
ADJUDICATION

1. This Adjudication is made in respect of two complaints by Dr Colin L. Leci. The first was elevated to my attention by his letter of 4 November 2015; the second arrived just as I was preparing to adjudicate the first on 18 December. Given that they concerned the same columnist, and a common allegation, I resolved that they would be dealt with by a single Adjudication.

The First Complaint

2. The first article is headlined *"Israel vows to crack down on stone throwers amid al-Aksa violence"*, was written by the FT's Jerusalem correspondent John Reed, and published on 16 September 2015. It is still available online at: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/1c6b1bb8-5bb2-11e5-9846-de406ccb37f2.html#axzz3wNQnxxoL>
3. The complainant takes issue with the accuracy of two elements of the article, as well as complaining generally of ignorance of the history of Jerusalem, a subject in which he is eager to demonstrate his expertise. He says:
 - (i) *"Rereading the article in question it appears your correspondent took no cognizance that the vast majority of your worldwide readers are not au fait with the history of the Temple Mount from Biblical Times until the current day, even in the New Testament the Jewish Temple is mentioned. As such the statement **"al-Aqsa, on the compound known to Muslims as Haram al-Sharif (the Noble Sanctuary) and to Jews as Temple Mount"** deliberately distorts historical fact giving the impression to the uninformed reader that somehow there was a Muslim presence on the site well before that of the Jews which is totally incorrect."*
 - (ii) *"In quoting the director of tourism and archaeology at the religious trust of Waqf **"that young Palestinians were coming to al-Aksa "to sleep there and defend the mosque"**" [complainant's underlining], it was inferred that Jews sough [sic] to pray in the mosque which is without any foundation - al-Aksa has no significance as was pointed out in my complaint."*
5. I don't think my role as Editorial Complaints Commissioner lends itself particularly well to determining the territorial rights of religious groups to sacred sites in Jerusalem. I therefore rely on only the most limited findings of fact. It cannot (I hope) be disputed that there is an area in Jerusalem,

described in the article as a 'compound', which has two different names: 'Haram al-Sharif' and 'Temple Mount'. The compound was historically the site of Jewish temples. Within that compound now exists al-Aqsa, which is a mosque. There is also a shrine known as the Dome of the Rock.

6. In his complaint to the editor, Lionel Barber, on 8 October 2015, the complainant suggested that *"your correspondent appear[s] to confuse the Temple Mount as being al-Aqsa which it certainly is not"*. I do not think this is a tenable reading: Mr Reed was quite clearly saying that al-Aqsa was on the Temple Mount compound (i.e. contained within it, not synonymous with it).
7. As for the complaint that the statement *"deliberately distorts historical fact, giving the impression to the uninformed reader that somehow there was a Muslim presence on the site well before that of the Jews"*, the complaint is patently hopeless. No uninformed reader (of which I had the joy of being, before this complaint was submitted) could reasonably have drawn such an esoteric inference. To an objective reasonable reader of the FT, no statement of historical precedence is given merely by the mentioning of two different names for the same compound.
8. The second accuracy complaint fares little better. The complainant himself acknowledges (in his email to the editor dated 16 September 2015) that the *"Jewish people have no designs on the [al-Aqsa] mosque and only wish to exert their Human Rights in terms of Freedom of Religion to be able to visit and pray on the Temple Mount"*.
9. Accordingly, there can be no dispute with the editor's response that some (but by no means all) religious Jews in Israel wish to be able to not only visit the compound, but to pray there. This is contrary to current Israeli governmental policy, which it has repeatedly stressed is not under review. Nor can there be any dispute that such persons have recently been involved in clashes on the compound with 'murabitoun'/'mourabatat' Muslim volunteers. These latter groups' activities have recently been denounced as illegal by Israel. Some of these violent clashes, some involving police, occurred *"around al-Aqsa"*.

10. It is for this reason that Yusuf Natsheh, director of tourism at the Waqf, told *Financial Times* that "*young Palestinians were coming to al-Aqsa "to sleep there and defend the mosque" "*. It is quite clear that 'defend the mosque' is an expression of the stated purpose of such 'young Palestinians'. It is unclear whether Mr Natsheh endorses that description of their activities. By placing it in quote marks, however, I do not think any objective and reasonable reader of the FT would believe that the correspondent, or *Financial Times* itself, was endorsing that description.
11. The complainant says that from this quote, "*it was inferred that Jews sough [sic] to pray in the mosque*" when in fact they wish to pray elsewhere in the compound. That was not an inference I drew, nor one I consider is reasonably available from the article. Where exactly on the compound some Israeli Jews wish to pray is immaterial: a reasonable reader would surely attribute the desire to 'defend' the mosque as being because it (the mosque) was the precise location of the recent violence, rather than because it was the precise location that religious Jews seek to recommence prayers.
12. According to the terms of Clause 1 of the Editorial Code of Practice, I am satisfied that neither of these complaints has resulted in any breach. The statements in the article were neither inaccurate nor misleading.
13. The third element of the first complaint is that "*there was no impartiality*" because Mr Natsheh was quoted, but not (by way of the complainant's suggestions) "*the Temple Mount Faithful or the Temple Institute, or Rabbi Yehuda Glick who maintain there should be a Jewish presence on the Temple Mount and freedom of religious worship for all and not one where Jews are banned*".
14. From this element of the complaint, one might imagine that the focus of this article was who should be allowed to pray at the compound. It was not. The actual focus of the article, as is clear from the headline, was the Israeli crack-down on stone-throwers who had clashed with police and religious Jewish visitors to Temple Mount. The 'two sides' in this story were the Israel police and those described as 'Palestinian protestors' with whom they had fought for three days. Insofar as the latter were given a voice by Mr Natsheh, the former were given voice by the Israeli Prime Minister in paragraphs 1, 2, 3, 6 and 7.

