



MEI MEDIA WATCH

(A Survey of Editorials)

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Israeli raid on *Mavi Marmara*

Compiled by

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[On 30 May a flotilla of six ships left the coast of Cyprus carrying humanitarian aid to the people of the Gaza Strip who are under the Israeli blockade. In the early hours of Monday 31 May an Israeli commando unit stormed one of the ships *MV Mavi Marmara* to inspect the cargo. The activists aboard the ship resisted the raid and in the ensuing clash at least nine Turkish civilians were killed and scores of other human right activists and a few soldiers were injured. This incident which took place in the international waters evoked strong reactions from around the world and was widely commented upon. Given the importance of the incident, major editorials in the English language media are reproduced here. **Editor, MEI Media Watch.**]

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I. Israel

HAARETZ.com

Tel Aviv, Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

The price of flawed policy

When a regular, well-armed, well-trained army goes to war against a "freedom flotilla" of civilian vessels laden with civilians, food and medication, the outcome is foretold - and it doesn't matter whether the confrontation achieved its goal and prevented the

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flotilla from reaching Gaza. The violent confrontation, whether caused by poor military planning or poor execution, resulted from flawed policy, wars of prestige, and from a profound misunderstanding of the confrontation's meanings and repercussions.

The grave political damage caused by the confrontation is all too clear. Relations with Turkey will probably deteriorate further, and there may even be serious damage on the official level. The proximity talks with the Palestinians, which started lamely and with low expectations, will have trouble proceeding, now that Israel has attacked a ship intended to aid Gazans languishing under a four-year siege. Hamas claimed an outstanding victory without firing a single rocket, Egypt is under redoubled pressure to undermine the siege by opening the Rafah crossing, and it's reasonable to assume Europe and the United States will not be able to let Israel get away with a mere reprimand.

All these developments are little surprise to anyone, and shouldn't have surprised the policy makers in Jerusalem. Nevertheless, it seemed no one could resist the temptation to show the Israel Defence Forces' strength in a place the IDF should not have been in the first place. Because the question was not who would win the confrontation, but who would win more public opinion points. In this test, Benjamin Netanyahu's government failed completely. Israel let its policy of maintaining the siege on Gaza become an existential matter. This policy boomeranged and cost Israel its international legitimacy.

The decision makers' negligence is threatening the security of Israelis, and Israel's global status. Someone must be held responsible for this disgraceful failure. There is no way to convince Israel's citizens and its friends around the world that Israel regrets the confrontation and its results, and is learning from its errors, other than setting up a state inquiry committee to investigate the decision-making process, and to decide who should pay for this dangerous policy.

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/the-price-of-flawed-policy-1.293445>



Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

The rush to judgment

IDF response to violence could have been worse.

The details of precisely what happened before dawn on the deck of the *Mavi Marmara* streamed in throughout Monday, and some were still unclear as night fell. How many pro-Palestinian activists participated in the attacks on the naval commandos who abseiled from helicopters onto the Turkish ship – the one vessel where the soldiers, armed with paintball guns, encountered heavy violence? Which weapons were wielded by the mobs on the ship – “just” pipes, stones and knives, or guns, too? Were the gunshot wounds sustained by some of the

commandos fired from their own handguns, which had been seized by the violent activists? Or were some of those on this “humanitarian” mission armed?

Although so much remained to be clarified, there could be no doubt that the injury and losses of life were a premeditated act not by Israeli armed forces, who had been repeatedly told to exercise restraint, but by those on the *Mavi Marmara*.

Nonetheless, unsurprisingly, much of the international community rushed to pass judgment, and found Israel guilty. It was as if a pent-up torrent of rabid anti-Israel hatred had finally found its release. And the criticism, of course, will be understood as legitimation for the most violent of the activists, emboldening further such incidents.

Within hours of the confrontation at sea, Turkey ordered its ambassador out of Israel, endangering 61 years of diplomatic relations. The Turkish government, of course, was to some extent a sponsor of the flotilla, and its stance on Israel has become viciously hostile since Operation Cast Lead a year and a half ago. Demonic depictions of the IDF have become a feature of the country’s popular culture, in Turkish-produced TV dramas such as *Valley of the Wolves*, *Separation: Palestine in Love and War* and *Ayrilik* that have aired on Turkey’s state-run TV station.

Now, Jews living in Turkey are being advised to remain indoors. Israel has issued an alert, warning its citizens not to travel to Turkey out of fear they might be singled out for attack.

Closer to home, Israel’s hard-earned diplomatic relations with Jordan and Egypt might be hurt as the Arab League calls an emergency meeting slated for Tuesday. Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas’s choice of the word “slaughter” to describe what happened sheds renewed doubt on the fragile beginnings of peace negotiations with the Palestinians.

And amid rioting in Wadi Ara, Public Security Minister Yitzhak Aharonovitch is warning of possible conflagrations inside Israel instigated by Arab Israelis, reminiscent of the first and second intifadas.

In Europe, Britain’s Foreign Secretary William Hague “deplored” the loss of life – a relatively mild reaction. France asserted that “nothing could justify” the military operations against a “humanitarian initiative.” Sweden, Greece, Iceland, Germany, Denmark and Italy also criticized Israel in varying degrees, while Catherine Ashton, the EU’s high representative for foreign affairs, called for the lifting of the Israeli blockade on Gaza, foreshadowing the pressure Israel will be under in coming days as the EU prepares to convene an emergency meeting to discuss the ramifications of the *Mavi Marmara* incident. Spain, the current EU president, branded the storming of the flotilla “unacceptable.”

In this atmosphere, Prime Minister Binyamin Netanyahu’s decision to cut short his trip abroad, cancelling a planned meeting with President Barack Obama in Washington, was unavoidable.

What happened on the *Mavi Marmara* was tragic. But it did not justify the international response. Israel left Gaza in 2005, removing every civilian and every military remnant. It would have no quarrel with Gaza if it had not faced relentless missile attacks from the Strip, and if the

Hamas government there were not arming itself at every opportunity in pursuit of its declared goal of Israel's elimination.

Israel's restrictions on the flow of people and material into Gaza stem solely from the need to prevent the arming of Hamas and its terrorist allies. That was why the "Freedom flotilla" was intercepted, and that was why Israel had offered to transport the supplies aboard the six vessels over land once they had been checked.

The premeditated refusal of those aboard one of the ships to act peacefully when confronted by IDF troops was the trigger for the violence at sea. Confronted with such violence when they had been expecting non-violent protests, or at worst, low-level clashes, it is doubtful that the soldiers of any of the nations that rushed to criticize Israel would have acted any differently. Indeed, it is likely that the consequences would have been considerably worse.

Source: <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editorials/Article.aspx?id=177085>



Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

A turning point for Turkey

Erdogan has so far refrained from breaking off diplomatic ties, but the future of Israel's relations with its close ME ally is uncertain.

Relations between Israel and Turkey are at a new low and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan is doing a great deal to exacerbate the situation. In a speech to his country's parliament Tuesday (1 June), Erdogan called the *Mavi Marmara* conflict at sea a "bloody massacre" and warned, "today is a turning point in history. Nothing will be the same again."

So far, the Turkish premier has refrained from breaking off diplomatic ties with Israel. But with four Turkish citizens among those killed on the Turkish ship that was part of the "Peace Flotilla" to Gaza, the future of relations with Turkey, once Israel's closest friend in the Middle East, is uncertain.

The deterioration of Turkey's relations with Israel dates back to its decision to support Hamas's violent takeover of Gaza in 2007. But it is part of a broader trend in which Erdogan has been gradually steering his country away from a secular-based democracy toward radical Islam. Though it is a member of NATO, Turkey, with the strong-willed Islamist Erdogan at the helm, appears to be moving out of the orbit of western democracies and into a deepening alliance with a newly forming axis of power composed of countries such as Russia, Iran, and Brazil.

Erdogan has led Turkish opposition to US-supported sanctions against Iran's nuclear ambitions, attempting instead, together with Hugo Chavez, to put together an alternative deal that would

allow Iran to continue to enrich uranium. His country has officially hosted Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad as well as Sudan's President Omar Hassan al-Bashir, a man charged with war crimes and genocide.

Relations with the US have worsened since the House Foreign Affairs Committee of the US Congress voted in March (2010) to brand as genocide the 1915 slaughter of around 1.5 million Armenians by Ottoman Turks.

Israel, which in the past had put its lobbying power on Capitol Hill to work for Turkey, did not rush to help this time. Turkey could have prevented the vote if it had moved forward on negotiations with Armenia, which got off to a good start but stalled when Turkey insisted on tying normalization to a withdrawal of Armenian troops from the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey thus missed an opportunity to reach an agreement on the Armenian massacre through dialogue.

As evidence of Turkey's increasing religious fundamentalism, Efraim Inbar, the director of Bar-Ilan University's BESA Centre for Strategic Studies, quoting businessmen friends, notes that sipping a glass of *raki* (the Turkish equivalent of arak or ouzo) in public nowadays can hurt one's chances of receiving a government contract. Pressure is growing to conform to Muslim mores.

The situation has not always been so bleak. Erdogan's party, which won the 2002 national elections – the last held – with 35 percent of the vote, started off its term positively. In December 2002, Yoav Biran, then the acting director-general of the Foreign Ministry, made a well-publicized visit. In January 2003, two Turkish frigates participated in a joint US-Turkey-Israel search-and-rescue exercise in the eastern Mediterranean. There was considerable additional military cooperation.

And although there was a 46% fall in the number of Israelis visiting Turkey in 2009 to 300,000, in previous years the two countries had maintained a vibrant exchange of tourists.

The ascension to power of the AKP was widely perceived not so much as the Turkish public's turn to radical Islam as a rejection of the nepotism, corruption and overly zealous secularism of the previous political leaderships.

While members of Istanbul's Jewish community are currently reluctant to be interviewed for fear they might be singled out by extremists, one Turkish Jew who spoke off the record felt that the masses of demonstrators holding Hezbollah flags in front of the Israeli Embassy did not represent the vast majority of Turks. Channel 2's Middle East news analyst Ehud Ya'ari has pointed out that many talkbacks on Turkish Internet news sites have been pro-Israel.

With elections slated for November 2011, Erdogan was right when he said that his country is at a turning point in history. Turkey's leadership has a choice. It can continue on its present path. Or, however improbably and belatedly, it can yet change direction.

If it chose to, Turkey could have a highly constructive role in forging a better Middle East. As a successful Islamic democracy aligned with the West, it could be a powerful force for regional

peace and a uniquely valuable partner for the US. In the process, it would be improving its own global stature while helping to stabilize the world's most volatile region.

Source: <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editorials/Article.aspx?id=177170>

HAARETZ.com

Tel Aviv, Editorial, 3 June 2010, Thursday

Exit strategy: Lifting the Gaza blockade

Instead of insisting on continuing a failed policy, Netanyahu should pull himself together and minimize the damage of Israel's flotilla raid.

Like a robot lacking in judgment, stuck on a predetermined path - that's how the government is behaving in its handling of the aid flotillas to the Gaza Strip. The announcement by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu at the security cabinet meeting Tuesday (1 June) that the blockade of Gaza will continue and that Israel will keep on using force to prevent ships from entering Gaza's port suggests that the foolishness continues and no lessons have been learned from this week's incidents.

The Netanyahu-Ehud Barak government is oblivious to the impact of the failed takeover of the Turkish ship the Mavi Marmara, which ended with the killing of nine passengers. It is oblivious to the international condemnation of this country's actions - Israel once more finds itself isolated. Most serious of all, it is oblivious to the damage it is causing to Israel's strategic interests.

The lethal operation is making it difficult for the U.S. administration to rally a majority in the UN Security Council for new sanctions against Iran and is eroding the international front against the Islamic Republic, which the United States has put together with great diplomatic effort. The naval operation challenges the negotiations with the Palestinians and weakens the bargaining ability of Netanyahu vis-à-vis U.S. President Barack Obama and Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas. The operation also ruins essential relations with Turkey and will cost Israel in lost tourists and export deals.

Instead of taking the initiative and developing a political exit strategy from the crisis, Netanyahu and Barak are digging themselves deeper into the quagmire. The government apparently believes its own public relations, according to which Israel was the victim of "Al-Qaida supporters." If this is the case, it must immediately dismiss the heads of the security and intelligence services that failed to issue warnings in time and did not prepare accordingly to meet this new and dangerous enemy. How does Israel plan to deal with the Irish ship the Rachel Corrie, which is on its way to the Gaza Strip? Will it also argue that the Irish government, which has given this ship its backing, is a member of Al-Qaida?

Instead of insisting on continuing a policy that has failed, Netanyahu should pull himself together and minimize the damage of the naval operation. He must appoint a commission of

inquiry that will investigate what happened and lift the damaging and unnecessary blockade on the Gaza Strip, while developing a response to arms smuggling. Statesmanship is measured by the ability to distinguish between what is important and what is not. Netanyahu and Barak, who dragged Israel into a foolish struggle of prestige with Hamas and its supporters, erred by selecting a violent and damaging form of action. They failed in this week's test of statesmanship.

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/exit-strategy-1.293883>



Editorial, 4 June 2010, Friday

How to end the blockade

The best way to bring peace: help end Hamas rule.

Pressure is growing for Israel to lift its blockade on Gaza. Turkey's Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, an unabashed supporter of Hamas, has made maintaining diplomatic ties with Israel contingent on an end to the siege. British Prime Minister David Cameron, couching his anti-blockade rhetoric in amiable terms, suggested "as a friend" that Israel end the Gaza siege, since it had actually strengthened Hamas.

Even the US is expected to press for an end to the blockade, according to the *New York Times*. Already in June 2009, President Barack Obama, during his Cairo speech, claimed that the measure devastates Palestinian families and does not serve Israeli interests.

In truth, Israel has no desire to maintain the blockade. In August 2005, in an extremely painful and controversial move, Israel withdrew its military and uprooted 8,000 Jewish settlers from the Gaza Strip. Sadly, instead of using "unoccupied" Gaza as the stepping stone to a future Palestinian state, the fears of sceptical Israeli defence experts came true.

Buoyed by the contention that terrorist violence had forced Israel out of Gaza, and no longer hampered by the IDF's presence, Hamas and other Islamic extremists bypassed Egypt's unsatisfactory guard of the Philadelphi Route and smuggled into Gaza hundreds of Qassam rockets and weapons. Although the *Karine A*, with its cargo of Iranian weaponry, was intercepted in January 2002, other ships carrying arms might have gotten through.

In June 2006, in one of many attacks on IDF soldiers guarding the border between Israel and Gaza, Hamas kidnapped Gilad Shalit. In June 2007, Hamas violently took over control of Gaza from the Fatah-led Palestinian Authority, ruthlessly tracking down wounded PA supporters in hospitals and eliminating them.

Inside Gaza, Hamas instituted an extremist Islamic regime that discriminates against Christians, wages a war against secular lifestyles and promotes misogyny, including honour killings.

Outside Gaza, Hamas bombarded Israeli towns for months with thousands of mortars and rockets, gradually hitting more distant locations. In December 2008 Israel was forced to launch Operation Cast Lead to track down and destroy rockets and the makeshift plants where these rockets are made.

