



ISRAEL MATTERS!

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Special Issue: Israel and The Gaza Flotilla

Netanyahu: “The Truth is Slowly Spreading Around the World”

According to Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu as he addressed his Cabinet, the truth about the flotilla clash was slowly sinking in to people’s minds around the world. As he was speaking, a leading Turkish newspaper published photos of brutal beatings of Israeli Naval commandos by Turkish terror activists.

The photos were a gruesome confirmation of the IDF’s documented evidence that the soldiers who boarded the flotilla ship “Mani Mamara” were virtually unarmed and were assaulted as they climbed down from ropes attached to a helicopter. The Turkish Hurriyet newspaper showed some of the soldiers after being brutally beaten, some of them knocked unconscious after being attacked by Turkish citizens using metal clubs.

The Turkish daily claimed that the IDF did not publish the pictures that could easily be seen by enemies as a degradation of the Israeli armed forces. However, they also clearly contradicted flotilla organizers’ claims that the Navy commandoes attacked them as they boarded the ship.

Unlike the activists on the five other boats of the flotilla, approximately 50 men on the Mani Mamara were trained for hand-to-hand combat and apparently planned the ambush of the Navy soldiers.

Prime Minister Netanyahu compared the flotilla clash with the peaceful interception of the ship “Rachel Corrie” that was subsequently turned away from Gaza by the Navy. He revealed that the Mamara ship, unlike the other five in the flotilla, was boarded in a separate city and “in effect, did not undergo strict security checks.”

“The entire world saw the difference between a humanitarian flotilla and a hate flotilla by violent, terrorism-supporting extremists,” Netanyahu stated. “In both incidents, Israel used an identical procedure: We proposed that the ships unload their cargo in Ashdod port, where it would undergo a security check to prevent the entry of weapons to Hamas, after which the civilian goods would be delivered to Gaza. To the previous flotilla, we even proposed that its cargo be checked by international organizations in El Arish. Make no mistake. Regarding ... five of the six ships in the flotilla, this process ended without casualties or untoward incidents. Only on one ship, on which dozens of thugs from a terrorist organization – or, to be more precise, an extremist, terrorism-supporting organization – had prepared in advance, armed with axes, knives and other ‘cold’ weapons, were our soldiers compelled to defend themselves against a tangible danger to their lives.”

“This truth is gradually spreading around the world. It must be understood that this was not a unique incident. This is a continuous process that enemies of Israel have been orchestrating for years in order to deny Israel’s right to defend itself. I would like to emphasize: We will not allow the establishment of an Iranian port in Gaza. We will not allow the free flow of war materiel and contraband to Hamas ... On the other hand, we would like for goods that are neither war materiel nor contraband to enter Gaza.”



A frame from a video released by the IDF showing a pro-Palestinian activist hitting an IDF soldier with a rod-like weapon.

Editorial Note: As this issue of *Israel Matters!* goes to press Israel was continuing to deal with the aftermath of its confrontation with the “Gaza Flotilla.” In it, nine activists, mostly from Turkey, were killed by IDF soldiers when they violently resisted the boarding of their ship in maintenance of the Israeli blockade of Gaza.

Poll: Israelis Support Flotilla Raid, Gaza Blockade

Despite international criticism over the IDF's response to the Gaza-bound flotilla, Israeli Jews strongly support the operation, along with the Israeli blockade on Hamas-run Gaza. Polls conducted by Pechter Middle East Polls and New Wave Research found strong support also for the operation.

The New Wave poll showed that 92% of Israeli Jews supported the decision to stop the Gaza-bound flotilla, and 91% said Israel should stop any similar attempts to reach Gaza in the future. Also, 73% support the naval blockade on Gaza, while 16% said the blockade should be lifted. The Pechter poll found that Israeli Jews overwhelmingly supported the flotilla raid, with 85% saying that Israel used the right amount of force or not enough force (39%) when stopping the boats. Overall, 73% expressed support of the blockade.

