

Geopolitics and the CJU

Canadians are blessed to live in a peaceful and relatively harmonious country which is the envy of the world. This peacefulness has been threatened recently by murderous terrorism. Radical Islamists have targeted Canadians. Madrid could be Toronto. The firebombing of a Jewish school library in Montreal in retaliation for the Israeli assassination of a Hamas leader who preached terrorism, illustrates this reality.

Samuel Huntington has described the current conflict as a 'Clash of civilizations'. He, and others, have argued that radical Islamism preaches the goal of world sovereignty and the imposition of Sharia law in every country. The ramifications of this are apparent in countries ruled by Islamists, including Afghanistan under the Taliban, and Iran at present.

One of the chief targets of the radical Islamists are our political and social freedoms. We must be vigilant about these freedoms.

What has this got to do with the CJU? Medical publishing should be far removed from these issues. We are the inheritors of a long scientific tradition of dispassionate evaluation of scientific data, independent of geopolitics and ethnic origin. However, there have been egregious exceptions. These include most notably the Soviet Union during the Stalinist era, where genetics was officially condemned as 'bourgeois science', preferring the now totally discredited Lysenkoism; and Nazi Germany, which condemned Einstein's theory of relativity as 'Jewish Science'. During the Third Reich the Nazis partially achieved their objective, when Einstein's name could no longer be mentioned in lectures or scholarly papers, (though his relativity theory was still taught).

The indefensible practice of allowing geopolitical issues to intrude in scientific research has arisen recently. This has been directed at Israeli and Iranian researchers. In the case of Israel, some European and British academics have refused to allow Israelis to participate in international meetings, and refused their journal submissions on the basis of their origin. In what is perhaps the most egregious recent example, two Israeli professors were sacked from the board of language journals run by Prof. Mona Baker of the University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology. Baker was explicit that the only reason for this was that they were Israeli. Both Israeli professors, who had worked for the journals for 3 years, were forced to resign as part of Baker's 'interpretation' of boycotting Israeli institutions.

In the case of Iran, the current US trade embargo against that country has been interpreted to prevent Iranian manuscripts from being published in U.S. based medical journals. The US Department of Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) imposes trade embargoes on countries viewed as hostile targets. Recently, this policy has been clarified in the scientific/medical realm. OFAC regulations state that manuscripts from authors from embargoed countries can be published in the US—provided the articles are not altered in any way. Academic societies or scientific publishing houses based in the US may not substantively alter, edit or enhance an article originating from an embargoed country, as these activities constitute provision of services to those nations. In January 2004, the American Society for Microbiology adopted a policy of no longer considering papers from Cuba, Iran, Libya and Sudan. The ramifications of these actions threaten the integrity and freedom of the scientific enterprise.

Discriminatory action against researchers undermines the principles on which scientific advancement rests. An embargo such as this will also have a detrimental effect on international scientific cooperation. For example, an international collaboration involving American scientists and those from an affected country that results in a coauthored publication could be construed as law breaking by the US investigator. This is enough to seriously impede collaborative efforts.

...2

...1

Canada has no trade embargo with any of these states. The CJU has received several submissions from Iran. Nonetheless, these actions in countries we are closely allied with, and frequently collaborate with, are concerning.

An important organization, the World Association of Medical Editors (WAME) has emerged over the last few years to address common issues related to medical publishing around the world. WAME has adopted a formal position on the issue of geopolitical intrusion on editorial decisions. This is printed below. The crux of the statement is that editorial decisions should not be affected by the origins of the manuscript, including the nationality, ethnicity, political beliefs, race, or religion of the authors. The CJU believes it is important to stand and be counted amongst the journals that support this position.

We trust that support for this position, which reflects a traditional Canadian sensibility of tolerance and respect for other cultures, meets with the approval of our readers.

Laurence H. Klotz, MD
Editor-in-Chief
Canadian Journal of Urology



WAME statement on Geopolitical Intrusion on Editorial Decisions (March 2004)

Decisions to edit and publish manuscripts submitted to biomedical journals should be based on characteristics of the manuscripts themselves and how they relate to the journal's purposes and readers. Among these characteristics are importance of the topic, originality, scientific strength, clarity and completeness of written expression, and potential interest to readers. Editors should also take into account whether studies are ethical and whether their publication might cause harm to readers or to the public interest.

Editorial decisions should not be affected by the origins of the manuscript, including the nationality, ethnicity, political beliefs, race, or religion of the authors. Decisions to edit and publish should not be determined by the policies of governments or other agencies outside of the journal itself. Editors should defend this principle, as they do other principles of sound editorial practice, and enlist their colleagues' support in this effort if necessary.