If, under international pressure, Israel were now forced to lift the blockade on Gaza, the concern is that war would follow. Hamas's conviction that terror works would be further vindicated. Its terrorists would obtain more long-range missiles that could reach Tel Aviv or even the outskirts of Jerusalem; it already has some of these, as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cautioned this week.

Israel could, in theory, announce that in the face of international criticism it is transferring responsibility for Gaza to the international community. In this scenario, Israel would seal its border crossings with Gaza. Supplies, medicine and other necessities would be transported via the Egyptian border. And Israel would, in theory, no longer be blamed for a supposed "humanitarian crises."

But one problem is that Egypt, which for decades has refused to take sole responsibility for Gaza, would never consent to this arrangement. Another is that Israel could never rely on international forces to scrupulously prevent the rearmament of Hamas. UNIFIL's failure to prevent Hezbollah from replenishing its stock of Iranian missiles in south Lebanon is proof that this doesn't work.

Another, more feasible, option is for Israel to recalibrate the list of goods that are included in the blockade, especially "dual-use" goods such as concrete, which can rebuild Gaza or create bomb-proof bunkers. A joint forum of Israeli and international organizations already meets weekly to reduce bottlenecks and address special requests. Perhaps, through cooperation with Egypt and reputable international aid organizations, a way could be found to ensure that, if things like concrete are allowed into Gaza, they are used for peaceful aims.

The real solution to the blockade, however, is in the hands of Gaza's people. Israel has made it clear that the siege would be lifted as soon as the political leadership in Gaza agreed to recognize the existence of the Jewish state, abandoned violence, released Shalit and adhered to past agreements achieved between Israel and the PA. Israel's struggle is not with the people of Gaza but with the radical regime there that is actively working to destroy the Jewish state.

Those truly interested in bringing peace and alleviating the plight of Gazans would best achieve their goal not by placing pressure on Israel to stop defending itself, but by convincing the residents of Gaza that Hamas's way is a dead end.

Source: <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editorials/Article.aspx?id=177431>

HAARETZ.com

Tel Aviv, Editorial, 5 June 2010, Saturday

Turkey is not an enemy

Compared to Egypt, Turkey has for years maintained close and cordial ties with Israel at all levels. Israelis have considered it a sister nation, trade with Turkey has expanded, and military cooperation has been perceived as a given.

Of all Israel's ties with Muslim countries, those with Turkey are the oldest. Until recently, in terms of strategy, that country was considered no less important than Egypt. The affair of the Gaza aid flotilla and the harsh and excessive comments by Turkey's prime minister against Israel have dramatically shaken the stability of these ties. Israelis now perceive Turkey as an enemy that should be denounced, or at least boycotted.

But it should be pointed out that compared to Egypt; Turkey has for years maintained close and cordial ties with Israel at all levels. Israelis have considered it a sister nation, trade with Turkey has expanded, and military cooperation has been perceived as a given. Visits by the leaders of both countries have also become a standard part of our political lives. Turkey's involvement in the indirect talks between Syria and Israel helped forge understandings between Damascus and Jerusalem, and normalization was not a subject Turkey and Israel disagreed on. Normalization actually preceded official ties between the two countries.

The change did not happen because of the victory of the Justice and Development Party and the election of Recep Tayyip Erdogan as prime minister. That party has been in power since 2002, and despite the dark prophecies that accompanied its rise to power, relations between the two countries continued normally. Turkey's anger exploded when its prime minister felt betrayed by former Prime Minister Ehud Olmert, who allowed Turkey to try to mediate between Israel and Hamas on the eve of Operation Cast Lead. Turkey realized then that Israel considers it a given; that it has to agree with all of Israel's whims.

Erdogan's criticism of Israel is not different in substance than the criticism by other friends of Israel in Europe and the United States. But his style is more blatant and direct. Erdogan does not agree with Israel on continuing the blockade of the Gaza Strip, and he is finding hard to understand, like many Israelis, the logic behind the blockade after four years in which it has not achieved Israel's goals. Erdogan's backing of the flotilla was just a continuation of the view that the blockade cannot go on.

Israel can ignore Turkey's serious arguments, slander its prime minister and describe the flotilla's activists as terrorists. This will not be enough to remove the stain of the operation that dragged Israel's image – not Turkey's, eight of whose citizens were killed – into the mud internationally.

Israel, which is now struggling to save its good name, considers public relations the sole means for achieving its goals. But without wise policy, public relations will prove empty of substance. The first step is to rehabilitate relations with Turkey, especially with its prime minister.

For this, political courage is necessary, which will lift the blockade on Gaza Strip and bring Turkey closer to the region's political process. Without all this, Israel can only continue being pleased with itself under the political blockade imposed on it.

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/opinion/turkey-is-not-an-enemy-1.294203>



Editorial, 5 June 2010, Saturday

Sailing into history

Israel simply cannot afford to continually underestimate the malevolent savvy of enemies like those behind the 'Freedom Flotilla.'

To more and more people, in more and more places worldwide, it all seems so obvious.

Obviously, Israel's blockade on Gaza is foul and illegitimate. Israel is capriciously, viciously making innocent people suffer.

Obviously, by extension, a humanitarian aid mission, bringing vital supplies to that beleaguered Gazan populace, is worthy of support, admiration and protection.

Obviously, too, any Israeli attempt to intercept such a heroic voyage is fundamentally illegal; the more so if it takes place in international waters, and is to be condemned. Equally, it falls upon the gutsy voyagers themselves, though they are so peaceably minded as to have ensured with great fanfare that even their cutlery is made of plastic, to resist any such interception as best they can.

Obviously, however, if violence does erupt aboard their boats, it is the responsibility of the Israeli aggressors who, never forget, initiated the interception. And if there is not merely violence, but death, the Israeli crime is all the greater. After all, if soldiers are facing off against helpless peace activists, how can the blame and the fault be directed at anyone but the Israelis?

So obvious. So widely accepted, with such appalling consequences. And so dishonest, so distorted, so false. The latest instalment of the big lie, in fact. A lie that Israel is labouring, with ever less international support, to puncture.

No Israel's blockade on Gaza is not foul, illegitimate or capricious. Show Israel another means of safeguarding its same vital self-defence needs, and doubtless it would be considered. But when Gaza has a leadership that is insistently committed to the destruction of Israel, when that leadership has spent years raining missiles down upon the heads of Israel's civilians even after the last (but one) Israeli soldier has long since left Gaza and the last Israeli settler too, and when

that leadership is exploiting every crack it can find in Israel's defences to smuggle in more weaponry, simple survival dictates that Israel needs to stop the flow.

The interception on the open seas was not illegal. As the state explained in its defence against petitions to that effect to the High Court of Justice, Israel is in a state of armed conflict with Hamas-run Gaza and regards itself as entitled under the laws of armed conflict to enforce its blockade. The flotilla had made plain its intention to break that blockade, and had rejected repeated non-forceful efforts to achieve its compliance.

Many of those aboard the six ships that Israel intercepted out at sea before dawn on Monday doubtless genuinely believed that theirs was a vital, constructive initiative. There are easier ways to get supplies into Gaza – the easiest way of all, of course, would be for them to encourage Hamas to renounce violence, and thus enable Israel to open the borders. But even their arduous journey could have ended to everyone's ostensible satisfaction had they permitted Israel, as it had repeatedly suggested, to bring the ships into Ashdod Port, there to search the cargo for dangerous content and, after the necessary checks, to facilitate the transfer of legitimate supplies overland to Gaza.

In the case of five of the six ships, indeed, there was no opposition when the naval commandos came aboard. But along with any true "peace activists" or "human rights activists" on the sixth, the *Mavi Marmara*, there were at least several dozen people for whom such respectable designations plainly do not apply. The IDF now says it believes that these "activists" were hired thugs, mercenaries who had been recruited in Turkey specifically to battle the commandos and who were subsequently found to have been travelling without ID papers and with envelopes of cash.

When Israeli commandos rappelled down the ropes from their helicopter overhead, brandishing paintball guns and anticipating being, perhaps, sworn at and spat upon, these "activists," as the IDF's footage shows, grabbed them and pummelled them with clubs and iron bars, producing knives and petrol bombs. They threw one commando over the side. According to the IDF, they also fired metal balls at the commandos from slingshots and, in one case, seized a commando's personal pistol and pointed it at his head. To judge by the partial soundtrack of the raid released by the IDF Spokesman's Office in midweek, they opened live fire on the commandos, too.

Yes, Israel initiated the incident. But no, Israel did not initiate the violence. The soldiers themselves have testified that they believed with good reason that their lives were in danger. And while some of what happened as the confrontation unfolded is still not known as of this writing, the film of the opening moments leaves no doubt as to how it began.

In two articles earlier this week, I focused on both the operational and the public diplomacy failures of the flotilla intercept. Operationally, the IDF evidently acted on the basis of flawed intelligence – a lacuna that remains hard to fathom. It knew full well that on board the *Mavi Marmara* were avowed Hamas supporters, activists of the IHH, an Islamic charity that Defence Minister Ehud Barak branded as a supporter of terrorism. The Al-Jazeera reporter on board had reported the night before that the activists were preparing "a surprise" for the Israeli forces. There had been broadcast talk of "battle" and "martyrdom." Why, then, would the IDF not have

expected heavy violence? Why then would it not have prepared a more effective intercepting party, and thus been better able to take control of the vessel with less loss of life?

Those questions have yet to be answered adequately. One can only hope that hubris is not at play here – the kind of hubris that leads one to misjudge one’s enemies. The kind of hubris born of interceptions of other ships and shipments to Gaza in recent years that were carried out successfully and quietly. The kind of hubris that led those said to have been responsible for the assassination of Hamas murderer and missile importer Mahmoud Mabhohuh in January (2010) to underrate the detective capabilities of the Dubai police force.

Other operational critiques are less well-founded. The notion that Israel should have disabled the vessels at their port of departure may sound enticing, provided such an operation had succeeded without trace, but the prospect of Israeli frogmen being apprehended at a harbour in Turkey was a nightmare scenario sensibly avoided. Similarly, the idea that Israel could have disabled the flotilla at sea by throwing chains or ropes around the propellers may sound fine in theory, too, but what if the sabotage had led to the sinking of the ships? As for sending out vessels to force the flotilla to change course, here, too, the practical considerations were anything but straightforward.

When it comes to the issue of public diplomacy, some of the officials within the various competing hierarchies are now privately acknowledging how detrimental it was to have withheld for hours on Monday (31 May) the IDF Spokesman’s footage of the commandos being battered to within inches of their lives. The delay was far longer than the necessary editing required. These were precious hours when Israel’s assertions that its highly trained soldiers had been overpowered by “peace activists” were being widely ridiculed, and the vicious anti-Israeli narrative was being circulated and concretized.

It was reasonable to worry about the impact of the footage on soldiers’ morale, though that concern should have been swiftly dismissed given the wider need to substantiate Israel’s account of events. It was not reasonable to put the film aside because there was still an operation to complete, or to save material for the Israeli evening news.

As in the past, some of those on the government’s PR front line, notably Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s spokesman Mark Regev, worked hard and effectively to articulate the official point of view. How much more resonant their comments would have been in those crucial first hours if that nauseating footage of soldiers being bludgeoned had been on the world’s TV screens as they spoke.

Belatedly, as ever, Israel released the critical footage. Belatedly, as ever, Israel remembered to reach out to Diaspora leaders.

Israel has for years neglected international public diplomacy because domestic political pressures are so relentless, because it refuses to internalize that others don’t automatically accept that its actions are moral, because it struggles to acknowledge the very importance of such outreach.

Unfortunately, what seems common to the atypical operational and the routine PR failures in this case is that hubris again – an arrogance that also stems from the utterly unjustifiable sense that our enemies need not be taken too seriously.

The “Freedom Flotilla” was an assault on Israel of fiendish malevolence. It tugged at the heartstrings of good-natured, under-informed people everywhere. For who could oppose bringing wheelchairs and baby clothes to the ordinary people of Gaza?

It set off from Turkey, a country widely perceived in the West as a reasonable, fair-minded nation, even as it moves ever deeper into the Iranian-Syrian embrace.

It carried activists and politicians and aid workers and journalists from a diverse range of countries and backgrounds, many of whom doubtless truly abhor violence and would have abhorred the notion of violence being committed in their cause. But along with them, camouflaged by them, on the *Mavi Marmara*, was a core of violent activists with a vicious agenda.

In part because Israel didn’t manage to force them to do so, very few people around the world this week penetrated that camouflage. Very few people drew a distinction between the peaceably minded and the violently intentioned, between the five ships that did not oppose the commandos, and the one that did.

But then Israel underestimated the pernicious savvy of those behind this latest challenge. And that constitutes indefensible conceit on Israel’s part, since this was and emphatically still is a challenge to Israel’s capacity to defend itself, to its international legitimacy, and thus to its very survival.

We need to do better. We can do better. We have highly intelligent political and military leaders. We are blessed with expertise in most every other relevant field too. It needs to be utilized more effectively, with wider consultation and deliberation, better decision-making processes, more effective execution.

Other ships are on their way. More of the unexpected, as well.

Every time Israel is outsmarted and outmanoeuvred – whether on the battlefield itself, or in the public diplomacy arena, or, as in this case, both – it loses a little more international support. It becomes more vulnerable to the divestures and the boycotters. It finds itself with fewer nations, fewer individuals even within the Jewish Diaspora, indeed fewer voices within Israel itself, willing and able to defy the tidal wave of prevailing wisdom and robustly champion its cause.

The history of Israel’s struggle against Islamic fundamentalism – as exemplified by Hamas, Hezbollah and Iran, with the “Freedom Flotilla” as its latest episode – is not generally being written from an Israeli vantage point these days. And history, they say, is written by the victors.

Source: <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Article.aspx?id=177502>

HAARETZ.com

Tel Aviv, Editorial, 6 June 2010, Sunday

Breaking out of the siege

If Israel is to break out of the international siege and strategic catastrophe it now faces, it urgently needs a different policy.

The intelligence failure and faulty planning in last week's operation to board the Mavi Marmara led to a crisis in Israel's foreign relations in the blink of an eye and a low in its standing in world public opinion. The international community is demanding an investigation into the incident and is roundly criticizing the siege Israel continues to impose on the Gaza Strip's 1.5 million residents. Friendly countries such as the United States and France are demanding that the Israeli government lift restrictions on the passage into Gaza of goods and raw materials for civilian use.

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in his usual manner, rushed to raise the spectre of the Iranian threat along with the adage that "the whole world is against us." Instead of locating the source of the fire scorching the diplomatic relations we built up with such effort, Netanyahu is following in the footsteps of his ostracized foreign minister, Avigdor Lieberman, accusing the world of hypocritical treatment of Israel.

In an effort to evade responsibility for the crisis and escape his obligation to fundamentally change his policy, the prime minister is distorting the nature of the criticism against his government and has plied it as hatred of the Jews.

