using them as shelters for soldiers or weapons."⁷

We agree that the military action undoubtedly "terrifies those who are not directly hit and wounds the soul, mind and resilience of the younger generation." This is certainly the case also regarding the children of the six million Israelis (including Arabs), out of a population of eight million, who live in terror of the rocket attacks that, along with the recent kidnapping

and murder of three Jewish teenagers, triggered the military action. The younger generation is also being harmed by Hamas itself, who not only indoctrinates them with hatred but uses them as child labor in building the tunnels, resulting in the deaths of 1600 children.⁸

The assertion that Israel has no regard for the lives of Gazan citizens is utterly false. Israel continues to supply electricity and water to Gaza even during this unfortunate conflict. Since the beginning of the current conflict, 1248 trucks entered Gaza from Israel, 4.44 million liters of diesel were delivered for the power station, and 48 infrastructural repairs were carried out. On July 27, 170 trucks were scheduled to enter but the crossing was forced to close at 14:00 because of Hamas activity in the area. The 94 trucks that entered delivered, among other things, 1165 tons of food, 600 tons of agricultural supplies, and 6 tons of medical supplies.⁹ We would also note that when Israel agreed to a humanitarian cease fire in order to allow supplies through and let the citizens buy food and medicine, it was Hamas that within the hour had violated this cease fire and was firing rockets into Israel.

As physicians, and as human beings, we are devastated at the loss of any life, Palestinian or Israeli. Israeli hospitals are filled with Arab and Jewish doctors working together to treat both Israeli and Palestinian patients. Although the proliferation of missiles into Israel endangers both patients and doctors, and requires frequent trips to shelters, care continues and surgeries and critical care continue even during the sirens. Since Israel withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005, there have been over 12,500 missiles shot from Gaza into Israel, including over 2500 in the current conflict. Obviously, many of these missiles, had they not been intercepted by the Iron Dome, could have easily struck hospitals, especially those in the South, killing countless patients.

At any time, hundreds of Palestinians are being treated in Israeli hospitals, including the granddaughter of Hamas leader Haniyeh himself! In 2013, for example, 225410 medical permits were issued to Palestinians in the West Bank and 13734 to Gazans. Despite frequent claims that Israel turns away ambulances carrying people in desperate need of medical services, in 2013, out of the 1,189 ambulances which requested permits, 1,188 received them, and only one was refused.¹⁰ During the current conflict, Israel has airlifted wounded Gazans to its hospitals. Some of these patients are the terrorists themselves, including a 16 year old who was among those involved in the infiltration attempt to Israel in which seven Israeli soldiers were killed. In addition, over 1200 Syrians injured during the bloodshed in Syria have and continue to be treated in Israeli hospitals, returning to Syria once they are healed. In order to help those Gazans that cannot reach Israel for care, Israel set up a field hospital on the border with a full range of services, including an emergency room, ambulatory services and a delivery room, but the Hamas continues to prevent Gazans from making their way there. They have also refused the offers of blood, humanitarian aid and medical care that Israel has offered. The Israeli army also runs an ATLS course for Palestinian physicians in the West Bank in order to help them better serve the local population.

Of course when one chooses to advance one's own political agenda and has a respected "scientific" publication only too eager to help, facts are of little concern. As physicians and as

human beings, we hope for a peaceful end to this conflict as well as a resumption of the non-biased, academic discourse to which we are accustomed.

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