

The Medical and Scientific Assessment of Israeli War Crimes

Politics, Medical Journals, the Medical Profession and the Israel Lobby

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Region: [Middle East & North Africa](#)

Theme: [Crimes against Humanity](#)

In-depth Report: [PALESTINE](#)

Last July, a group of doctors and scientists wrote to the Lancet expressing dismay at the carnage in Gaza and Israel's propaganda. Since its publication, Sir Mark Pepys, a leading light in the Jewish Medical Association has been protesting about the decision of Lancet editor Richard Horton to publish the letter and last month Pepys organised a letter of protest, under the name Concerned Academics for Editorial Ethics (sole functions, attack Horton, defend Israel), to publisher Reed Elsevier about Horton. This prompted a counter-letter and campaign, Hands off the Lancet. <http://jfjfp.com/?tag=sir-mark-pepys>

Will Mark Pepys et al modify their allegations in the light of the UN report on war crimes?

Pepys et al have accused the signatories of the open letter of protest about Gaza 2014, together with Lancet editor Dr Richard Horton, of knowingly publishing fabrications on the basis of a political mindset that "would have made Goebbels proud". I wonder if Pepys would care to modify these allegations, and set the academic record right, in the light of the findings of the UN Independent Commission of Enquiry, just published.

The report concludes that "the extent of the devastation and human suffering in Gaza was unprecedented and will impact generations to come".

Above all it concludes that the evidence points to the commission of war crimes by Israel, which puts things in the territory of the International Criminal Court. The Commission also states that Hamas in Gaza may also have committed war crimes, which is not to suggest any parity between the effects of homemade rockets on the one hand, and the massive and systematic damage wrought across Gaza on the other: 6000 airstrikes, 50,000 tank and artillery shells fired, deploying US-supplied state-of-the-art bombs which have such broad impact that their use predictably inflicts indiscriminate damage- and this on one of the world's most heavily populated and congested urban spaces The commission found that at least 142 Gazan families lost three or more members in attacks on their homes, around 742 fatalities at least. Look at the disparity in the overall casualty figures: Palestinian deaths 2251 (mostly civilians, including 551 children); Israeli deaths 73 (almost all soldiers, no children).

I would like to ask Pepys et al why they think that Israel denied the UN Commission access to Gaza, and thus the chance to take firsthand testimony directly?

Israel remains the occupying power in Gaza as far as international law is concerned and is therefore subject to all the legal obligations of an occupying power to protect civilians.

Even Israeli newspapers like the Jerusalem Post cite the phrase “mowing the grass” as capturing the strategic thinking behind the assault on Gaza last year, as with the very similarly conducted assault in 2008- a UN Commission concluded that Israel had committed war crimes in that case too. The core intention is to unmake Palestinian society in Gaza, already imprisoned and impoverished for years by Israeli siege and blockade, to render it traumatised and impotent. Indiscriminate attack is the point of the operation, not a side-effect. The UN report refers to “Israel’s lamentable track record in holding wrong doers accountable”, but the Gaza operation was conducted as intended : the Israeli government and military high command are scarcely likely to hold themselves to account. Who will?

Competing interests: I was a signatory to the Manduca et al letter in The Lancet July 2014. 23 years experience of health and human rights-related involvement in Israel/Palestine.

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