Netanyahu and Lieberman are imposing a siege on a Jewish and democratic state that has professed to be a light unto the nations, but is becoming anathema among nations. The disagreement over halting construction in West Bank settlements and East Jerusalem sorely eroded the goodwill Israel had garnered in the wake of Netanyahu's declared support for a two-state solution. Last month's nuclear non-proliferation conference diverted attention from the Iranian nuclear program to Israel's nuclear capabilities. The summit of countries bordering the Mediterranean, which had been due to open today in Barcelona, was scrapped following Arab leaders' refusal to be in the company of the Israeli foreign minister. And finally, the proximity talks with the Palestinians are being portrayed as a recipe for perpetuating the deadlock in the peace process.

Reasonable governments of democratic countries act in accordance with the interests of their citizens. Even if the world is "hypocritical," as Netanyahu claims, he must fundamentally change his government's aggressive and inward-looking approach; it is not within his power to change the nature of the rest of the world.

A thorough investigation of the Mavi Marmara incident and the lifting of the siege against civilians in Gaza are essential steps, but they are certainly not sufficient. If Israel is to break out of the international siege and strategic catastrophe it now faces, it urgently needs a different policy.

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/breaking-out-of-the-siege-1.294408>



Editorial, 6 June 2010, Sunday

A resonant flotilla ruling from the High Court

Decisive legal support accorded to the IDF.

Contrary to the expectations of some, Israel's Supreme Court, sitting as the High Court of Justice, last week rejected petitions ensuing from the interception of the Gaza-bound flotilla.

The decisive legal support accorded the IDF is nothing to scoff at. This court is anything but a government lackey. Precisely because its decisions often go the other way, its current stance should not be downplayed or overlooked. It adds great moral weight to Israel's case internationally.

The Supreme Court has gained unique status in the world of jurisprudence. Even among the most liberal of democracies, it is unrivalled in its independence, in its readiness for interventionism and in its insistent fearlessness of stepping hard on the toes of other branches of government.

In his book *Coercing Virtue: The Worldwide Rule of Judges*; eminent American legal scholar Robert Bork declares that "Pride of place" of any supreme court's excessive judicial activism "goes not to the United States, nor to Canada, but to the State of Israel... Imagine, if you can, a supreme court that has gained the power to choose its own members, wrested control of the attorney-general from the executive branch, set aside legislation and executive action when there were disagreements about policy, altered the meaning of enacted law, forbidden government action at certain times, ordered government action at other times, and claimed and exercised the authority to override national defence measures."

This has not, by any means, earned the highest court in our land universal admiration at home. Domestically, it is frequently perceived as pushing a left-wing agenda, with critics charging that it does so on occasion at the expense of vital national interests and that the justices sometimes view themselves as functioning in a hypothetical World Court rather than in the beleaguered Jewish state.

Examples of the court's dramatic role in decision-making processes are numerous. In March 2000 it ruled that Arabs may settle on Jewish National Fund lands. In January 2003 it overturned a decision by the Central Election Commission to disqualify the Balad Party and its then leaders, Ahmed Tibi (Arafat's long-time adviser) and (the now absconded accused spy) Azmi Bishara from running for the Knesset. Time after time, it has ordered the rerouting of the security barrier, reducing the amount of West Bank territory it encompasses and bringing it closer to the Green Line, when it has felt that Palestinian humanitarian concerns were wrongly addressed in the

balance with defence considerations. Most recently, despite concerns over an escalated vulnerability to terrorism, it forced the opening of Route 443 connecting Modi'in and Jerusalem to Palestinian traffic.

Against such a background, the decision of this court – one that has consistently made itself a thorn in many an Israeli government's side – to unequivocally and in the strongest terms uphold the state's legal right to impede sea passage to Hamas-controlled Gaza should be heard and respected by democracies worldwide.

Any other reaction would attest to an untenable bias – to the dismissal of Israel's ultra-autonomous and honourable legal system, one that accepts appeals from avowed enemies of this state, gives their litigants fair hearings and recurrently rules in their favour. The fact that even terrorists and their advocates *are* free and *feel* free to petition this court, and can reasonably anticipate legal succour and victory, speaks volumes.

There is thus particular importance to the fact that Supreme Court President Dorit Beinisch staunchly defended Israel's right "to prevent direct access to Gaza, including imposing a naval blockade to thwart the smuggling of weapons and ammunition to Hamas, which for years has shelled Israel and launched terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians."

Noting that Israel offered to transport the ships' cargo to Gaza via Ashdod, Beinisch added that during the takeover of the *Mavi Marmara* "IDF soldiers were attacked with knives, clubs and metal rods. Attempts were made to snatch their personal weapons and to violently injure them. One of the soldiers was even thrown overboard."

Beinisch is no yes-woman. Indeed, her conclusions should reasonably be regarded as being as credible as those of an impartial fact-finding inquiry. She is certainly more objective than any neo-Goldstone inquisitor the UN might appoint.

Source: <http://www.jpost.com/Opinion/Editorials/Article.aspx?id=177581>

HAARETZ.com

Tel Aviv, Editorial, 8 June 2010, Tuesday

Stop avoiding the investigation

The flotilla affair still requires a thorough examination because the killing of Turkish civilians caused Israel tremendous damage abroad

Paragraph 1 of the Investigation Committees Law sets the terms for establishing a state commission of inquiry. It says the government is authorized to set up a committee to investigate "a matter of vital importance to the public at a given time that requires clarification." It is hard to think of an event or issue that fits that description better than the decision-making processes before the raid on the Turkish flotilla headed for Gaza last week.

The flotilla affair still requires a thorough examination because the killing of Turkish civilians caused Israel tremendous damage abroad, portrayed the state as a law-breaking hoodlum and increased tensions between Jewish and Arab Israelis. As more details come to light, the impression grows that the decisions to continue the Gaza blockade, confront Turkey and send naval commandos to intercept the ships were made offhandedly, without thorough consideration of the possible consequences.

Only a state commission of inquiry, whose members would be appointed by the Supreme Court, can ensure a thorough clarification of the policy and its consequences, without its members having to fear the people in power. Only such a body would have the authority and public standing to carry out a deep and fair probe that would not be taken for an attempt to whitewash the matter or pass the buck from the political leaders to the military.

But the government of Benjamin Netanyahu, Ehud Barak and Avigdor Lieberman, who are chiefly responsible for our policy on Gaza and decisions regarding the flotilla, is closing its eyes and refusing to see the incident as "a matter of vital importance to the public."

Instead of agreeing to a proper investigation, the politicians are hiding behind flimsy excuses. Netanyahu and Barak are trying to avoid a probe into their actions: They are talking about an internal inquiry by the Israel Defence Forces, which by nature involves only the soldiers and their commanders and not the politicians. Such an inquiry would involve a report to justify the action itself and the force Israel used against the flotilla. This would serve as a public-relations exercise rather than an instrument for finding out the truth and fixing the problems.

Barak has said that "the Chinese don't investigate either." It is interesting that this regime evokes the defence minister and Labour chairman's envy. He has forgotten that in a democracy, the government is accountable to the public and its decisions must be transparent. In crises like the flotilla affair, the only way to achieve this accountability and transparency is to set up a state commission of inquiry.

Source: <http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/stop-avoiding-the-investigation-1.294828>

II. Middle East

arab news.com
The Middle East's Leading English Language Daily

Jeddah, Editorial, 31 May 2010, Monday

Terror at dawn, Arab News

Israel has once again shown its true colours to the world with its murderous piracy in international waters.

What Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas has so rightly called “a massacre” saw the death of at least 10 peace activists on board the lead ship of the six-vessel Freedom Flotilla and the injury of scores others, as heavily armed Israeli commandos seized the convoy and sailed it toward their port of Ashdod. Israeli sources put the toll at nine. The full details of this outrage are not yet clear since the Israeli authorities are censoring all reports and used sophisticated jamming technology to halt media broadcasts from the vessels as they were assaulted. The truth will only become known when 700 journalists and peace activists are released and can give their testimony.

Meanwhile, the world is appalled at this blatant and deadly act of piracy. Governments around the globe are demanding an explanation for this crime and a full investigation of what occurred. International fury has only been increased by the threadbare excuses the Israelis have trotted out in an attempt to justify this carnage. According to them, they opened fire in self-defence when they were attacked with sticks and knives and two pistols as their commandos surged aboard the aid ships. Two pistols — against dozens of heavily armed Israeli soldiers who proceeded to shoot at least 19 people dead. What were the peace activists doing — passing the two pistols to each other with their dying breath? This was surely cold-blooded murder on the high seas, an international crime, which demands the highest penalty for those who planned and carried it out.

Israeli spokesmen were yesterday protesting they had to stop the Freedom Flotilla otherwise it would have breached their blockade and reached Gaza carrying weapons for Hamas fighters, as well as the 10,000 tons of aid that activists insist was the convoy’s only cargo. Given the news blackout, the Israelis will have plenty of time to ensure that when the ships’ holds are inspected, probably with orchestrated publicity, some weapons will indeed be found. Such a “discovery” would provide some sort of smokescreen for the brutal violence of their piracy. However the international community is unlikely to be taken in, even though planted weapons might provide a fig leaf for Washington.

Netanyahu was last night returning to Israel from Canada having cancelled his planned White House meeting with President Barack Obama. So far the US administration has said only that it “deeply regrets” the loss of life. This is a completely inadequate response to a brazen crime.

If the Israelis were intent on maintaining their illegal blockade of the 1.4 million Palestinians trapped in the Gaza Ghetto, there were other less deadly ways of stopping the Freedom Flotilla. They had sufficient notice to prepare booms or nets to entangle propellers and immobilize the convoy. They did not have to board with guns blazing and cause such a bloodbath.

This was Israel once again at its most violent and unacceptable worst with vicious behaviour that demands utter condemnation as well as real sanctions from the international community.

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article59667.ece>

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

Israel's logic of the hammer

We deplore unconditionally the Israeli slaughter of peace activists in the Freedom Fleet, and the logic behind the attack and the men who ordered it represent a grave danger to this country and, in the end, to the entire world.

The utterly inappropriate use of overwhelming force calls to mind the cliché that problems look like nails to a man who has a hammer. However, there are many political actors with hammers, and not all of them see all external challenges as nails.

Ask yourself, how much experience would a politician need to see that the Freedom Fleet was a matter that called for diplomatic tact and careful handling? Might not even an average university student of politics realize it, or even a teenager who aspired to one day study the affairs of the world?

Israel's decision to use its hammer against activists transporting aid to a desperate populace demonstrates unalloyed incompetence. We have spoken often in this space about how the settlers have hijacked the Israeli political sphere; the necessary condition for that event, however, was the absence of any political leader who could stand up to an obviously doomed ideology.

Israel's leaders need to wake up and see that the world has changed and that they have become incapable of doing what is in their own people's best interests. Seeing the root of the problem does not require a discourse in ideology or colonialism. A simple glance at history tells the story of the collapse of Israeli common sense.

Regardless of how one feels about the right to a Jewish homeland, one must acknowledge that the leaders of the Zionist movement and Israel in its early decades achieved outsized political, economic and military successes.

The world, however, has changed, and Israel's political class does not have the mettle to meet it. From roughly 1967-87 the Palestinians in the occupied territories were largely subdued, but generations turned over among Israelis and Palestinians. The Islamists rose up among the Palestinians, and the hammers of history can no longer isolate Israel from the Palestinian people. The Israeli leadership, meanwhile, is trapped in its logic of the hammer; it lacks the ability to make a deal or even tie up loose ends.

The calibre of Israel leaders has deteriorated so thoroughly that the danger they present is obvious even to heretofore unshakeable quarters as the US military and security chiefs – David Petraeus and James Jones have both said publicly this year that uncritical US backing for Israel poses a security threat to US troops and interests.

Alas, the same tragic logic behind the Freedom Fleet massacre also threatens us; instead of addressing such relative trifles as Ghajar and Shebaa, Israel's leaders often look north and see only nails.

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=115429

gulfnews.com

Dubai, Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

UN has failed people of Gaza too many times

The world body has declined to hold Israel accountable for the killing of innocent people.

Again the international community fails the children of Gaza and those who support peace and justice around the world. All peace-loving people were momentarily optimistic that the United Nations Security Council would condemn the Israeli terrorist attack on the Freedom Flotilla and perhaps demand the immediate lifting of the Israeli blockade. For some reason, maybe because of the global outrage reflected in the spontaneous demonstrations in the Middle East and Europe, we thought the Security Council would finally come to its senses and hold Israel accountable for the crime, perpetrated in international waters.

But the Security Council refrained again from pointing the finger at the obvious culprit. Instead, a fluid and unbinding so-called "formal presidential statement" said it "regrets the loss of life and injuries".

Of course, the statement said the council "expresses its condolences" to the families of those killed in the Israeli attack.

The families don't want the UN's condolences. They were not waiting for a sympathetic note. They are looking for justice. And the world again failed them.

Those families and the oppressed people of Gaza, who have been denied the basic means of living for the past three years, now look at the Arab governments to take action against Israel. They surely are not expecting a military reaction. But at least all ties with Israel must be ceased. Embassies closed. The so-called peace talks suspended.

The Israelis will act in this way again and again until they realise there are real consequences for their continuing aggression.

An Arab emergency summit must be convened to determine the next collective step. The Arab League has recently endorsed the so-called 'proximity talks' between the Palestinians and the Israelis. The question today is: Aren't these talks pointless at this stage?

Source: <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/un-has-failed-people-of-gaza-too-many-times-1.635509>

THE JORDAN TIMES

Amman, Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

No excuse

Displaying, yet again, utter disregard for international humanitarian law and contempt for the sanctity of life, Israeli commandos yesterday attacked the Gaza-bound aid flotilla and cold-bloodedly murdered several activists on board a Turkish ship.

Their mistake: trying to deliver much-needed aid to the 1.5 million Gazans suffering under a prolonged Israeli blockade that constitutes, according to the Amnesty International's director for the Middle East and North Africa, "collective punishment under international law".

If those responsible for reinforcing this same law wish to preserve it as a credible yardstick, they need to take urgent measures to deal with this buccaneer attack.

Many world leaders expressed "shock" and "condemnation" in the face of the shootings that they "deplored" and called it, with various degrees of censure, a "grave act", a "massacre", a "terrorist act" or a "very painful act".

Whatever the name, killing people for the simple reason that they want to aid fellow human beings in dire need qualifies plainly as murder, and as such, the action has to be investigated and dealt with accordingly.

As Norwegian Prime Minister Jens Stoltenberg said, "this underlines that the blockade of Gaza should be ended as soon as possible", because "this type of military action is unacceptable... It is clear that this is a use of force against civilians".

Expressing "regret" for the loss of life should not get Israel off the hook. Its excuse that it "acted in self-defence" is a tall tale, for the world knows, as well as Israel, that the ship convoy was not there to wage war, but to alleviate the misery of the people of Gaza.

Israel alleged that its forces “were attacked by protesters” - their ship being stormed by Israeli troops, that is indeed convincing! - “but it begs credibility that the level of lethal force used by Israeli troops could have been justified”, said Malcolm Smart of Amnesty International, which called the act exactly what it was: use of “excessive force”.

People of conscience are outraged. Israel’s friends and foes alike are at least unsettled, at most outraged by the “all out of proportion to any threat posed” act. So, then, isn’t it time to stop Israel from acting with impunity and held accountable for its offences?

The international humanitarian law is there. It only needs to be applied fairly.

