

August 17, 2014

The Lancet: A History of Exploiting Medicine for Political Warfare Against Israel

Background

- *The Lancet* is a UK-based medical journal. Richard Horton has served as Editor in Chief since 1995.
- [NGO Monitor's research](#) demonstrates that, under Horton's editorship, *The Lancet* has become a platform for intense political propaganda, particularly targeting Israel. It frequently exploits its academic authority and prestige, providing a scientific veneer to politicized NGO claims, stripping away the context. Often, these articles contain egregious factual errors and legal distortions unconnected to medicine and science.
- Although the editor of a peer-reviewed journal, [Horton has written with disdain](#) on the "system of peer review" calling it "biased, unjust, unaccountable, incomplete, easily fixed, often insulting, usually ignorant, occasionally foolish, and frequently wrong."

Hamas-Israel Gaza War 2014

- On July 23, 2014, *The Lancet* published [An Open Letter for the People of Gaza](#), which accused Israel of "war crimes" while ignoring Hamas's crimes of rocket fire and terror tunnels from Gaza into Israeli territory. The letter, written by Drs. [Mads Gilbert](#) (see below), Paola Manduca, and Swee Ang Chai (see below), ends with the statement, "We declare no competing interests." Yet, all three authors are associated with highly politicized NGOs. One (Manduca) is associated with Interpal, which is designated as a terrorist entity by the [United States](#).¹ Manduca also [raises money for Interpal](#).
- The letter accused Israel of carrying out a propaganda campaign that "justifies the creation of an emergency to masquerade a massacre."
- *The Lancet* [allowed its website to be used to collect over 20,000 email signatures](#) to "support the letter," demonstrating the editorial board's active role in backing the letter.
- The letter made false accusations about Israel, denied its' right to self-defense, and failed to mention Hamas at all.

¹ The [U.S. Treasury Department describes Interpal](#) as "a principal charity utilized to hide the flow of money to HAMAS. Reporting indicates it is the conduit through which money flows to HAMAS from other charities, e.g., the Al Qqsa Foundation, and that it oversees the activities of other charities." A [BBC investigation](#) described Interpal as "at the heart of a global coalition of 56 Islamic charities called the Union for Good, chaired by the spiritual leader of the worldwide Muslim Brotherhood Movement, Dr Yusuf Qaradawi... Dr Qaradawi has said of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict: 'We must plant the love of death and the love of martyrdom in the Islamic nation.'" The BBC report also states that the "US Treasury designated the Union for Good as a terrorist entity saying it 'facilitates the transfer of tens of millions of dollars a year to Hamas-managed associations in the West bank and Gaza strip.'"

- Unsubstantiated allegations were made regarding both the use of illegal weaponry by the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF) and the utilization of those weapons to deliberately kill civilians.
- *The Lancet's* decision to publish this biased piece – written by authors known to be part of radical anti-Israel NGOs – speaks to the political nature of the medical journal.
- A [global outcry](#) occurred in response to the letter. *The Lancet* also published a [rebuttal](#) from 1,234 Canadian doctors that criticized the original article.

The Lancet's partnerships with political advocacy NGOs

Lancet-Palestinian Health Alliance (LPHA)

- [The Lancet](#) partners with a number of anti-Israel NGOs to maintain the [Lancet-Palestinian Health Alliance \(LPHA\)](#), “a loose network of health researchers committed to illuminating the conditions under which Palestinians live today.” Through its partnership, *The Lancet* publishes reports and articles, holds annual conferences, and solicits research papers and studies that specifically focus on Palestinian issues, often in an overtly political context.
- At the [LPHA conference](#) in Amman (March 17-18, 2014), Richard Horton acknowledged the political aims of *The Lancet's* involvement in this program and its non-medical, non-scientific nature: “We publish science at the Lancet, but the evidence has to go beyond that to the humanity of people....We need a deeper and more rigorous investigation of Palestinian health and wellbeing – most specifically its economic, social and political determinants.”
- In December 2013, Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP), in association with *The Lancet*, launched a LPHA research publication. The 35 contributions of the LPHA report were authored by health professionals and academics from the fields of medicine and science. However, some of the abstracts revealed a political slant, reflecting the authors' subjective anti-Israel prejudices.
 - For example, in the contribution titled “[Emergency preparedness and response of the Palestinian health system to an Israeli assault on the Gaza Strip, occupied Palestinian territory, in 2012: a qualitative assessment](#),” the authors blame “Israeli violence” entirely, failing to consider the role of terror groups operating within civilian areas in Gaza that necessitate Israel's self-defense measures. Two of the authors, Ghassan Zaqout and Aed Yaghi, are affiliated with the [Palestinian Medical Relief Society \(PMRS\)](#), a highly biased NGO that repeatedly claims that Israel violates “[human rights](#),” employs methods of “[collective punishment](#),” “deploys [non-conventional weapons](#) against civilians,” and seeks to “[oust](#) the Palestinians... into densely populated enclaves fully controlled by Israel and geographically separate.”

