AMERICAN MATHEMATICAL SOCIETY

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Dear colleagues,

The November 2013 issue of the *Notices of the American Mathematical Society* carried an article "Principles for implementing a potential solution to the Middle East conflict," by Thomas L. Saaty and H. J. Zoffer. A number of you have written to me to express the belief that the article is entirely political in character, and therefore inappropriate for the *Notices*. The first thing to say is that the conclusions of the article do not represent positions of the American Mathematical Society.

So why was the article published? The AMS describes the goal of the Notices in this way:

> By publishing high-level exposition, the *Notices* provides opportunities for mathematicians and students of mathematics to find out what is going on in the field. Each issue contains one or two such expository articles that describe current developments in mathematical research, written by professional mathematicians. The *Notices* also carries articles on the history of mathematics, mathematics education, and professional issues facing mathematicians, as well as reviews of books, plays, movies, and other artistic and cultural works involving mathematics. Members keep abreast of official AMS reports, activities, and actions, and the news of the mathematical world, through articles in the *Notices.*

Although the condition "written by a professional mathematician" is certainly not a requirement for publication in the *Notices*, Professor Saaty earned a Ph.D. in mathematics under Einar Hille at Yale.

There is a fairly constant pressure from readers to broaden the scope of mathematics and applications that is presented in the *Notices*. The November article about the Mideast follows a February 2013 *Notices* article by Professor Saaty, "On the measurement of intangibles. A principal eigenvector approach to relative measurement from paired comparisons." Publication of the February article appears to be an entirely natural and reasonable response to the interest in a broad scope of applications of mathematics. Professor Saaty developed in the 1970s his "analytic hierarchy process" for quantifying the relative importance of factors that may not individually allow for reasonable quantification. The February article explains in some detail how this process works for a family weighing factors like access to transportation and house condition in making a choice among houses.

Because he has found a receptive audience for his ideas in a wide variety of settings (including occasionally conflict resolution) over the past forty years, Professor Saaty has found foundation support over the past five years to apply the ideas in the setting of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The editors of the *Notices* believed that this application would attract the interest of readers. The decision to publish the article was unrelated to the conclusions reached by the authors. It is my belief that the *Notices* ***should*** publish articles describing reasonable mathematical modeling of interesting problems, even if the conclusions reached are controversial or disagreeable. The real world is a complicated, controversial, and sometimes unpleasant place.

As the Editorial Board of the *Notices* and others at the AMS review *Notices* policies in the coming months, I hope that the central questions will be about mathematics. Mathematical modeling cannot and should not be judged as we would judge a proof in geometry, but there are still mathematical questions to ask. Is the idea of the model a useful and defensible one? Is it described in enough detail for readers to understand and evaluate the reasoning?

If you would like to address these questions or others, I would be happy to hear from you at president@ams.org. Your voice can be part of the discussion.

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