

THE LANCET STRIKES AGAIN

We have all been witness to the publication of the anti-Israel correspondence in *The Lancet* during Operation Protective Edge [1], to which tens of physicians, some of whom openly identified with organizations hostile to Israel, were signatory. The anti-Israel policy of the *Lancet* has been expressed in numerous comments, articles and letters that have appeared from time to time in the *Lancet* [2-4].

On the other hand, doctors at Rambam Medical Center in Haifa acted differently, inviting the editor of the *Lancet* to Israel. Some of those involved or who had responded to the recent correspondence declined to meet with the *Lancet* editor. Others decided to engage him in discourse. Our Sages state that “there is no greater merit than turning your enemy into your friend.” The editor did not become our admirer, but the article he subsequently printed in *the Lancet* [5] represented a different approach, and the editor further committed to publicizing a series of articles that would depict medicine in Israel, clearly a positive initiative.

It would seem that the true test will be whether the political, anti-Israeli articles we have seen will continue in the future, or whether medicine in the *Lancet* will be politics free or at least display a greater balance among the writers. We shall have to wait and see over the coming years if the current editor’s anti-Israel policy will continue or whether there will be a shift to a more objective stance.

As these lines were being written, *the Lancet* Ombudsman printed his report on the above-mentioned letter. This report is attached and, in our view, is no less egregious than the original article [6].

First, we are somewhat surprised by the decision of the Ombudsman to publicly print her response, a measure not usually taken, and wonder whether the intention is more to gain political capital than to report on a specific investigation.

The ombudsman also wholly ignored the affiliation of the authors to radical racist organizations, a fact that certainly taints the entire correspondence. The ombudsman’s report, rather than being an objective assessment of the original article and the arguments raised, is itself tendentious. Phrases such as “all can agree that the recent conflict in Gaza involved a shocking toll of death and injury” and a comparison of the death toll between Israelis and Palestinians is not only unnecessary in the given context, it is biased and misleading. The ombudsman’s statement that the use of the phrase “massacre in Gaza” can be understood is adopting a position inconsistent with an objective examination of the complaint.

Likewise the statement that “Armed conflict in a densely populated area is distressing and unnecessary and notably, attacks on hospitals and health workers are unacceptable in any situation” represents the adoption of a political stance by the ombudsman herself. Besides once again using dogmatic terms, the ombudsman fails to note that the reason for armed conflict in a densely populated area was the deliberate situation of terrorists in urban areas, and any attacks on hospitals were a direct result of those same hospitals being used as a launching pad for rockets or a hideout for Hamas operatives. In other words, the ombudsman, rather than examining the claims against the original piece, repeats the very same one-sided claims.

Even where the authors ostensibly corrected their initial omissions by providing

references, the references are themselves questionable. As one example, the claim for the use of gas is supported by a press release from the Gaza Ministry of Health – a source that is neither substantiated nor objective.

Regarding the visit of the Editor to Israel and his alleged change of heart, time will tell the extent of such a radical change in perspective. Only the future will show if the visit represented an honest attempt to view the situation through a prism of objectivity or an attempt to cleanse himself from past “sins” against Israel in order to provide him with fertile and accepting ground to continue such a campaign.

The ombudsman sums up his report by announcing that she “considers the matter closed.” We certainly do not.

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5. Horton R. People to people. *Lancet* 2014; 384: 1332 offline.
6. Wedzicha W. Ombudsman’s report on the letter by Manduca and others. *Lancet* 2014; 384: 1486-7.

“To sin by silence when they should protest makes cowards of men”

Ella Wheeler Wilcox (1850-1919), American author and poet. Her most enduring work was “Solitude,” which contains the lines, “Laugh, and the world laughs with you; weep, and you weep alone”

“If only I may grow: firmer, simpler, -- quieter, warmer”

Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961), Swedish diplomat, economist and author. The second Secretary-General of the United Nations, he served from April 1953 until his death in a plane crash in 1961. Hammarskjöld is one of just three people to be awarded a posthumous Nobel Prize. His death occurred en route to cease-fire negotiations; American President John F. Kennedy called him “the greatest statesman of our century”