The Pechter poll showed dislike for President Barack Obama following the flotilla incident: 71% said they disliked or strongly disliked Obama, and 63% said they were dissatisfied with the U.S. response to the flotilla clash.

If Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan accompanies a flotilla to Gaza, the IDF should do whatever necessary to stop him, 75% said. 84% said the same regarding a possible Iranian mission to Gaza. The New Wave poll found that 78% believe the flotilla proves that Turkey is acting as an enemy to Israel.

The Gaza Flotilla and the Maritime Blockade of Gaza – The Legal Background

1. A maritime blockade is in effect off the coast of Gaza. The blockade was imposed because Israel is currently in a state of armed conflict with the Hamas regime that controls Gaza and which has repeatedly bombed and rocketed civilian targets in Israel with weapons that have been smuggled into Gaza via the sea.
2. Maritime blockades are a legitimate and recognized measure under international law that may be implemented as part of an armed conflict at sea.
3. A blockade may be imposed at sea, including in international waters, so long as it does not bar access to the ports and coasts of neutral countries.
4. The naval manuals of several western countries, including the US and England, recognize the maritime blockade as an effective naval measure and set forth the various criteria that make a blockade valid, including the requirement to give due notice of the existence of the blockade.
5. Israel publicized the existence of the blockade and its precise coordinates by use of the accepted international professional maritime channels. Israel also provided appropriate notification to the affected governments and to the organizers of the Gaza protest flotilla. Moreover, in real time, the ships participating in the protest flotilla were warned repeatedly that a maritime blockade was in effect.
6. Here, it should be noted that under customary law, knowledge of the blockade may be presumed once a blockade has been declared and appropriate notification has been granted, as above.
7. Under international maritime law, when a maritime blockade is in effect no boats can enter the blockaded area. That includes both civilian and enemy vessels.
8. A country may take action to enforce its blockade. Any vessel that violates or attempts to violate a maritime blockade may be captured or even attacked under international law. The US Commander's Handbook on the Law of Naval Operations sets forth that a vessel is considered to be in attempt to breach a blockade from the time the vessel leaves its port with the intention of evading the blockade.
9. The flotilla protesters indicated their clear intention to violate the blockade by means of written and oral statements. Moreover, the route of the vessels indicated their clear intention to violate the blockade in violation of international law.
10. Given the protesters explicit intention to violate the naval blockade, Israel exercised its right under international law to enforce the blockade. Prior to undertaking enforcement measures explicit warnings were relayed directly to the captains of the vessels expressing Israel's intent to exercise its right to enforce the blockade.
11. Israel attempted to take control of the vessels participating in the flotilla by peaceful means and in an orderly fashion to enforce the blockade. Given the large number of vessels participating in the flotilla, an operational decision was made to undertake measures to enforce the blockade a certain distance from the area of the blockade.
12. Israeli personnel attempting to enforce the blockade were met with violence by the protesters and acted in self-defense to fend off those attacks.

Biden Defends Israel on Flotilla Raid



Vice President Joe Biden defended Israel's handling of the raid on a Gaza aid flotilla, departing from the Obama administration's posture of wait and see. Biden said Israel has an "absolute right" to defend its security interests, according to the online political commentary, Politico. "It's legitimate for Israel to say, 'I don't know what's on that ship.' These guys are dropping 3,000 rockets on my people," Biden said.

The flotilla of six ships, loaded with assistance for the Gaza Strip's 1.5 million residents was aimed at breaching Israel's blockade of the strip. Israel's raid on the largest ship ended in bloodshed when passengers attacked the commandos. Nine passengers were killed and six Israeli soldiers were injured. Israeli troops boarded and commandeered the five smaller ships without incident.

Biden repeated the Obama administration's position that Israel should ease the Gaza blockade for humanitarian reasons, and should investigate the incident. He also emphasized that he understood Israeli concerns. "As we put pressure and the world put pressure on Israel to let material go into Gaza to help those people who are suffering - the ordinary Palestinians there - what happened?" he asked. " Hamas would confiscate it, put it in a warehouse, and sell it."