Source: <http://jordantimes.com/?news=27055>

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Gaza's long absent friends

As it well should, the list continued to grow on Tuesday (1 June) of those who were condemning and demanding explanations for Israel’s heinous use of disproportionate force against the apparently unarmed peace activists aboard the Freedom Fleet.

Many are expressing their shock and dismay, and they have loudly decried the blockage of Gaza and insisted on easing the isolation of the enclave. Many have in the last 48 hours held up a mirror to show the suffering of the Gazans to the outside world.

That, we say without any doubt, is a positive development. However, we would like to turn that mirror on those so lately appalled and ask, where have you been for the last four years?

Gaza has been suffocating long since before this year, well before Israel’s berserker assault on the tiny strip of land in December 2008 and January 2009 – this latest iteration of an Israeli chokehold on Gaza began when Hamas won parliamentary elections in 2006 and was tightened when it routed the forces of Fatah to seize control of Gaza in June 2007.

On Tuesday (1 June), Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak said he would open the Rafah border crossing with Gaza to allow the arrival of humanitarian aid. Huzzah! Merely the mention of Egypt – which is callously driving a steel wall dozens of meters deep into the ground at the border in order to help its Israeli allies stem the flow of alleged contraband to Gaza – is enough to make obvious the hypocrisy of the crocodile tears flowing so freely these last two days.

Let us also consider the curious case of Kuwait: the detention of a Kuwaiti national among the Freedom Fleet's activists has spurred Parliament there to urge the country's withdrawal from the 2002 Arab Peace Initiative. But the peace initiative still looked good after Israel's wanton devastation of Gaza 18 months ago? Don't get us wrong, your moral outrage today is nice, but – as long as we're asking questions – just why did the country wait so long to forcefully call for an end to Israel's siege of Gaza?

In addition, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and the Arab League should all also look straight into that mirror and ask, what have we done to break the siege of Gaza? What work have we done to put the blockade on the world's agenda? What have we done to at least protest the siege?

We know the answer. That answer also goes a long way toward explaining the future dynamic of this region. When critical phenomena arise, governments and official institutions are almost entirely absent. Their absence has left broad space for Iran to grasp a central role in Gaza, for example; throughout the wider region, an array of non-state actors has taken advantage of the vacuum to create roles for themselves. One of the great dangers facing the Middle East is the potential for these non-state actors to gain control over the course of events here.

The cause of this peril – the inertia of the Arab states – has been highlighted by their loud protestations since the attack early Monday (31 May) morning. We would remind them that they would do much more for Gaza – and the entire region – if they were to give up some of their sweat and their money, instead of their blood and their pronouncements.

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=115454



Cairo, Editorial, 3-9 June 2010

In cold blood

It was like a scene in a bad film. Turmoil in high seas, human rights activists pitted against Israel's elite forces. Israel's Shayetet 13 did the stunts, 700 activists from 40 countries made up the rest of the cast; Ehud Barak directed, and the whole world watched in shock and horror.

Once again, Israel paraded its arrogance of power against civilians armed with nothing but a human conscience and the resolve to break the silence and challenge the injustice.

The activists had to make a hard and long journey -- one that they knew would take them into harm's way -- to deliver medicine, food, and building material to the Palestinians who lost their homes in Gaza. Now they are victims themselves, some of them killed, others wounded, and others still held captive by the Israelis.

It is clear to anyone who believes in the injustice of the siege on Gaza that the activists acted in keeping with international law and the Geneva Conventions. They organised the Freedom Flotilla and took it to Gaza to break an unjust siege. Little did they know that Israel would do anything to keep the injustice going!

This is not the first time for the Israelis to show disrespect for human lives, Palestinian or otherwise. Activist Rachel Corrie, who dared to challenge the demolition of Palestinian homes, ended up dead under the tracks of an Israeli bulldozers. Professor Noam Chomsky, Jewish, when he went to Israel to lecture at Birzeit University, was detained and deported. When the Freedom Flotilla sailed to bring hope to the Palestinians, the Israelis made a point of reacting with excessive force.

Watching Israel's preparations to confront the Freedom Flotilla, one gets the impression that Israel's very existence was in danger. Israel brought gunboats, helicopters, and its elite units, all ready for a sea battle. It also prepared a camp for the activists it planned to imprison. Then its spin-doctors told the world that the peace activists were in the wrong. Gaza, a place under siege in which 85 per cent of the population lives under the poverty line, was suddenly being portrayed as a land of milk and honey by the Israeli propaganda machine.

Israel acted so irresponsibly because it doesn't want anyone to challenge its occupation of Palestinian land or its abuse of the Palestinians. Israel acted like a beast that doesn't want anyone to free the prey it was devouring. Israel wanted time to devour its prey, and anyone who dared challenge its actions was in threat of mortal injury.

The Israeli occupation of the West Bank and Gaza, now in its 43rd year, has taken Israel to the far right, giving it a government of extremists who want to grab land, continue the occupation, place the Palestinians into segregated cantons, and shut up anyone who would object. The Israeli government hasn't shown an ounce of remorse over the attack on the Freedom Flotilla.

At the roots of Israel's mounting madness, there is only one thing: occupation. At the heart of Israel's fascism and racism, there is only one thing: occupation.

Israel will not have a sane government until it abandons the occupation, Vargas Llosa, the Peruvian writer, once told Gideon Levy. The two were demonstrating against the tearing down of houses in the Sheikh Jarrah section of Jerusalem when Llosa said that the demolishing of houses was utterly absurd.

Israel is making no friends. Several countries have already told Israeli ambassadors what they thought about the Freedom Flotilla killings. But it is the reaction among Jewish communities in Europe and America that matters most.

The pro-Israeli French Bernard-Henri Levi voiced his concern over the continuation of the occupation, and 5,000 Jewish European intellectuals signed a "Call for Reason" in which they urged an end to the occupation.

The Israeli government, with its annexation wall, destruction of homes, and attack on peace activists, is a liability to Jews around the world, doing more damage than anything anti-Semitism can ever do. Who can defend the crime against the Freedom Flotilla?

Placating the Israeli government would be wrong, for it would lead to more intransigence on its part. The international community must isolate the Israeli government. It must impose a system of escalating sanctions against it, until it ends its occupation of Palestinian and Syrian land.

Ending the Israeli occupation is not just in the interest of Arabs, but also of Jews and the entire world.

Source: <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/2010/1001/ed.htm>



Jeddah, Editorial, 3 June 2010, Thursday

Another aid ship

A seventh vessel with aid for Gaza was reportedly still steaming toward Palestine last night.

The MV “Rachel Corrie” was apparently delayed in Cyprus for 48 hours by mechanical problems and was therefore not part of the Freedom Flotilla, which the Israelis intercepted so murderously on Monday (31 May).

This further brave challenge to the illegal Israeli blockade by the Irish-flagged vessel is the more powerful because aboard her is a Nobel Peace laureate from Northern Ireland, Mairead Corrigan Maguire, who has insisted that there are no arms in the cargo. The ship itself is named after an American peace activist whom the Israelis crushed with a bulldozer in 2003 when she sought to stop the illegal demolition of Palestinian homes in the West Bank.

The Israelis once more have the choice of either mounting another violent piratical attack on an unarmed vessel or letting it steam on to waiting Gaza. Their illegal blockade of the luckless 1.5 million Palestinians there is already in ruins. In response to Monday’s (31 May) outrage, the Egyptians have thrown open their border with Gaza. Moreover, the MV Rachel Corrie will certainly not be the last aid ship to seek to run through the Israeli cordon. The world has been revolted by the Freedom Flotilla massacre and the demand the inhuman blockade be ended has never been louder. Even Washington has protested, with Secretary of State Hillary Clinton announcing Tuesday (1 June) that the continued isolation of the Gaza Palestinians was unacceptable.

In an ideal world, the United States could send a warship to escort the Rachel Corrie safely into Gaza. It is after all only too happy to patrol the Indian Ocean to guard against Somali pirates. Why should protecting unarmed shipping on a perfectly legal voyage to Gaza be any different?

Perhaps, however, the Americans are mindful of what happened to one of their own warships, the spy ship USS Liberty which in 1967 was sunk in these same waters by Israeli warplanes with the loss of 34 American lives. Israel has always been a spitting cobra when cornered, even when it comes to attacking their principal ally and major founder.

Indeed it is the general reaction of the Israeli public to Monday's (31 May) piracy which should give the world cause for serious concern. Remarkably few Israelis deplore what their forces did. While most make a point, however insincere, of regretting the loss of life, they have little doubt in their own minds that everything that was done was entirely justified. Some added that the people aboard the Freedom Flotilla brought their own deaths on themselves by acting "illegally."

We must wonder how a population so steeped in the belief that might is right and that Israel can continue to behave just as it likes, regardless of world opinion and international law, can ever be persuaded to back a just and lasting settlement for the Palestinians. It is, therefore, emerging that the greatest hindrance to peace lies not so much in the terms of any settlement but in the blinkered arrogance of what appears to be the majority of Israelis.

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article60448.ece>

THE JORDAN TIMES

Amman, Editorial, 3 June 2010, Thursday

Dangerous and endangering

Does anybody really doubt anymore that Israel is a rogue state? Like a rogue state, it flouts international law at will and has done so for over half-a-century. The country has no time for criticism or dissent, and those who challenge its rule risk deportation, imprisonment or death.

The media are censored and blocked from reporting events, even if in a more sophisticated way than in other countries where there is no free media. And of its various religious communities, the country defines itself as belonging to only one.

Moreover, some in Israel even go so far as to consider that their rule derives from divine entitlement.

These are the actions and characteristics of a rogue state. And yet, Israel's spokespeople continue to contend that Israel values freedom, democracy and the rule of law. So convinced are they,

apparently, by their own rhetoric that they cannot see how incongruous they sound, how self-delusional they are.

It's an extremely dangerous state of affairs, and has always been so. Israel has time and again caused regional conflagrations that resulted in great loss of life and great instability. And Israel's continued occupation and settlement of land snatched in 1967, and the denial of the rights of refugees will only continue to cause more violence and more tension.

Arab countries cannot be blamed for Israel's reckless disregard for human life, international law and common human decency. Arabs have offered Israel full peace and normalisation on the only condition that the country abides by international law.

This offer has been ignored and repelled, thus shaming the entire Arab world.

Moreover, Arab countries now face a situation in which their own citizens have been put in mortal danger by Israel's reckless behaviour.

Thirty Jordanians were aboard the aid ships trying to breach the illegal and immoral Israeli blockade on Gaza Strip. Those onboard had noble aims. The Israeli reaction amounted to nothing less than piracy on the high seas. Imagine, if anybody else had similarly intercepted a ship with Israeli activists? What would the Israeli reaction have been?

The Arab world needs to formulate a proper response to the latest Israeli outrage. Withdrawing, until further notice, the Arab Peace Initiative might be a first step.

Source: <http://jordantimes.com/?news=27126>



Muscat, Editorial, 3 June 2010, Thursday

The killers

Israel knows best how to kill peace and innocent people. There is no other plausible explanation or rationale behind Israeli naval forces' barbaric action against a convoy of ships carrying humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip. Yesterday's dawn raid on the main aid ship in international waters was another reminder to the civilised world that Israelis would go to any length to torpedo international efforts to help Palestinians and sabotage plans to advance peace attempts to resolve the Middle East conflict. What was more reprehensible was the commando raid in which at least 20 peace activists were killed and scores injured. It was an unprovoked action against people of different nationalities that were carrying food, building materials, medicines and other essential goods to 1.5 million Palestinians trapped in Gaza by the Israeli

blockade. Israelis said their armed forces had acted on provocation from the main ship. But what they are not telling the world is why did the commandos storm the aid ship in the first place when the Jewish state knows fully well that the six-ship convoy with hundreds of aid workers was due to deliver its cargo later in the day? The armed interception of the flotilla, killing of passengers, mostly Turks, and forceful towing of the convoy to an Israeli port is outrageous, to say the least, and deserves international condemnation and action.

Global reaction to the senseless raid on aid ships is swift. The Sultanate, including Shura Council, condemned the Israeli aggression on the 'Freedom Flotilla' and urged the international community, parliamentary councils in the world and human rights organisations to take practical steps to deter Israel and stop its recurrent aggression on the Palestinian people and humanitarian initiatives. While the Arab League called for an emergency session today (3 June), there were protests and demonstrations in many Arab, Muslim and European capitals and the anger was more pronounced in Turkey than in any other country. The bloody incident hurt the feelings of Ankara which was a close ally of Israel at one time but their relations started falling apart after the Israeli invasion of Gaza in 2008-9. Moreover, the flotilla was partly sponsored by a Turkish aid organisation and many victims were Turks. As a retaliatory measure, Turkey withdrew its ambassador to Israel and called for an emergency meeting of the UN Security Council. Jordanians too wanted diplomatic ties with Tel Aviv severed and Greece suspended a military exercise and put off Israel air force chief's visit. In other European capitals, Israeli envoys had been asked to explain the massacre aboard the aid ship.

The raid has brought into sharp focus the crippling Israeli blockade of Gaza and the international community's apathy to Gazans' plight. So far Israel has been getting away with every atrocity it has been perpetrating against the Palestinians and this time the world should not allow it to happen. It should be isolated and punished for yesterday's crime, which is not only against the Palestinians but others also. What is appalling in the sordid drama is Israel indulged in the heinous act just on the eve of its Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's visit to Washington to confer with the Obama administration officials on the progress of the current proximity talks to restart the Middle East peace dialogue. Israel's peace postures are a charade and the Jewish state is taking the world, particularly the US, for a ride. It's time President Obama sees through Israel's game. Will he act now?

Source: http://www.omantribune.com/index.php?page=editorial_details&id=1635&heading=Editorial

THE DAILY STAR

LEBANON

Beirut, Editorial, 4 June 2010, Friday

Israel's game is coming to an end

Benjamin Netanyahu as visionary? This was the conclusion of a Ha'aretz editorialist this week, after Israel's bloody attack on a Turkish ship in international waters, loaded with

aid for Gaza.

Of course, it was a tongue-in-cheek description, which detailed the Israeli prime minister's visions and predictions in recent months: "the world is against us," and there's no way that the government can agree on peace with the Arabs.

Netanyahu's recent actions have proven him right, the writer said, based on the international diplomatic and political reactions to Monday's (31 May) massacre, and the absence of any realistic hope for a peace process.

Netanyahu's tactic of considering everything an existential threat to Israel has produced this situation.

Hamas is a threat: Pull off an assassination in Dubai, and expect no repercussions in allied countries.

Hezbollah is a threat: Since the party hasn't attacked Israel recently, accuse it of obtaining weapons, and expect no repercussions for Israel's credibility.

The world wants an alternative to Hezbollah and Hamas, a Palestinian Gandhi: When civilian activists seek to get aid to the Gaza strip, murder them on the high seas and expect no repercussions for Israel's image.

The struggle today is over who, if anyone, will investigate the latest incident. Netanyahu might approve an inquiry, while Ehud Barak is digging in against such a move, to protect the Israeli military. There are indications that the game is coming to an end, because business as usual is unacceptable and unfeasible.

A round of elections, to produce a more workable governing coalition, is a strong possibility. But the deeper issue is that Israel's political structure is deteriorating, as its governments face accusations that were unthinkable in the past: political myopia, technical inefficiency, pure stupidity and self-deception.