GCMHP and Dr. Eyad El-Sarraj

- Since 1996, *The Lancet* has cooperated with the Gaza Community Mental Health Programme (GCMHP) and its representatives, particularly founder Dr. Eyad El-Sarraj, often reporting on non-medical issues relating to the Arab-Israeli conflict.
- In September 1996, *The Lancet* article "[Israel: Justice in Heaven](#)" included a history and short documentation of Sarraj's activism.
- A March 2005 article titled "[Protecting the Mental Health of Gaza's Inhabitants](#)" chronicled the history of GCMHP and updated the timeline of Sarraj's continued activism. The end of the article included Sarraj's unsupported "analysis" of the conflict: "Jews have been victimized and have a traumatic history and so now do the Palestinians....Violence only makes people more defensive and paranoid."
- *The Lancet* article "[Health as Human Security in the Occupied Palestinian Territories](#)" (2009) discussed the alleged effects of sonic booms caused by Israeli military planes over Gaza, and claimed health and mental health implications for pregnant women and children. These claims are not universally accepted in the medical research community. One study was conducted in Nevada between 1969 and 1986 by the Department of Community and Environmental Medicine of the University of California, Irvine. [The report stated](#): "From the data collected, no convincing evidence was found to prove or disprove the existence of adverse health effects due to exposure to sonic boom." In another study, [Dr Daniel Ellis from St. Georges Hospital in London](#) wrote in the *BMJ* on November 17, 2005, noting: "Apparently, sonic booms cause no negative effects on the breeding of gray seals nor do they damage avian eggs nor do they have a hugely detrimental effect on sleep. There is no mention of miscarriages, heart problems or any other medical problems for that matter."
- Sarraj was also praised by *The Lancet's* editor, Richard Horton, in March 2009 for his assistance with *The Lancet's* publication of "[The Occupied Palestinian Territory: Peace, Justice, and Health](#)" series.
- On 15 February 2014, *The Lancet* published an [obituary](#) by Geoff Watts, praising Sarraj as a "pillar" whose career was a "mixture of medicine and activism." The obituary described GCMHP as an organization with an "ethos of respect for justice and human rights," with its major target groups being "children....and victims of organized violence and torture." However, Sarraj's [problematic legacy](#), in which he exploited his professional credentials as a psychiatrist and human rights organization head in order to promote his immoral anti-Israel agenda, is not at all addressed. (See NGO Monitor's [letter to the Editor of The Lancet](#) on this issue.)

MAP and Dr. Swee Ang Chai

- Medical Aid for Palestinians (MAP) regularly partners with *The Lancet* to launch LPHA's annual research publications and [attend LPHA's annual conferences](#). MAP has been supporting the LPHA alliance since its establishment in 2009. MAP officials have also

contributed numerous pieces to *The Lancet*, and their political views are frequently cited.

- MAP has been known to distort facts in order to advance its anti-Israel stance. For instance, in February 2009 Dr. Swee Ang Chai, founding trustee of MAP and a key author of *An Open Letter for the People of Gaza*, published the introduction from her book, [The Wounds of Gaza](#), on *The Lancet's* "Global Health Network" website. The article, which included no sources or references, was filled with unverifiable anecdotes. It was removed 28 days later following widespread criticism due to "[factual inaccuracies](#)."
- The [entry began](#) with a misrepresentation of two incidents, whose historical veracity are the subject of much scholarly debate: "Are we talking about the Khan Younis massacre of 5,000 in 1956, or the execution of 35,000 prisoners of war by Israel in 1967?" Apparently, Chai arrived at her figures by taking an [UNWRA report](#), which claimed "a large number of civilians were killed," inflating the number by a factor of twenty.² While the details she provided are entirely inaccurate and without basis, they also failed to advance any medical claims.