President Obama's response was reflected in a statement issued by Rep. Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.), the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives: "I regret the loss of life and look forward to learning the facts from a credible and transparent investigation. This event underscores the urgent need for negotiations designed to achieve an enduring and comprehensive regional peace." But in other remarks, Pelosi refused to condemn Israel's blockade, and reaffirmed the "close friendship" with Israel.

Pelosi's deputy, House Majority Leader Rep. Steny Hoyer (D-Md.), defended Israel in his statement and said the administration and Congress would protect Israel from condemnation by the U.N. Security Council. Republican leaders also defended Israel. "The United States stands with Jerusalem in its effort to ensure the safety and security of its citizenry," said Rep. Eric Cantor (R-Va.), the minority whip in the House. "We can't forget why the blockade exists in the first place: to deny Hamas the weaponry and raw materials it needs to continue its rocket attacks in Israel, killing innocent people."

The American Israel Public Affairs Committee, AIPAC, welcomed the statements from Biden, Hoyer, and Cantor. "Vice President Joe Biden, Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, and GOP Whip Eric Cantor have it right," AIPAC spokesman Josh Block said in a statement. "The United States stands shoulder to shoulder with Israel and simply will not allow Israel to be isolated and falsely accused."

"I am 100% on Israel's Side" - Tony Blair



Israel has the right to protect itself, former British Prime Minister Tony Blair said in an interview on British television. Blair recently met with Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Barak to discuss the repercussions of the flotilla raid.

Blair, though stressing the need to launch an international, impartial probe into the incident stated that he wholeheartedly supports Israel's right to self-defense. "There are no questions at all. There have been rockets fired from Gaza, there are people in Gaza who want to kill innocent Israelis," the former UK Prime Minister said.

"When it comes to security, I am one hundred percent on Israel's side."

Youtube Pulls "We Con the World" Parody

After it got over 3 million hits in barely a week YouTube, the online video posting site, removed the parody video, "We Con the World," a satirical musical portrayal of the true intentions of the Turkish-Hamas captain, crew, and passengers. Viewers who tried to watch the video at its original link got a message stating that "This video is no longer available due to a copyright claim by Warner/ Chappell Music, Inc." According to YouTube, the video violated the copyright of the companies that own the rights to the "We Are the World" video, produced in the 1980s to raise money for hunger in Africa.

At press time, Youtube had not commented on its removal, but there were many campaigns on social media sites, like Facebook, to force the site to remove the video.

This isn't the first time YouTube removed pro-Israel videos. During Operation Cast Lead, it removed videos distributed by the IDF showing Israel's side of the war. After protests, YouTube restored the videos, but flagged them with a statement that said "This video or group may contain content that is inappropriate for some users, as flagged by YouTube's user community."

Many sites on the internet have reposted the video and a search of "We Con the World" will yield many links to it. For example, it can be seen at the WeJew website: [http://wejew.com/media/8629/Flotilla Choir Parody: We Con The World/](http://wejew.com/media/8629/Flotilla%20Choir%20Parody%20We%20Con%20The%20World/)

Israel: Some things never change - A 1956 Swiss cartoon



Israels «Aggression»

(«Nebelspalter», Zürich, 28. November 1956)

Senate letter in support of Israel:



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515-4302

June 17, 2010

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to express our strong support for Israel's right to defend itself. We believe that it is in the national security interest of the United States to unequivocally reiterate that the United States stands behind its longtime friend and ally. Further, we urge you to remain steadfast in the defense of Israel in the face of the international community's rush to unfairly judge and condemn Israel in international fora such as the United Nations Security Council. We urge you to continue to use U.S. influence and, if necessary, veto power to prevent any biased or one-sided resolutions from passing.