If Netanyahu's intention is to make Israel "fit in" in the Middle East, he might be succeeding, as political dysfunction, and the waste of a people's energy and talents, are becoming the norm.

This unstable situation in Israel can easily spiral out of control, and neighbouring countries should be aware of the consequences. It doesn't matter which side in Lebanon is right – Israel will use Hezbollah's arms as a pretext to attack, versus Israel doesn't need Hezbollah's arms as a pretext to attack – the result is the same. Israel is likely to lash out.

Lebanon, meanwhile, stumbles along with its efforts to hold a "National Dialogue" on how to defend the country. The intense media scrutiny of the formal sessions in Baabda Palace appears to reduce the possibility that anything meaningful can be debated or decided there.

But behind the scenes, Lebanon's leaders, whether or not they hold state office, should be ready for the possible scenarios, whether Israel implodes, or explodes, and sends the shrapnel in our direction.

Source: http://www.dailystar.com.lb/article.asp?edition_id=10&categ_id=17&article_id=115533

gulfnews.com

Dubai, Editorial, 4 June 2010, Friday

Arab League's inaction is deplorable

Asking the UN to investigate the massacre and lift the siege on Gaza is a waste of time

Arabs, still in shock over the Freedom Flotilla massacre, were hoping the Arab League meeting would call for strong action. The obvious demand of the public was for Arab governments to break the crippling Israeli siege of Gaza, which has been sucking the life out of the Strip for the past three years.

The siege, imposed by Israel, is a violation of all international laws and humanitarian norms. The United Nations Security Council has called repeatedly for an end to the blockade. So has the European Union. But Israel dismissed every call. Not only that, it went ahead and massacred, in front of the whole world, the peace activists who tried to deliver urgently needed food and medical supplies to Gaza.

On Wednesday night (2 June), Arab foreign ministers met in response to the massacre. The result of the meeting was not only disappointing but in fact embarrassing.

"The Arab League will go to the Security Council and demand lifting of the blockade from Gaza," Secretary-General Amr Moussa told reporters after the meeting.

What a waste of time. Arab governments want the Security Council to ask for the blockade to end. This amounts to a cruel joke.

First, the blockade was not imposed by the UN. Secondly, why would Israel listen to the UN now when it has been defying the will of the international community for years?

Thirdly, the UN on Tuesday (1 June) called for an investigation into the Freedom Flotilla massacre and Israel rebuffed the call outright.

Arab ministers surely know these facts. The conclusion then is that they don't actually want to act. Inaction is the real name of the ridiculous statement issued by the Arab League meeting.

The question on every Arab's mind today is why Arab governments don't just go ahead and break the siege of Gaza.

Source: <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/arab-league-s-inaction-is-deplorable-1.636398>

gulfnews.com

Dubai, Editorial, 5 June 2010, Saturday

US reaction to flotilla attack is unacceptable

With his words Obama has failed the Palestinians, and his duty to seek justice

The Obama administration has failed in its duty to truth and justice in its reaction to the state-sponsored terrorist attack on the Freedom Flotilla. After a peaceful flotilla of ships was pirated on the high seas, innocent people shot dead and their goods stolen, Obama only managed to say that "it was a tragic situation" when he commented on the attack and loss of life.

Obama should have called for legal action to be taken against those who committed the piracy. He should have called for the humanitarian goods to be delivered, without hindrance, to the people of Gaza. Instead, in a bizarre interview with Larry King, Obama managed to infuriate the Arab world by saying that there had been "missiles raining down on Israeli cities along the Israel/Gaza border", which never happened. It is true that a few missiles were fired over civilian targets, which was wrong.

But Hamas stopped firing the missiles a long time ago, and it was outrageous that during this interview Obama failed to speak of the slaughter of Gazans during the Israeli invasion last January (2009). He portrayed the Gaza blockade as some kind of economic problem, rather than the humanitarian outrage that it is. He said that there was "a blockage up that is preventing people in Palestinian Gaza from having job opportunities and being able to create businesses".

Obama should have taken the opportunity of the terrible Israeli attack to look at the bigger picture and speak of the core issues of the Palestinian conflict with the Israelis, which are the continuing occupation of the West Bank, and the blockade of Gaza. He should have stood by what he said at the beginning of his presidency when he spoke about the need for a complete freeze on building in the illegal colonies on the West Bank. His present silence condemns him, and he needs to recognise that his policies have drifted into ineffective irrelevancy.

Source: <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/us-reaction-to-flotilla-attack-is-unacceptable-1.636822>



Dubai, Editorial, 5 June 2010, Saturday

Flotilla and Turkish-Israeli ties

Storming of the flotilla bound for Gaza has come at a visible cost. Turkish-Israeli relations are on the rocks. If anger and resentment prevailing in Ankara are to be believed, their bilateral relations are bound to nosedive.

Tel Aviv's trigger-happy tendency has pushed one of the major Islamic countries to recast its ties with the Jewish state. At the same time, it has proved beyond doubt that not only does Israel disregard public opinion; it also scales very low its relationship with the Muslim world. Had this not been the case, it would not have attacked the vessels carrying peace activists and aid for the besieged residents of Gaza. By compelling Ankara to think otherwise, Israel has sabotaged its reconciliation prospects with the world at large.

The Turkish ship, Marmara, which was the target of the Israeli commando raid on the high seas that left nine people dead and scores injured, is now the subject of international wrath. For the pundits of international law and inter-state relations, it is tantamount to an act of war against Turkey. The fact that it was attacked in the international waters and held in arrest since then — as a thriller from a Hollywood film — are enough to provoke large scale ramifications. Turkey is exceptional by virtue of the fact that it had the courage to strike a balance in its foreign relations by reaching out to the West and Israel —and, at the same time, boast itself as the centre of Muslim civilisation. Israel should have opened up to the Muslim and Arab world by valuing its ties with Ankara. But the manner in which Tel Aviv snubs the Muslim countries that have recognised the Jewish state out of realpolitik largesse is quite despicable. This will neither help the Zionist entity further its international image nor address the imbroglio of security and peaceful coexistence in the region.

As things stand today, a rupture is round the corner. The two countries that had staged regular joint military training exercises and had an open line of communication over a host of bilateral affairs will miss the fraternity. Moreover, it comes as a blow to the efforts of modernity that Ankara had been carefully treading in its endeavour to make the country a hub and an inevitable link between the East and the West. It will come as an opportunity to radical elements who will try to cash in on this incident by evoking historic and religious disenchantment. Turkish Primer Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan was correct when he said that Israel's mindless jingoism will lead to losing its best friend in the region. As a measure of damage control, Israel will be better advised to lift the siege on Gaza, allow aid ships to sail into the enclave and order an inquiry into its naval misadventure. The Flotilla flop is Tel Aviv's diplomatic and humanitarian fiasco. It has only added to its chronology of defiance and disregard for civilised norms of interstate relations. Dumping Turkey would not be as easy as dispensing with the Goldstone findings. The flotilla will come to haunt it, come what may.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/June/editorial_June9.xml§ion=editorial&col



Jeddah, Editorial, 6 June 2010, Sunday

Ship shenanigans

Will the world now finally wake up to the brutality of Israeli government?

Another aid ship, the Irish-flagged Rachel Corrie, has been boarded and seized by the Israeli Navy in a further act of piracy. As with last week's murderous assault on the main Freedom Flotilla in which nine peace activists died in a hail of bullets, the attackers used sophisticated communications jamming equipment before the attack. Last night (5 June), therefore, the world only had the Israelis' word that the ship had been captured without resistance from the largely Irish crew.

The vessel, which had quite legitimately refused orders to alter course away from Gaza, was reportedly on its way to the port of Ashdod in Israel. From there, the Netanyahu government announced the aid would be taken on to Gaza once it had been inspected and forbidden items, such as building materials had been removed.

Hamas however has been refusing to accept the original cargo seized from the Freedom Flotilla, unless everything it contained, including cement and building materials were released. It was expected that it would take the same stance over the latest goods that were destined for the 1.6 million Palestinians blockaded in Gaza. This may at first glance seem self-defeating, but since Egypt, in response to Israel's bloody piracy last week, has thrown open its border and effectively ended the blockade, it must be hoped that the sufferings of the entrapped Gaza population are already being relieved.

With even Washington now saying openly that the continued Gaza blockade is insupportable, the Israelis are almost completely isolated diplomatically. Their bloody high seas aggression against the Turkish vessel the MV Mavi Marmara has seriously damaged their relations with both Ankara and Cairo. It remains to be seen how tough a response the Turkish government will take. Certainly the majority of Turks has been horrified at Israel's deadly behaviour and there is little mood to protect arms and trade deals which the Israelis have fostered between the two countries.

There is one key point that has generally been overlooked in the worldwide coverage of Israeli piracy and that is why the Palestinians of Gaza are so in need of the building materials which the Israelis claim could be used by Hamas for aggressive purposes. Thousands of structures, homes, schools, hospitals and public buildings were destroyed or seriously damaged in the barbarous

Israeli bombardment of the Gaza Ghetto in December 2008. The destruction added to the already considerable woes of an isolated and brutalized Palestinian population.

Thus the reason that cement and other building materials are so urgently needed is to repair the havoc and wreckage that the Israelis themselves created. For sure the Hamas administration may seek to build bunkers but the real purpose of the construction items is to allow the people of Gaza to rebuild their homes and their lives. In this sense then, Israel is perpetuating the bombardment of 17 months ago, seeking to maintain the widespread destruction they wrought so shamelessly.

Once again, those who long for justice for Palestinians will be asking, will the world now finally wake up to the cynical brutality of this allegedly civilized Israeli government?

Source: <http://arabnews.com/opinion/editorial/article61704.ece>

gulfnews.com

Dubai, Editorial, 6 June 2010, Sunday

There's no limit to Israel's acts of criminality

Seizure of Rachel Corrie follows murderous assault on the Freedom Flotilla

There is no bound to Israel's arrogance and criminal actions, flying in the face once again of international law and condemnation.

Saturday (5 June), the security forces of the Jewish state seized control on the high seas of the MV Rachel Corrie, an Irish-registered ship attempting to enter the port of Gaza in defiance of Israel's illegal blockade of the Strip and its people.

This latest act of high seas piracy follows Israel's murderous assault on the Freedom Flotilla last Monday (31 May), which cost nine activists their lives.

Despite worldwide condemnation and outrage over last week's marine assault on unarmed humanitarian activities, Israel still ignores all normal mores and values, acting instead with the misguided values of a pariah state.

The Rachel Corrie — appropriately named after an American activist who was killed by an Israeli bulldozer as she tried to prevent it from demolishing a Palestinian home in 2003 — carried only humanitarian aid within its hold.

The cargo was sealed in the Irish port of Dundalk nearly two weeks ago. Its load of cement, building materials, wheelchairs, medical supplies and notebooks for schoolchildren was verified by Irish trade unions, customs officials and a member of Ireland's Senate. But this cargo is

deemed too dangerous for the destitute Palestinian people suffering under Israel's yoke of occupation and oppression. On board the Rachel Corrie is Nobel Peace Prize winner Mairead Corrigan, no stranger to state-sponsored terror.

Ireland is constitutionally bound to be neutral and non-aligned. But its citizens' passports have been used by Israel in committing murder in Dubai, and now its vessels are subjected to piracy by the Jewish state. The sentiment of Irish people — like all right-minded around the world — is now firmly anti-Israel, based on Tel Aviv's criminal acts of piracy, murder, theft, assault and litany of other state-endorsed terror against all who seek justice.

Source: <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/there-s-no-limit-to-israel-s-acts-of-criminality-1.637156>

gulfnews.com

Dubai, Editorial, 8 June 2010, Tuesday

NGOs take lead in Gaza struggle

Political bodies have failed to end the siege, but aid agencies can make a difference

An increasing number of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) plan to send more aid ships to the besieged Gaza Strip. These groups, from Arab, Muslim and European countries, are being encouraged by the international condemnation of the Israeli attack on the Freedom Flotilla last week (31 May). At the same time they are fed up with the inability of Arab states to force the end of the blockade, imposed by Israel in defiance of international law and despite the repeated calls by the United Nations Security Council to lift the siege.

The move by the NGOs to send more aid ships to Gaza should be encouraged and supported by all nations. And the major powers can at least provide protection to those ships since they are unable to pressure their Israeli ally into lifting the crippling blockade.

The more ships the better. This is what should happen today.

Following last week's global outrage over the Mediterranean massacre, Israel will surely hesitate to raid new ships or kill the passengers.

The more ships the better. Every able group should send aid ships until the blockade becomes useless. The UN and the Arab League have failed to end the Israeli siege. It seems it is now up to the NGOs to shoulder the responsibility of keeping Gazans alive.

Source: <http://gulfnews.com/opinions/editorials/ngos-take-lead-in-gaza-struggle-1.638072>

THE JORDAN TIMES

Amman, Editorial, 8 June 2010, Tuesday

Is the story over?

As expected, Israel matched its use of overwhelming force against the passengers on the Mavi Marmara ship with an equally vigorous attempt to shape both how the story played out in US media and the official response from the US government. To that end, it prepared talking points, enlisted the efforts of its lobby, and mobilised a virtual army of activists to monitor, respond to and pressure press, politicians and electronic web postings.

Israel's talking points suggested an alternate reality, asserting that: the ships posed a mortal danger to Israel since they were populated by "dangerous extremists" (which, if true, raises the question, why did Israel free them, sending them on their way?); the Israeli military was ambushed and, therefore, acted in self defence (as if hooded, heavily armed paratroopers who landed in the dead of night on ships in international waters were but innocent bystanders); the cargo could have been delivered peacefully to Gaza if only the ships had off-loaded in Israel (ignoring the fact that the materials being delivered included items like pre-fabricated housing that Israel had banned from reaching Gaza); and there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza (clearly refuted by respected independent NGO statistics on poverty and malnutrition rates among Palestinian children in Gaza).

Worldwide reactions to the violent assault and the resultant deaths were swift in condemning the Israeli behaviour. But none of this mattered since Israel, in crises of this sort, plays to an audience of one. It is acceptable for Israel to endure international outrage and votes of 14 to 1 in the United Nations Security Council, as long as that "1", the United States, stands by its side.

Seen in this context, initial reactions here may have given Israel some comfort, although to quote the jumbled words of legendary baseball great Yogi Berra, "it isn't over 'til it's over".

US television networks, for the most part, gave scant coverage to the unfolding tragedy - leaving viewers interested in the story no recourse but to hunt down Al-Jazeera English or the BBC to follow the tragic events at sea. Print media were a bit better, but as FAIR (Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting, a media watchdog group) noted, too often the major dailies reported the story "through Israel's eyes" giving the benefit of the doubt to Israeli claims and focusing on the impact the event will have on US-Israeli relations rather than on the plight of the Palestinians or the legality of Israel's attack in international waters.

On June 1 (2010), for example, The Washington Post wrote an editorial calling on the Israelis to "ease restrictions on both Gaza and the West Bank", and make a credible move towards peace with the Palestinians, but not before it asserted that the passengers of the Mavi Marmara were

"militants who swarmed [the Israeli military] with knives and iron bars", accusing them of having ties to Al Qaeda and "deliberately provoking a confrontation".