15. Accordingly, finding no breaches, I reject the first complaint in its entirety.

The Second Complaint

16. The second complaint is made in respect of an article headlined "*Benjamin Netanyahu tries to end gas dispute with Egypt*", written by John Reed in Jerusalem and Heba Saleh in Cairo. It was published on 8 December 2015, and is available online here: <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/1fa1f05e-9dco-11e5-8ce1-f6219b685d74.html#axzz3wNQnxxoL>.
17. The complainant takes issue with only one sentence in the article, which opens paragraph 10: "*LNG exports from Egypt ceased in 2012 because of rising local demand*".
18. The complainant, in an email to the editor dated 15 December 2015 says: "*Did your correspondent check this fact? Because had he bothered he would have found that the LNG pipeline to Israel (and also Jordan) was blown up numerous times which was even reported in the Financial Times.*"
19. The complainant is correct that attacks on the Arab Gas Pipeline were reported in *Financial Times*. They were even reported in the very article about which he makes this second complaint. A few inches higher, in paragraph 4, the article states: "*The arbitration decision [in para. 3] related to the disruption of supplies during Egypt's political transition in 2011 and attacks by militants in the Sinai peninsula on EMG's pipeline*".
20. John Reed responded to Lionel Barber's enquiry by saying: "*My understanding, from Heba's file for the story, is that after about a year of attacks and interruptions in supply through the Sinai, gas exports from Egypt to Israel were cut off entirely because of greater local demand (owing in part to low fixed prices on the domestic market).*"
21. Having conducted my own research, the overwhelming reason given by a variety of sources for the fall in Egypt's gas exports in 2012-2015 is burgeoning internal demand. See, by way of example, this Bloomberg overview: <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2012-12-11/egypt-importing-gas-for-first-time-as-exports-disappear>.

22. The most authoritative source I could find, being, the US Government's Energy Information Agency (EIA), has a helpful overview of Egypt's energy exports at: <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.cfm?iso=EGY> . It includes the following relevant passages:

*"Dry natural gas exports, which began in 2003, increased rapidly with the completion of the first stage of the Arab Gas Pipeline (AGP) linking Egypt to Jordan, along with the startup of LNG production in 2004. However, in recent years Egypt's natural gas exports have declined substantially, falling by an annual average of almost 30% from 2010 to 2013. In 2011 and 2012, sabotage attacks repeatedly disrupted gas exports through the AGP, substantially curtailing the amount of natural gas sent to Jordan and Israel. **In 2012, Egypt halted natural gas exports to Israel by canceling its long-term supply contract to Israel because of a payment dispute. The move also underlined Egypt's need to divert natural gas supply away from exports to its local market to meet demand.***

...

*Egypt has two LNG plants with a combined capacity of 610 Bcf per year (or 12.7 million tons per year). The Spanish-Egyptian Gas Company (Segas) LNG plant in Damietta started production in late-2004. The plant is owned by Union Fenosa Gas (80%), a joint venture between Spain's Gas Natural and Italy's Eni, along with Egypt's national companies EGPC and EGAS (10% each). The LNG plant has one train with a capacity of 264 Bcf (5.5 million tons) per year. **The Segas/Damietta LNG plant has not exported LNG since 2012 because of a lack of natural gas supplies. The Egyptian government redirected natural gas supplies to the domestic market to mitigate fuel shortages and power outages, particularly during the summer months. Gas Natural and Eni filed an international arbitration case against EGAS for not abiding by their feed gas contract"***

[my emphasis]

23. Readers may notice that the complainant's own reference to an "LNG pipeline" discloses the obvious error in his complaint. LNG stands for Liquefied Natural Gas, being natural gas which has been cooled to around minus-163 degrees Celsius. It can only be transported internationally by sea, in specially-adapted double-hulled LNG carriers. Pipelines do not carry LNG: they carry 'dry' natural gas, in its gaseous form. As such, attacks which prevented pipeline exports of dry gas to Israel from Egypt should have led to higher LNG exports to compensate. The fact that Egypt's LNG exports actually fell after 2012 was, as the article says, largely due to growing domestic demand for natural gas.

24. For these reasons, there is quite clearly no breach of Clause 1 of the FT Editorial Code of Practice, and I reject the second complaint in its entirety.

Post-Script

25. Running throughout the complainant's correspondence was a tendency, even an eagerness, to attribute what he considered obvious errors in the article to bad faith on the part of the journalist. He claimed *inter alia* that Mr Reed "*wilfully he acted as an agent of Arab propaganda*" and made other unsupported statements impugning Mr Reed's professionalism. Nothing I have read or heard in the course of preparing this Adjudication has so much as suggested the slightest case for Mr Reed to answer on such grounds.
26. It is, however, only fair to warn future complainants that un-evidenced slurs against journalists may cause their complaints - even if otherwise meritorious - to be disregarded. It is an implied term that complainants bring their issues to the editor, and then to me, in good faith. Impugning the character of a journalist without providing substantial proof of malice, will more usually reflect rather worse on the authors of such accusations than on their subjects.

GREG CALLUS
Editorial Complaints Commissioner
Financial Times Ltd
6 January 2016