On May 31, after repeated warnings, Israeli forces intercepted a flotilla attempting to break through its naval blockade of Gaza. The blockade of Gaza was instituted to stop terrorists from smuggling weapons into Gaza to murder innocent civilians. Since Israel's disengagement from Gaza in 2005, Hamas has fired more than 10,000 rockets and mortars at Israel's civilian population. Acknowledging the seriousness of the problem, Egypt also initiated its own blockade of Gaza along the Rafah crossing in 2007.

Over the course of its blockade, Israeli forces have diverted nine such flotillas, all without incident. The same was true for five of the six ships in this flotilla. They were commandeered peacefully and directed to the Israeli port of Ashdod. However, those aboard the largest ship, Mavi Marmara, violently resisted. As dramatic video depicts, the passengers on the ship attacked Israeli soldiers with clubs, metal rods, and iron bars as they attempted to board the ship. The soldiers were brutally beaten and one even thrown off the top deck. With their lives threatened, Israeli forces used necessary force as an act of self-defense and of last resort.

The several dozen who attacked the Israeli soldiers were not peaceful aid workers, but extremists who sought to aid the Iran-backed terrorist Hamas regime in Gaza. Days before, as broadcast on al-Jazeera, they proclaimed their willingness to be martyrs for the destruction of Israel, revealing a sinister element of premeditated violence. Furthermore, as confirmed by the State Department and intelligence agencies around the world, the Turkish aid group that sent out the flotilla, İnsani Yardım Vakfı (IHH), has met with senior officials of recognized terrorist groups over the last three years.

If the flotilla was truly intent on bringing aid to Gaza, it could have done that. Israeli officials repeatedly offered their ports to harbor the ships and disperse the aid so that it would not go into the hands of corrupt Hamas officials but directly to the people living in Gaza. But the flotilla refused these overtures, instead revealing their intent to break the blockade and sail unchecked into Gaza. As you know, Hamas even refused the aid that was aboard the Mavi Marmara after it was inspected by Israeli officials.

Senate letter in support of Israel (Cont'd):

of Muslim charities, the Union of Good, which was designated by the US Treasury Department as a terrorist organization. The Union of Good was created by and strongly supports Hamas, which has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the US State Department. We recommend that your administration consider whether the IHH should be put on the list of foreign terrorist organizations, after an examination by the intelligence community, the State Department, and the Treasury Department.

We commend the action you took to prevent the adoption of an unfair United Nations Security Council resolution, which would have represented a rush to judgment by the international community. We also deplore the actions of the United Nations Human Rights Council which, once again, singled out Israel. Israel has announced its intention to promptly carry out a thorough investigation of this incident and has the right to determine how its investigation is conducted. In the meantime, we ask you to stand firm in the future at the United Nations Security Council and to use your veto power, if necessary, to prevent any similar biased or one-sided resolutions from passing.

Finally, we believe that this incident should not derail the current proximity talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We hope that these talks will move quickly to direct negotiations and ultimately, to a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Sincerely,

Harry Reid
Majority Leader

Mitch McConnell
Republican Leader

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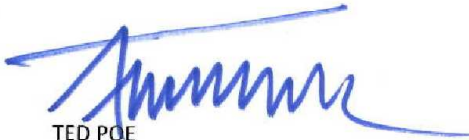
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House of Representatives letter in support of Israel:

The U.S. should make every effort to thwart international condemnation and focus the international community on the crimes of the Iran-backed Hamas leadership against Israel and the Palestinian people. As Israel faces increased threats, most recently from the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps, which announced that it could provide a naval escort to any additional aid ships wishing to reach Gaza, the United States must continue to stand by Israel, one of our strongest allies.

We look forward to working with you on these vital issues affecting the U.S.-Israel relationship.



TED POE
Member of Congress
TEXAS

Sincerely,



GARY PETERS
Member of Congress
MICHIGAN

Tourism to Israel: May 2010 – 6th Consecutive Record-Breaking Month

Buoyed by continued monthly growth in incoming tourism to Israel, Tourism Minister Stas Misezhnikov of the Israel Our Home party says Israel has to continue building more hotel rooms and tourist attractions. “The increased demand,” Misezhnikov says, “together with the growing interest of investors, means we must re-evaluate our supply. [What is needed is] the construction of thousands of hotel rooms and tourist attractions.”