A predictable collection of members of Congress was fast out of the gate with statements of support, most of which echoed Israeli-supplied talking points. Some went overboard, making bizarre observations, like Senator John McCain who claimed that the incident was but "another step in a chain of unfortunate events beginning with President Obama's insistence that there be a freeze, as a precondition for peace talks, a freeze on settlements in Jerusalem. Jerusalem is the capital of Israel, not a settlement", thus demonstrating that McCain had not only read the recent talking points, but recalled an earlier set supplied by the Israeli prime minister after the last crisis.

But before one concludes that the story is over and that reality, like the Mavi Marmara, had been subdued, more thoughtful voices have joined the fray, and these are worthy of note.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi called for a "credible and transparent investigation", as did the chair of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, John Kerry. Members of Congress Dennis Kucinich, Keith Ellison, Andre Carson and Betty McCollum made strong statements of concern, while Congressman William Delahunt focused on the importance of US-Turkish relations, demanding a "thorough, independent and impartial investigation" and praising "Turkey's responsible leadership in the region".

The Obama administration's response though muted at first, developed clarity by week's end. Pushed by world reaction, concerned with outraged Arab opinion and pressured by NATO ally Turkey's demand for justice, Washington finally staked out for itself a more nuanced and balanced position. Israel may accept its isolation from the world community but the US has found its ally's position in maintaining a blockade of Gaza "untenable" and has agreed that an "impartial inquiry" into the deadly raid is needed.

Speaking on "Larry King Live" Obama condemned "all the acts that led up to this violence". He went on to describe the loss of life as "unnecessary", noting that his administration was calling for "an effective investigation of everything that happened". He concluded, noting that it was now important that "we break out of the current impasse, use this tragedy as an opportunity so that we can figure out how we can meet Israel's security concerns but at the same time start opening up opportunity for Palestinians".

What is clear is that the "audience of one" has not fully bought into the alternate reality of supplied talking points. This story is not over.

Source: <http://www.jordantimes.com/?news=27266&searchFor=editorial>



Dubai, Editorial, 8 June 2010, Tuesday

Israel needs to make amends

The Gaza flotilla controversy refuses to die down. The latest twist in the story is that Israel has rejected a UN proposal to launch an international investigation into the raid conducted by its soldiers.

The attack targeted a fleet of sea vessels carrying aid and construction material to besieged Palestinians in Gaza. The killing of nine peace activists aboard Mavi Marmara, a Turkish ship has led to widespread international condemnation of Israel's actions.

Defending its soldiers, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has laid the blame squarely on the 'violent Turkish terror extremists' on board the 'ship of hate' for initiating the attack, thus prompting an armed response. Facts speak otherwise. The Turkish government, for one, is extremely angry. It has promised to take up the case—it calls a massacre and display of state terrorism—at all international platforms.

Israel however, refuses to see reason. It feels, its sovereignty and independence would be compromised if an international commission were to probe the incident. It thus feels it is the best judge to decide how to start an investigation but clearly one without international oversight. The question is how far an Israeli inquiry is likely to appease Istanbul and others who are at present seething with anger. Responding to activists armed with sticks and bars for self-defence by bullets at close range is hardly justifiable.

It seems Israel may have pushed its luck too far in this case. Even other enquiries conducted by Israel following its last military offensive against Hamas in Gaza in December 2008 dismissed charges of misconduct or wrong doing by its soldiers. How does it expect anyone to think, let alone believe that the flotilla enquiry will be any different when it is not even ready to acknowledge its role in the crime? Michael Oren, the Israeli ambassador to Washington has also reiterated that Israel will not apologise for the incident.

At present, according to Oren, the Israeli government was engaged with the Obama administration to find a way to conduct the enquiry. With the pressure mounting from all sides, including EU, the US will have to find some extraordinary justification to get its ally off the hook. France and UK had in fact, urged Israel to agree to the UN proposal, a suggestion Tel Aviv dismissed brusquely.

With Israel having decided to throw all prudence to the winds it has dug in its heels for a confrontation. A posture that can only come from a deep-seated confidence and assurance of support from its powerful ally across the Atlantic. The danger for Washington however lies in backing the wrong horse even if it's a cherished favourite. Not only does President Obama risk losing further credibility, any support to Israel risks making a huge joke at the expense of the US for its avowed respect of international law.

How much longer can the US continue to support an ally that has not left any stone unturned in proving its belligerent intent by actions that are a flagrant violation of international law? This is the case whether it is the continued and illegal siege of Gaza, illegal occupation of Arab

territories or the killing of peace activists. Israel needs to be reprimanded. Moreover, it needs to pay penance if it has any hope of living in peace with its regional neighbours.

Source:

http://www.khaleejtimes.com/displayarticle.asp?xfile=data/editorial/2010/June/editorial_June15.xml§ion=editorial&col



Tel Aviv, Editorial, 8 June 2010, Tuesday

Gaza crisis escalating

One week after bloody clashes aboard an aid ship bound for blockaded Gaza Strip, the Mideast scenario is turning serious and if no international action is initiated immediately, the situation is bound to spin out of control and suck more and more countries into the crisis with a potential to become an international conflict. The developments in the last two days have added ammunition to the raging controversy over Israel's illegal raid on a flotilla carrying relief supplies to the besieged Gaza. Its repercussions are being felt all over the region. Turkey has been seething with anger over the storming of the main ship and killing of its eight aid workers and deportation of hundreds of Palestinian supporters from the seized flotilla. After recalling its envoy, Ankara has been mulling over measures and trying to rally global support for further action. In an unexpected move, the Iranian Red Crescent has decided to send three aid ships to Gaza and a planeload of medical equipment to Egypt for delivery to 1.5 million Palestinians trapped in the Strip. Red Crescent says it will send two ships, one each with aid workers and paramedics and foodstuff and medicines, in coordination with the Turkish government, this week and the third one with an operation theatre at a later date. The Iranian decision comes in the wake of an earlier announcement that the elite Revolutionary Guards had expressed their readiness to escort the aid flotilla to Gaza. When the Iranian vessels set sail they are picking up the Israeli gauntlet and clashes between the two arch enemies are a possibility.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, instead of de-escalating the mounting tensions, has added fuel to the fire by rebuffing UN chief Ban Ki-moon's suggestion for an international investigation into the deadly raid on the aid flotilla. The Israeli refusal to a fair and impartial probe shows that what the Jewish state is telling the world is nothing but blatant lies. It is afraid of being exposed before the world if an international inquiry team finds out the truth behind Israel's cold-blooded murders. Netanyahu insists his government will conduct its own investigation. We know what kind of probes Israel does into such incidents. They will be done only to whitewash the facts. In yet another serious incident, Israelis killed four Palestinian commandos in waters off Gaza.

In a new attempt to douse the rising tempers in the Middle East, US Vice-President Joe Biden said in Cairo that Washington was eyeing new ways to deal with the Israeli blockade of the

Hamas-controlled Gaza. He did not spell out what are those ways. But, apparently, the US is banking upon a European initiative to monitor aid movement into the Gaza Strip. France and Britain too have volunteered to send warships to lend support to the EU plan to check what Israel suspects arms smuggling aboard aid vessels. To begin with, it's a practical and viable option in the present circumstances. But the question is will an intractable Israel agree to it or will it choose to continue with its collective punishment of Gazans for an indefinite period?

Source: http://www.omantribune.com/index.php?page=editorial_details&id=1641&heading=Editorial

III. India

THE HINDU

New Delhi, Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

Gaza blockade harming citizens

Masures imposed in June 2007 to hold Hamas accountable for rocket attacks have crippled Gazan economy.

The aid flotilla attacked by Israeli troops on Monday was trying to break the naval blockade of the Gaza Strip imposed by Israel in June 2007.

Israel said the blockade was intended to hold Hamas — which it views as a terrorist group — “responsible and accountable” for rocket attacks on Israeli territory. It is also intended to constrain Hamas's ability to rule in Gaza, and to put pressure on it to release Gilad Shalit, an Israeli soldier held captive for four years.

The blockade, preventing all exports from Gaza and confining imports to a limited supply of humanitarian goods, has failed to bring down Hamas but has heaped misery on Gaza's 1.5 million residents.

The U.N. humanitarian co-ordinator said last week that the formal economy in Gaza has “collapsed” and 60 per cent of households were short of food. According to U.N. statistics, around 70 per cent of Gazans live on less than \$1 a day, 75 per cent rely on food aid and 60 per cent have no daily access to water.

Luxury foods are banned and a U.N. report last year said that on average it took 85 days to get shelter kits into Gaza, 68 days to deliver health and paediatric hygiene kits, and 39 days for household items such as bedding and kitchen utensils. It said that school textbooks and stationery had been delayed.

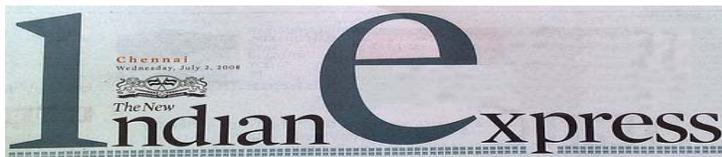
The effect of the blockade was felt even more acutely in the aftermath of the invasion of the strip by Israeli forces in the winter of 2008-9, as materials needed for reconstruction were delayed or banned from entering Gaza. A U.N. fact-finding mission described the blockade as “collective punishment”.

In the absence of imports, goods have been smuggled in through tunnels built under the Gaza-Egypt border. The World Bank estimates that 80 per cent of Gaza's imports arrive by tunnel. The goods, which are taxed by Hamas, attract inflated prices that are out of the reach of most ordinary residents.

The Free Gaza Movement, an international human rights organisation, first sailed from Cyprus in August 2008 in an attempt to highlight the plight of the citizens of Gaza suffering under the blockade.

The first sailing made it to Gaza, but subsequent boats carrying supplies during the Gaza conflict were intercepted and in June last year Israeli forces boarded a boat taking aid to the strip and detained campaigners, who were later deported

Source: <http://beta.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/article443126.ece>



Chennai, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Israel's display of arrogance

Outrage is too mild a word to describe what Israel has committed on the high seas against an unarmed flotilla bound for blockaded Gaza with some 10,000 tonnes of necessary supplies. It is bad enough that the ships were boarded by heavily armed commandos, but it is truly appalling that they should shoot and kill some 10 activists (the number is still uncertain) on the plea that they were attacked by metal rods and knives! It is a measure of Israel's unrepentant arrogance that even the killing of peaceful activists should be justified by a patently ludicrous falsehood. Who had the guns and the firepower, the soldiers or the demonstrators, who included a holocaust survivor? Boarding a ship is an act of aggression by any standard, but the Israelis have predictably said they were virtually forced to do it. As the survivors are held incommunicado in the port of Ashdod where six of the boats were taken, Israel's version is still the only one available.

The world has reacted with predictable outrage and condemnation, with the European Union demanding an inquiry and an end to the embargo of Hamas-ruled Gaza. But Jerusalem can afford to shrug and sneer because the protective hand of the sole superpower will prevent any real punishment. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has expressed regret but vowed to maintain the blockade.

Curiously enough, the Indian reaction seems to be a clone of the American. While President Barack Obama regretted the loss of life, New Delhi ‘deplored the tragic loss of life and reports of killings and injuries’. There is no mention of the fact that even if no life had been lost, boarding a ship in international waters would still be akin to piracy. Obviously the omission is deliberate, an admission that some countries are more equal, a shameful abandonment of rule of law.

The real question is how long Israel will be allowed to get away with its flagrantly criminal behaviour. Last January (2010), Mossad operatives murdered a Hamas commander in Dubai with the help of identities stolen from a number of friendly countries. That double crime passed without consequence. This one too will probably be allowed to pass, after some suitably resonant huffing and puffing. The resulting tide of bitterness will further poison the toxic air in the Middle East and delay a solution to an already difficult problem, but that suits Israel perfectly.

Source: <http://expressbuzz.com/opinion/editorials/israel%E2%80%99s-display-of-arrogance/178132.html>



New Delhi, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Israel's act of piracy

By any yardstick, using force against peace activists or those engaged in a primarily humanitarian mission is a shameful and criminal act. And considering that Israel attacked the flotilla of ships carrying aid and supplies to Gaza, killing at least 10 civilian activists and injuring many more, in international waters, is nothing short of an act of piracy, of state terrorism.

The international reaction against Israel, for once, has been prompt and sharp, with condemnation pouring in from quarters normally tolerant of the Jewish state's actions. With the UN Security Council now calling for an investigation into the attack on the flotilla, the international community, particularly the US, should apply requisite pressure on Israel to allow and aid such a probe.

In addition, there must be renewed focus on working towards lifting the wholly unjust and crippling blockade of Gaza, which Israel imposed, according to its policy of collective punishment shortly after Hamas took control. India should play its role in that, even trying to use what influence it has with Tel Aviv. The blockade of Gaza is at the heart of this affair. Israel has severely restricted the number and quantity of supplies — everything from fuel to cement to food and medicines — it allows through into Gaza.

That has left the population of Gaza, crammed into a tiny strip of land, desperately lacking essential items for survival, not to mention the crippling of basic services like electricity or sewage treatment or hospitals. That dire situation is what the aid flotilla was trying to draw attention to, with Israel contriving to call these aid-laden ships a threat to its security.

Israel's latest unilateral action only confirms that it often behaves like a law unto itself, outside the ambit of any international rules or treaties. The repercussions of these unilateral actions affect other countries, including India. Tel Aviv must realise that acts such as these would make it difficult for countries like India to sustain, let alone enhance, bilateral cooperation. A resolution to the larger Palestinian issue seems distant, not least given Israel's obduracy, but the latter is fast losing any remaining moral ground as well as friends. Wiser counsel must prevail.

Source: <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/Opinion/Israels-act-of-piracy/articleshow/6001254.cms>

THE HINDU

New Delhi, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Israel's rogue behaviour

Tuesday's (1 June) attack on an unarmed, humanitarian flotilla of activists carrying relief supplies for the besieged and blockaded people of Gaza is a reminder to the world of the lawless, outlaw nature of the Israeli state. Although the death toll is still unclear, as many as 10 activists, several of them Turkish nationals, died when Israel Defence Forces commandos swooped down on the vessels in international waters and used grossly disproportionate force to overcome the not unexpected resistance they encountered. The boats, their passengers, and cargo have all been illegally detained. Among those locked up by the Israelis are a number of journalists from around the world who had joined the flotilla to cover the story. The criminal Israeli response to what was intended to be a Gandhian act of solidarity with the Palestinian people is the product of the international community's failure to ensure that Tel Aviv's illegal and immoral blockade of Gaza was lifted. Israel cut off Gaza from the rest of the world in June 2007 as a means of weakening the political hold Hamas has on the territory. The rocket attacks were a pretext for the blockade, which quickly escalated into a full-scale war on the people of the territory. Gaza suffers all the evils of occupation despite the withdrawal by the Zionist forces in 2005.

