

The conflict in Gaza: a view from Israel

Khamis Elessi¹ writes as a physician describing the deteriorating situation in the Gaza Strip (or Gaza) and pleads to save the residents of Gaza from catastrophe. We share his concern for all the innocent people in Israel and in Gaza. Unfortunately, his Correspondence contains inaccuracies and omits information that paints a very different picture of the catastrophe and its causes.

The Correspondence takes the Israeli occupation of Gaza in 1967 as the starting point, but it does not mention that Israel withdrew entirely from Gaza in 2005 with the hopes that Gazans would build their own future and thrive. All Israel asked is that the Palestinian leadership cease its hostilities against Israel, which, tragically for both Gazans and Israelis, did not happen. Crucial here is the position of Hamas, which seized control over Gaza in 2007. Hamas' political platform has always called for the destruction of the "Zionist entity" or, in simple terms, the eradication of Israel.² Hamas has been declared a terrorist organisation not only by the UK, but by the USA, the EU, Canada, and Australia.³ Although we do not accuse Elessi of supporting Hamas terrorists, his letter is one-sided and does not do justice to the humanitarian crisis that is unfolding.

Since 2007, Hamas has unlawfully fired tens of thousands of rockets into Israel; in the past 2 weeks alone the number stands at over 6000.⁴ Hamas aims their indiscriminate fire at major population centres where Israel's leading medical facilities are located. This includes rockets fired at Sheba Tel HaShomer Medical Center (Tel Aviv, Israel), where Elessi received some of his training.

Some critics of the Israeli Government claim that Israel targets health facilities and ambulances—it does not. The Israeli army is clear and explicit that its enemy is Hamas and not the civilian population of

Gaza.⁵ However, Hamas have long chosen to hide their armaments and military personnel in civilian buildings, including mosques, schools, and, yes, hospitals.⁶ What choice does Israel have but to defend itself? We offer the American combat veteran David French's clear analysis of these challenges in a recent *New York Times* piece.⁷

The most blatant omission of Elessi's letter is any mention of the horrific events of Oct 7, 2023, that precipitated Israel's current campaign in Gaza. As a fellow clinician, he will no doubt agree on the importance of the history of present illness as a crucial background to the patient's chief complaint. On that day, Hamas killed 1400 Israelis and foreign citizens, of all religions and 25 different nationalities.⁸ Most of these people were civilians.⁸ It should also be noted that Hamas murdered medical personnel who were tending to the wounded.

Elessi complains of a tragic disregard for Gaza's civilians. A recent example of this, which took place after the Correspondence was published, was the attack on al-Ahli Arab Hospital on Oct 17, 2023. The USA, the UK, and other countries have said that the attack on this hospital was probably caused by a rocket fired by Islamic Jihad, another terrorist group.^{9,10}

Together with Elessi we sincerely pray for the protection of innocent lives on both sides of the border, but his concern for the lives of Gazans (which we most emphatically share) must begin with the terrorist organisation that currently governs Gaza.

We declare no competing interests.

Editorial note: The Lancet Group takes a neutral position with respect to territorial claims in published text and institutional affiliations.

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