The introduction also alleged that, during the 2009 Gaza War, which was accompanied by a widespread [NGO-led political attack against Israel](#), the IDF illegally deployed phosphorus shells and bombs with the *intention* of deliberately harming civilians. Citing the testimonies of unnamed "eyewitnesses," [she wrote](#): "...eyewitnesses describe the tanks shelling into homes...the phosphorous explodes and burns the families and the homes. Many charred bodies were found among phosphorus particles." Chai further claimed that "the use of DIME (dense inert material explosives) was **evident**" (emphasis added), based on ambiguous circumstantial proof such as "extremely heavy" bomb casings and shrapnel. Chai also describes other incidents based on the testimony of unnamed witnesses she prejudicially [describes as "survivors"](#) who "describe Israeli tanks arriving in front of homes demanding residents to come out....The deliberate targeting of unarmed children and women is well documented by human rights groups in the Gaza Strip..."

This extensive list of accusations, which Chai presented as "well documented," not only lack any factual basis, but were not even repeated by other anti-Israel NGOs or by the Goldstone Report. That *The Lancet* could publish such claims demonstrates a failed editorial process, entirely in violation of basic scientific and academic standards.

Mads Gilbert

- In January 2009, Dr. Gilbert [traveled to Gaza's Al-Shifa Hospital](#) as a member of the Norwegian Aid Committee, [NORWAC](#), an NGO funded by the Norwegian government

² Special Report of the Director of the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East, December 15, 1956, available at <http://unispal.un.org/UNISPAL.NSF/0/6558F61D3DB6BD4505256593006B06BE>

ostensibly to provide health care services in partnership with the Palestinian Ministry of Health.

- During the fighting and afterward, Gilbert repeatedly and falsely [accused Israel](#) of deliberately targeting civilians and invented allegations of use of illegal weapons, while making no mention [of evidence](#) that Al-Shifa hospital had been used for military purposes and also shielded the Hamas leadership.
- Dr. Gilbert is a former member of the fringe left Red Party in Norway, which has its [roots in](#) the country's Communist Party. Gilbert stood as the Red Party's [candidate](#) in local elections in the town of Tromsø in 2007.
- The centrality of his ideology was highlighted in comments following Al-Qaida's September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the U.S., in which Gilbert expressed sympathy with the terrorists. Days after the atrocity, in an interview for the Norwegian newspaper *Dagbladet* [Gilbert said](#) "**The attack on New York did not come as a surprise after the policy that the West has led during the last decades...The oppressed also have a moral right to attack the USA with any weapon they can come up with.**" When asked directly in the same interview, "Do you support a terror attack against the USA?," Gilbert replied, "Terror is a bad weapon but the answer is yes within the context which I have mentioned."

PHR-I and Ruchama Marton

- *The Lancet* published an article by president and founder of [Physicians for Human Rights-Israel \(PHR-I\)](#), Ruchama Marton, which [promoted the 2012 Palestinian statehood campaign in the United Nations](#).
- [Founded](#) in 1988 by [Ruchama Marton](#), Physicians for Human Rights-Israel (PHR-I) claims to be "a non-profit, non-governmental organization that strives to promote a more fair and inclusive society in which the right to health is applied equally for all." (PHR-I is not formally affiliated with the US-based Physicians for Human Rights).
- PHR-I takes a political posture. It strives to "put an end" to "Israel's prolonged occupation over Palestinian territory," which it views as "the basis of human rights violations."
- While using the term "physicians" in its name [half of the 1,500 claimed members and a number of key staff are not medical professionals](#).
- In 2009, PHR-I's highly biased political agenda led the Israel Medical Association to [halt cooperative activities](#), and elicited the condemnations of Dr. Yoram Blachar, president of the World Medical Association, who called PHR-I "[a radical political group disguised as a medical organization](#)."
- PHR-I is [organizing a "medical fact-finding mission" to Gaza](#). Based on the terms of the current mission's proposal and the conclusions of its 2009 investigation, it appears that the professional "halo" of these experts-activists will once again be exploited in order to accuse Israel of war crimes and other violations.