The Israeli invasion of 2008-09 led to the commission of war crimes as documented by the UN-mandated Goldstone Commission. And the blockade of Gaza and its people amounts to collective punishment of civilians, another grave breach of international humanitarian law. Any other country would have been hauled over the coals by the UN Security Council for such rogue behaviour but Israel enjoys the backing of the United States. As a presidential candidate, Barack Obama held out the faint hope of a more even-handed approach to the problems of West Asia. But as President, he has dismally failed to exert the kind of pressure needed to get Israel to withdraw from the territories it has illegally occupied since 1967. The crime that played out on the high seas on May 31 is very much part of the crime of occupation. There is little sense in the UNSC asking for an inquiry into the incident when previous inquiries into Israeli behaviour — notably the Goldstone report — ended in the dustbin. At the very least, the international community must ensure the immediate end of the Israeli embargo on Gaza. No goal or logic can

justify subjecting an entire civilian population to an economic blockade. India has joined democratic forces round the world in condemning the attack on the flotilla. It must move beyond this now and actively work for the lifting of the inhuman blockade.

Source: <http://beta.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/article444026.ece>



New Delhi, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Eye on Gaza

Life hadn't been this calm in the Middle East since the Iraq war. Yet, people have perhaps never been so pessimistic. Calm — despite the Iranian nuclear programme, the lack of a Palestine settlement, an impending transition in Egypt, Dubai possibly on the brink, the Islamist threat to Yemen, and a still unsettled Iraq. But it's Israelis and Palestinians despairing the most. Nevertheless, the “proximity talks” appeared to have been salvaged from the controversy surrounding new constructions in East Jerusalem settlements announced at the start of US Vice President Joe Biden's March visit, that brought US-Israel relations to a dramatic and historic low. Then, the Israel Defence Forces were authorised to rappel down to the Turkish-led flotilla reportedly carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza. The aftermath: 10 civilian activists killed by the IDF in international waters, people aboard the flotilla detained at the Israeli port of Ashdod, and a very isolated Israel facing near-unanimous global condemnation, offering defences few would buy.

Israel's blinkered intransigence of late — whether West Bank constructions or the present government's long refusal to acknowledge the two-state roadmap, or the policy leverage of right-wing fringe parties — is doing Israel as much disservice as did the 2006 Lebanon war. Israel recently turned away all-purpose dissenter Noam Chomsky; it's blockaded Gaza for three years hoping to topple Hamas; and now it's shot civilian activists. What has it achieved thereby? Israel is about to lose an old ally in the Islamic world, Turkey. Another Islamic ally, Egypt, will find itself at odds with a livid public. Israel has embarrassed an US trying to resuscitate the proximity talks. It's also ensured that the global focus shifts from its own biggest concern — Iran — to itself. The UNSC, set to discuss fresh sanctions against Iran, now had to convene over the IDF assault.

Israel's increasing tendency to shoot itself in the foot will not help its security. Its diplomatic standing is sinking. Little wonder that some have begun wondering if Israel's agenda has moved from “self-defence” to “defence of the Gaza blockade”. Of all possible options, Israel chose the

worst vis-à-vis the flotilla. And the one party that's gained the most from the Gaza siege is militant Hamas, which has practically legitimised its narrative in many quarters. Meanwhile, ordinary Gazans suffer and Gilad Shalit languishes in captivity.

Source: <http://www.indianexpress.com/story-print/628220/>



Kolkata, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Gunboat diplomacy

The world condemns Israel

Israel stands before the world today as a condemned nation and it has only itself to blame. Its gunboat diplomacy against a Turkish aid ship sailing towards Gaza has almost immediately provoked international outrage. And a remarkably insensitive Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, sullies his standing further still by extending full support for Monday's naval blitz. Nor for that matter has the reaction of the USA, Israel's critical ally, been as robust as the world would have expected. The response of Barack Obama, given to bombast and rhetoric, is almost a diplomatic understatement ~ regret for the death of 10 pro-Palestinian activists and a ritualistic promise to look into the "tragedy". Decidedly more strident have been the international appeals for a thorough investigation. The UN has convened an emergency session of the Security Council, and only a thorough inquiry can examine Netanyahu's claim that the Israeli commandos "were clubbed, beaten, stabbed."

The immediate impact is the rupture in Israel's relations with Turkey, its only Muslim ally. Ankara has equated the commando raid on the Turkish vessel to "state terrorism" and the reported demonstrations at Israeli embassies across the world at once places Tel-Aviv at a distance from the comity of nations. The flotilla, consisting of six vessels, had left the Cyprus coast to deliver 10,000 tons of aid supplies to Gaza. The consignment is believed to be the biggest effort yet to break Israel's three-year blockade of the Hamas-controlled territory. Israel's action has been inhuman, and will rank as one of the deepest tragedies of the Middle East.

Israel will almost inevitably have to face up to the backlash, and the world would expect a more forthright condemnation from President Obama and Hilary Clinton. The naval interception makes a mockery of the canons of international law, an exceptional instance of "inhumane state terrorism" to summon the words of the Turkish Prime Minister, Tayyip Erdogan. The Turks, who account for most of the victims, can be no less outraged than the Palestinians. Israel has shot itself in the foot.

Source:

http://www.thestatesman.net/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&show=archive&id=329745&catid=38&year=2010&month=06&day=2&Itemid=66

THE ASIAN AGE

Delhi | Mumbai | Kolkata | London

New Delhi, Editorial, 3 June 2010, Thursday

Was Israeli outrage to abort peace bid?

In attacking in international waters the Free Gaza peace flotilla made up of ships from Turkey, Europe and the United States, Israel has consolidated its reputation for disregarding international law and opinion. As the UN Security Council sought an independent inquiry into the shocking episode in which a large number of international peace activists may have been killed and many times that number injured, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon strongly hinted that the raid on the flotilla by Israeli commandos in international waters may have placed Israel afoul of international law. Many believe that Tel Aviv has made a career of doing just this. Daniel Levy, a former Israeli peace negotiator who now researches at an American think tank, noted wryly after this predawn incident on Monday (1 July): “Israel constantly claims it wants the world to focus on Iran, but then it ends up doing something that gets everyone to focus on itself.”

For some time now, domestic politics in Israel and the ascendancy in it of anti-Palestinian hawks have ensured that the US-inspired “roadmap” to peace has virtually run aground. Following the worldwide condemnation and anxiety caused by the peace flotilla incident in the Mediterranean, it is not unlikely that the Israeli ruling class’ aggressive posture will be further strengthened, marginalising even more the prospects of resumption of the long-stalled peace talks with Palestinians. Many are also likely to wonder if one of the reasons for the wholly illogical Israeli military response to ships carrying humanitarian assistance was not to scupper prospects of peace talks for a long time to come, unless they are held entirely on Israeli terms. The unexpected turn of events may be expected to upset several geopolitical calculations and inflame the Islamic world.

US President Barack Obama is likely to be placed in an especially tricky situation by the gear-shift caused by Tel Aviv’s action and its stubborn defence of an indefensible act. Mr Obama had stretched out a hand of peace to the world’s Muslims after he entered the White House, but did not follow this up with sufficient nuts-and-bolts changes in American government policy. Now his administration will be required to do more than merely express the wish to find out the circumstances that led to the tragic event. The fundamental issue is to question Israel’s blockading of Gaza, a tiny strip on the coast with a population of 1.5 million, which Israel has occupied since the 1967 war. In 2007, Israel began a maritime blockade of Gaza after Hamas — widely regarded in the West as a terrorist outfit — handsomely won the 2006 election in that Palestinian territory. The election was widely regarded as fair. British foreign secretary William

Hague has called for lifting of the blockade. EU foreign policy chief Catherine Ashton has noted that Gaza's closure was "unacceptable". Washington cannot afford to miss the cue here and continue to leave the impression that Tel Aviv enjoys its sanction to impose a blockade on a territory it grabbed as booty of war. It is plain to see that developments in Gaza and other occupied territories is the key to any positive movement in a peace process between Israel and Palestine, no matter who initiates it. Israel has sought to justify its attack on the peace ships by underlining that its blockade of Gaza is legal. It is unclear where it got this impression, but the assumption is now being questioned with greater vigour than before. India has so much to do with West Asia, but its policies for the region are grounded in uncertainties and opportunism. New Delhi has expressed regret over the loss of lives and Israel's use of disproportionate force on peace vessels, but it did not raise the basic question about Gaza.

Source: <http://www.asianage.com/editorial/was-israeli-outrage-abort-peace-bid-957>

Indian Express

New Delhi, Editorial, 4 June 2010, Friday

Video warfare

During the Second Intifada, a French TV network aired a video of a 12-year-old boy, Muhammad al-Durrah, cowering behind his father and then falling dead from Israeli gunfire. Years later, the Israeli government decided to dispute the veracity of the video, claiming that the killing was staged by Palestinian propagandists. In the years since, the footage has fed into a sense of injury and self-righteousness, and become an iconic exhortation to battle, for both sides. It also demonstrated the power and fallibility of moving image as documentary proof.

News of the Israeli commandos' attack on the Mavi Marmara has been backed up by a deluge of amateur video. The organisers of the Gaza aid ship were web casting events live, and videos of the violence have been replayed all over the world, to galvanic effect. Meanwhile, the Israeli military has matched that with its own mini film festival, with YouTube clips that make it seem that the soldiers were merely acting in self-defence. In one video, an activist appears to push a soldier off the vessel; others claim to reveal a cache of weapons on the ship. These disjointed bits of action have a disturbingly Rashomon-like feel — it's hard to imagine how it played out, the sequence of events, the exact provocation. But it doesn't matter, because both sets of video feed the partisan preconceptions and paranoia of both sides. Once, images claimed to bear witness — from Abraham Zapruder's 26-second video of Kennedy's assassination or Tiananmen Square or Abu Ghraib itself. Conflicts branded themselves into our memory with single, iconic images. But now, though media is more personal and participatory than ever, the image's claim to truth has never been so assailable.

There was, of course, only one truth that unfolded in the flotilla raid — but sifting through to that truth may be impossible with this flood of video "evidence". With their digital manipulability, pictures are only as good as words — and we tend to choose those that reassure our own beliefs.

Source: <http://www.indianexpress.com/news/video-warfare/629162/>

IV. US and Canada

The Boston Globe

Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

US should condemn Israeli raid, push for immediate talks

The Israeli raid that killed at least nine activists who sought to break the blockade of Gaza is a turning point in the Middle East. The likeliest reaction is a new wave of terrorism and conflict. The less likely — but absolutely critical — reaction should be a renewed commitment to the peace process. No event could demonstrate more clearly to all parties that the current situation on the West Bank and in Gaza is not sustainable, and that a two-state agreement is essential for world peace.

The United States' overwhelming goal is to bring about peace talks. Arab allies in the Middle East are eager for the Obama administration to join in international condemnation of Israel, and such a yearning is justified. The attack on a flotilla of ships in international waters off Gaza was unnecessarily provocative. The 600 activists, from many nations, on board the ships clearly intended to try to break an Israeli blockade and provide supplies to Palestinians in Gaza. But Israel didn't wait for the ships to reach Israeli territory; launching a military raid in international waters was a disproportionate response. Israel bears responsibility for the loss of life. It is reasonable to inquire whether Israeli soldiers feared for their lives before firing. But the Israeli army, in ordering the raid, had to know that bloodshed was a possible outcome.

At the same time, the United States must make clear that Israel's adversaries will gain more by restraint than by any corresponding act of violence. The government of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu will come under intense international pressure to resolve the standoff in Gaza and to move toward peace in the West Bank. That means other nations must do all that is in their power to get Israelis and Palestinians to the bargaining table as quickly as possible.

The United States should condemn the Israeli attack, but with the overall goal of moving Israel and the Palestinians toward negotiations. The best interests of the United States and Israel and the other nations of the Middle East are aligned. They are in favour of a two-state peace agreement. Every action by President Obama should be dedicated to that purpose.

Source:

http://www.boston.com/bostonglobe/editorial_opinion/editorials/articles/2010/06/01/us_should_condemn_israeli_raid_push_for_immediate_talks/



Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

Provoking violence

An act designed to be a provocation has, in fact, provoked violence and the world is shocked, simply shocked.

At least 600 “activists,” more than half of them from Turkey, boarded six boats with the express purpose of breaking through an Israeli blockade of Gaza that has existed since Hamas terrorists murdered their way into power nearly three years ago.

Some, such as the European legislators on board the flotilla, came to make a statement. Others, such as the members of Turkey’s IHH, which helped organize the flotilla, may not have had such pure motives. IHH does indeed do some humanitarian work, that is, when it is not supporting Islamic terrorist networks, including Hamas.

Cw-4 Israel had offered to offload whatever supplies were being carried by the ships in a nearby Israeli port, assure that they were in fact, humanitarian in nature and destined for the Palestinian people of Gaza, and relay them through legitimate channels. But that offer was rejected by the flotilla organizers.

The point wasn’t to deliver supplies; it was to break the blockade and to provoke international outrage if it could.

What happened next gets even trickery.

Having given the lead Turkish-flagged vessel warning it would be boarded, Israeli commandos did just that. They were prepared for civil disobedience and armed with paintball rifles. What they got were some 30 activists armed with knives and metal poles and soon two handguns taken from the Israelis.

After one soldier was thrown from the top deck to a lower deck and others came under fire, the order was given to fire back. At least nine passengers are believed to have been killed in the incident. Two Israeli soldiers were shot and others stabbed.

The other activists were off-loaded in Israel and given a choice of arrest or a trip home. The injured were taken to Israeli hospitals.

Little is clear except that those who claim to want a better life for the Palestinian people have succeeded only in putting the peace process farther and farther out of reach.

Source: http://news.bostonherald.com/news/opinion/editorials/view/20100601provoking_violence/



Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

Israel and the flotilla

Israeli commandos rappelled from helicopters onto a ship carrying humanitarian supplies to Gaza early Monday (1 July), expecting minimal resistance from about 600 pro-Palestinian activists on board. The Israelis badly miscalculated. A melee ended with nine protesters killed. Dozens were wounded, including seven Israeli soldiers.

Many countries quickly condemned the Israeli raid, including its closest ally in the Muslim world, Turkey.

The more we learn about this incident, though, the more it looks like a setup designed to provoke or embarrass Israel.

Video shows the Israeli commandos were surrounded and attacked as they reached the ship's deck. The Israelis tried to avoid a lethal confrontation. Israeli officials reportedly offered the vessel the same deal that was accepted by at least one previous flotilla — divert to the Israeli port of Ashdod and unload the cargo for inspection. As long as the cargo doesn't contain weaponry, it will be shipped into the Gaza Strip by land.

The leaders of the protest group were intent on breaking the blockade. Max Boot of the Council on Foreign Relations wrote in *The Wall Street Journal* on Monday (1 July) that the group has close ties to Hamas and to other terrorist groups, including al-Qaida.

The bloody confrontation has prompted international calls for Israel to abandon its embargo of Gaza. Remember, though, why Israel restricts the flow of goods into Gaza.

Hamas, which is backed by Iran, controls Gaza and has used that control to lob missiles into Israel. Hamas has pledged never to recognize the Jewish state. Its goal is to destroy Israel.

Hamas leaders refuse to abide by diplomatic agreements reached by Palestinian negotiators with Israel. Hamas won't join Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in indirect peace talks with Israel.