He was speaking against the backdrop of the latest report issued by the Central Bureau of Statistics, which includes these numbers: 309,000 tourists visited Israel in May 2010 – an all-time record for the month of May – and an increase of 4% over May 2008, which was Israel's record year for tourism. 1.4 million tourists have visited Israel since the beginning of the year, an increase of 11% over the same period in 2008. Of those, 1.1 million remained in Israel for at least one night – an increase of 5% over 2008.

“In accordance with the Tourism Ministry's three-year plan,” Misezhnikov said, “an additional million tourists will have visited Israel in 2012, in total four million tourists and business people. We must be ready to offer them an attractive tourism solution ... Competition with other countries in the region will intensify significantly in the coming months and years and, in order to compete, the ministry will allocate a significant portion of its budget to helping entrepreneurs.”

Specifically, he said, the ministry will allocate a half-billion shekels to assist in hotel projects, which “will lead to the construction of thousands of hotel rooms that will contribute hundreds of millions of shekels and thousands of jobs to the economy.” As part of this policy, the Tourism Ministry's Investment Administration approved grants worth 65 million shekels to five hotel projects in Jerusalem and the Galilee. The five are the Waldorf Astoria and a boutique hotel in Ein Kerem, both in Jerusalem, and HaGoshrim Hotel, Ein Hahula, and Prima Tiberias in the Galilee.

Israel: World Leader in Recycled Water

In recent years, Israel - the world's leader in water recycling - has advanced by leaps and bounds in desalination and recycling water. Israel recycles 70% of its waste water and sewage, and in distant second place is Spain, with 12%.

In addition to its major natural water resources, the Kinneret and the mountain and coastal aquifers, Israel already has several desalination plants in operation, and several more planned. Together they are projected to eventually provide for two-thirds of the country's water needs.

A new plant costing 1.5 billion shekels in Hadera was recently dedicated that is projected to supply 10% of the country's water. The Hadera plant uses reverse osmosis technology, which means the sea water does not have to be heated, as is done in larger plants in the world that are less environmentally friendly. The entire process of desalinating the water takes 35 minutes from the time it enters pipelines in the sea.

Israel's first large desalination plant is the largest of its kind in the world. It was founded in Ashkelon. It began work in 2005, and provides about 115 million cubic meters per year of desalinated water at good quality and low cost.

Israel's total water consumption is rising steadily, and it stands today at approximately two billion cubic meters per year. The forecast for 2015 is for 2.5 billion cubic meters per year. Most of the usage is for agriculture and industry, not home use.

Arab Boy from Jenin Saved in Afula Hospital

According to the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the antipathy of an Arab from Jenin was replaced by appreciation after his son's life was saved in HaEmek (Valley) Hospital in Afula. “My son and I are not the same as we were before this happened,” the boy's father said afterwards, “and I will share this with my family and friends.”

The incident began when 15-year-old Mohammed Kalalwe of Jenin noticed a deadly viper snake and tried killing it with a rock, but he was unable to avoid being bitten in his right palm. Within minutes, the boy's father, Hafed, grabbed his stricken son and rushed him to the Jenin Hospital which had no anti-serum. The hospital staff decided to send the boy by ambulance to the HaEmek Medical Center.

Hafed later related that he was genuinely afraid to be taken to the Jewish hospital because he was sure that he and his son would be ignored. His son's palm and arm were critically swollen and the pain was unbearable. The reality of HaEmek contrasted sharply with Hafed's negative expectations. They were immediately greeted in Arabic and rushed into the emergency room, where the multi-ethnic staff administered life-saving anti-serum and brought the boy back from the brink of death.

Asked by a hospital staffer how he felt about HaEmek Hospital and the Israelis with whom he had come into contact, the father answered, “Our people do not know the truth about you. My son and I are not the same as we were before this happened and I will share this with my family and friends. May Allah bless all of you.”