Last year (2009), Hamas provoked a three-week war with Israel by firing dozens of rockets in a two-day period. Gazans suffered heavy casualties as Israel retaliated to halt the rocket attacks.

Israel does allow food, medicine, fuel and other staples into Gaza. It is delivering the goods carried by this flotilla. But Israel restricts supplies that can be used to construct rockets, underground bunkers and weapons factories.

Hamas would like nothing better than freer borders for arms shipments. Right now it has to smuggle arms via tunnels dug under the border with Egypt. The Egyptians sometimes can be persuaded to look the other way, but Egyptian authorities also crack down from time to time and destroy the tunnels.

This is turning into a diplomatic debacle for Israel. On Monday (1 July), Egypt opened its border with Gaza to deflect criticism of its role in the Israeli embargo. That's an invitation for weapons smuggling. More ships are headed into international waters near Gaza, apparently to provoke another confrontation.

Pardon us, though, if we don't join the condemnation. Israel has a right to defend itself and a keen interest in preventing arms from reaching Gaza. There's a nasty neighbour in control of that territory, just a short-range rocket away.

Source: <http://www.chicagotribune.com/news/opinion/editorials/ct-edit-gaza-20100601,0,4785345.story>



Tel Aviv, Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

The flotilla fiasco

The Israeli commandos who landed on the deck of the Turkish ferry Mavi Marmara off the coast of the Gaza Strip early Monday (1 June) were totally unprepared for what they encountered: dozens of militants who swarmed around them with knives and iron bars. The result was a bloody battle in which at least nine passengers were killed -- and a diplomatic debacle for the government of Benjamin Netanyahu. Though the investigations to come will find many to blame, it's already clear that Israel's response to the pro-Palestinian flotilla was both misguided and badly executed.

We have no sympathy for the motives of the participants in the flotilla -- a motley collection that included European sympathizers with the Palestinian cause, Israeli Arab leaders and Turkish Islamic activists. Israel says that some of the organizers have ties to Hamas and al-Qaeda. What's plain is that the group's nominal purpose, delivering "humanitarian" supplies to Gaza, was secondary to the aim of provoking a confrontation. The flotilla turned down an Israeli offer to unload the six boats and deliver the goods to Gaza by truck; it ignored repeated warnings that it

would not be allowed to reach Gaza. Its spokesmen said they would insist on "breaking Israel's siege," as one of them put it.

Yet the threat to Israel was political rather than military. So far there's been no indication the boats carried missiles or other arms for Hamas. Mr. Netanyahu's aim should have been to prevent the militants from creating the incident they were hoping for. Allowing the boats to dock in Gaza, as Israel had done before, would have been better than sending military commandos to intercept them. The fact that the soldiers who roped down from helicopters to the lead Turkish ferry were unprepared to subdue its passengers without using lethal force only compounded the error.

Israel will now endure days, if not months, of condemnations by its many enemies. Middle East peace talks are at risk again, as are Israel's once-strong relations with Turkey. What was to have been a conciliatory meeting between Mr. Netanyahu and President Obama Tuesday (2 June) has been cancelled. The White House has been properly cautious so far in responding to the incident; it should be careful to distinguish itself in the coming days from the anti-Israeli chorus. U.S. diplomacy should aim at ensuring that the inevitable calls for an international investigation do not lead to another one-sided setup like the United Nations' Goldstone Commission, whose report on Israel's 2008 invasion of Gaza has become another weapon in the international campaign to de-legitimize the Jewish state.

As for Mr. Netanyahu, the only road to recovery from this disaster lies in embracing, once and for all, credible steps to create conditions for a Palestinian state. A good start would be easing restrictions on both Gaza and the West Bank, once the reactions to Monday's (1 June) events subside. Mr. Netanyahu also needs to broaden his government to include pro-peace parties; one of his main problems is cabinet hawks who have made Israeli diplomacy an oxymoron. The Prime Minister is in a deepening hole; his only way out is to move to the centre.

Source:

<http://www.washingtonpost.com/wpdyn/content/article/2010/05/31/AR2010053103160.html?hpid=opinion%2Fnsbox1>

The Gazette

Division of Canwest Publishing Inc.

Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

Checkmate at sea: Israel couldn't win

Public relations met realpolitik in the waters off the Gaza Strip Monday (1 June) morning. It's not yet clear which side won.

"Spin" artists on both sides were hard at work even before the facts were all in about the convoy of activists heading for Gaza in defiance of an Israeli embargo that has, by all accounts, caused great hardship for the people of that isolated enclave.

We do know that Israeli commando troops, some with paintball guns, boarded some of the vessels from dinghies and helicopters. We know there were at least nine deaths. We know the vessels were all taken to Ashdod, an Israeli port.

We know that Israel's enemies immediately went into oratorical overdrive. We know Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu cancelled a trip to Washington - much to the relief of the Obama administration, no doubt - and headed straight home, instead, from his visit to Canada.

We know, too, that the organizers of the flotilla were not primarily concerned with getting "humanitarian supplies" to the people of Gaza. We know this because if that had been their goal, they would have accepted the repeated Israeli offer to land the cargo at Ashdod, and the Israeli guarantee to deliver the aid supplies from there to Gaza.

We know also that the Palestinian leadership is not at all dismayed by this turn of events. We know that because Hamas Prime Minister Ismail Haniyeh, told supporters on the weekend that "if the ships reach Gaza, it's a victory for Gaza. If they are intercepted and terrorized by the Zionists, it will be a victory for Gaza, too."

And we know that the flotilla organizers, a combination of humanitarian and pro-Palestinian activists called Free Gaza, has in the past managed to get small vessels full of civilian goods into Gaza, while Israeli authorities looked the other way. We know that because Free Gaza proclaims it. We do not know the organization's motives in changing tactics now.

We know, too, that Israel's enemies have seized many past opportunities to smuggle arms into Gaza and the West Bank.

Further, we know that any use of force by Israel, in support of a blockade widely labelled as illegal, is a public relations setback for Israel. We know that Israeli policy is based on intractable realities - that's what makes it realpolitik - and even on existential anxiety. Southern Lebanon bristles with weapons aimed at Israel. Hamas is dedicated to destroying the Jewish state. Syria is another implacable neighbour. Obviously Israel cannot trust the pacifism of activists.

Anything Israel did in these circumstances would have been a defeat: either permitting the opening of a smuggling route for future delivery of even deadly cargo, or accepting the public relations disaster we have seen. Israel has not survived for more than six decades, amid implacable hatred, by putting public relations ahead of practical considerations.

Source: <http://www.montrealgazette.com/opinion/editorials/Checkmate+Israel+couldn/3095016/story.html>



Tel Aviv, Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

Gaza's war without end

Israel's war against Hamas, culminating with the invasion of Gaza more than a year ago, has slowly been fading from memory. But it never really ended. A deadly confrontation in the international waters of the Mediterranean yesterday provided a grim reminder that Israel's naval blockade, itself an act of war, has laid siege to Gaza.

The deaths of nine activists in one of the vessels making up a "Freedom Flotilla" was an accident waiting to happen. Whatever the excuses and explanations from the Israeli side, and whatever the accusations and allegations by (and about) the international activists, this was a high stakes game of chicken on the high seas. A conflict that was avoidable became inevitable.

There is good reason that naval blockades are considered acts of war: They deprive the encircled people of a lifeline to the outside world; and they are inherently dangerous to enforce, as the Israeli navy discovered yesterday (31 May). Israel won a hollow victory by blocking a humanitarian convoy ferrying 10,000 tonnes of supplies to the Gaza Strip while handing a massive propaganda coup to the Hamas leadership it vilifies as terrorists.

For now, Hamas has stopped lobbing rockets into Israeli towns, relying instead on relief ships that are far more explosive for Israel's international image. And so, instead of defending itself from rocket fire, Israel's navy is defending an indefensible blockade by boarding ships in international waters with excessive force, instead of letting some relief ships through, as it has in the past.

Speaking in Ottawa yesterday (31 May), Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu showed he still has not learned how to pick his battles — and that this blockade has backfired. But he was clearly reassured by the warm reception from his host, Prime Minister Stephen Harper, who seemed more concerned that the incident had "coloured" the bilateral visit than anything else.

Israel misfired in the Mediterranean, but Canada missed an opportunity during Netanyahu's visit to show greater concern — not only about the loss of foreign lives yesterday, but Gaza's loss of a lifeline to the world during the three years that this blockade has dragged on.

Source: <http://www.thestar.com/opinion/editorials/article/817110-gaza-s-war-without-end>

International Herald Tribune

New York, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Israel and the Blockade

The supporters of the Gaza-bound aid flotilla had more than humanitarian intentions. The Gaza Freedom March made its motives clear in a statement before Monday's (1 June) deadly confrontation: "A violent response from Israel will breathe new life into the

Palestine solidarity movement, drawing attention to the blockade.”

There can be no excuse for the way that Israel completely mishandled the incident. A commando raid on the lead, Turkish-flagged ship left nine activists dead and has opened Israel to a torrent of criticism.

This is a grievous, self-inflicted wound. It has damaged Israel’s ties with Turkey, once its closest ally in the Muslim world; given the Hamas-led government in Gaza a huge propaganda boost; and complicated peace talks with the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

It also has made it much tougher for the Obama administration to persuade the United Nations Security Council to put new sanctions on Iran’s nuclear program — which Israeli officials insist is their top priority.

The questions rose by the confrontation — and there are many — demand an immediate and objective international investigation.

Why did Israel, which has blocked some ships but allowed others to pass, decide to take a stand now? Did it make a real effort to find a compromise with Turkey, which sanctioned the flotilla? Israel has a right to stop weapons from going into Gaza, but there has been no suggestion that the ships were carrying a large cache.

Was boarding, especially in the dark, the only means of stopping the ships? What happened once Israeli forces got on board? The Israeli Defence Forces have distributed a video showing that the commandos were attacked. Why weren’t they better prepared to defend themselves without using lethal force?

There is a bigger question that Israel — and the United States — must be asking: Is the blockade working? Is it weakening Hamas? Or just punishing Gaza’s 1.4 million residents — and diverting attention away from abuses by Hamas, including its shelling of Israeli cities and its refusal to accept Israel’s right to exist?

At this point, it should be clear that the blockade is unjust and against Israel’s long-term security.

After Hamas seized control of the Gaza Strip in 2007, Israel — with Egypt’s help — imposed a blockade on many goods and most people going into and out of the territory. The goal was to quickly turn residents against their new government. Three years later, Hamas is still in charge — and the blockade has become an excuse for any and all of the government’s failures.

The situation in Gaza is grim. Eight out of 10 people depend on international aid agencies to survive. Basic foodstuffs are available, but medical supplies and construction materials are severely lacking. The desperation could be seen on Tuesday when Egypt lifted the blockade and several thousand Gazans rushed the border but were later sent home after police officers said they did not know when the crossing would be opened.

On Tuesday, President Obama expressed his “deep regret” over the flotilla incident. He is doing Israel no favours with such a tepid response. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has shown time and again that he prefers bullying and confrontation over diplomacy. Washington needs to make clear to him just how dangerous and counterproductive that approach is.

Mr. Obama needs to state clearly that the Israeli attack was unacceptable and back an impartial international investigation. The United States should also join the other permanent members of the United Nations Security Council — Britain, France, Russia and China — in urging Israel to permanently lift the blockade.

That would lessen the suffering of the people in Gaza. And it would give the United States more credibility as it presses both Israelis and the Palestinian president, Mahmoud Abbas, to negotiate a peace deal.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/02/opinion/02wed1.html?ref=global>



Editorial, 4 June 2010, Friday

A Credible Investigation

Israel’s government has decided to tough out the criticism of its attack this week on a six-ship flotilla trying to run the Gaza blockade. The story, and the anger, isn’t going away.

The news wires on Thursday (3 June) were filled with pictures of grieving mourners as Turkey held funerals for 8 of the 9 activists killed on the lead ship. Some of the more than 600 activists from 42 countries, released from Israeli detention, are accusing Israel of a litany of abuses. Israel’s charges that its commandos were attacked and shot at by some of the ship’s passengers are being ignored by everyone except its most passionate defenders.

We still don’t know what happened on that ship. But we are sure that before things get even more out of control, the world — and Israel — needs an impartial international investigation. Instead of pressing for that, the Obama administration is encouraging Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s misguided belief that Israel can lead its own probe with international participation. That is not going to suffice.

Some Israeli officials are pointing to South Korea, which recently conducted an investigation, with the participation of five other countries, into the sinking of a South Korean warship. There is a big difference: Seoul was examining North Korea’s behaviour not its own.

As Israel resists an independent inquiry, there are other parties eager to do their own investigations. The United Nations Human Rights Commission, whose 2009 probe of the Gaza

war accused Israel and the Palestinian-faction Hamas of war crimes, has already announced its own probe of the flotilla debacle.

Israel needs to work with the United States to come up with a fair and independent investigatory body — and then cooperate fully. (It refused to cooperate with the Gaza war investigation that guaranteed that its side of the story wasn't heard.) Our suggestion: Do it under the auspices of the so-called quartet — the United States, Russia, the European Union and the United Nations — that is already working on Middle East peace.

Until this incident is credibly investigated, there is little hope of moving forward with Israeli-Palestinian peace talks or efforts to curb Iran's nuclear program.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/04/opinion/04fri3.html?ref=global>



Editorial, 5 June 2010, Saturday

Turkey's Fury

Turkey is understandably furious about Israel's disastrous attack on the Turkish-flagged aid ship that tried to run the Gaza blockade. Eight Turks and a Turkish-American died. Turkey's demands for the release of detained activists (all are now free) and for an international investigation (Israel is balking) are reasonable.

But Turkish officials have let their anger and rhetoric go way too far. Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan of Turkey has called for Israel to be punished for state terrorism. President Abdullah Gul said, "Turkey will never forgive this attack." Turkey, Israel and their shared ally, the United States, need to work to cool things down. Turkey was the first Muslim nation to recognize Israel, and both countries have benefited from the relationship. Bilateral trade reached \$2.5 billion in 2009. As a moderate, secular democracy and NATO member, Turkey has a strong interest in a stable Middle East.

Things have deteriorated sharply since early 2009 when Mr. Erdogan publicly confronted the Israeli president, Shimon Peres, on the subject of Gaza. His new even fiercer denunciations are playing well at home and in the wider Muslim world. But Mr. Erdogan may find it hard to walk things back when he needs to — and he will.

The Palestinians can certainly use articulate defenders. And Israel deserves to be criticized for the flotilla disaster. But gratuitously stoking anti-Israeli sentiment is irresponsible and dangerous.

Mr. Erdogan is to be applauded for his attempts to broker secret negotiations between Israel's previous government and Syria. His more recent effort, with Brazil, to cut a nuclear deal with

Iran was disturbingly naïve. Turkey needs to keep working diplomatically to end the blockade. Israel has now indicated a willingness to modify the siege; it needs to end it altogether. If Turkey is truly committed to the rights of the Palestinians, it should be pressing other Muslim countries to seriously encourage an Israeli-Palestinian peace deal — the best way to up the pressure on Israel.

Israel also has a strong interest in repairing relations with Turkey. That is yet another reason why it should support a credible, independent international investigation. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu still doesn't get this. Washington needs to help him understand all that is at stake.

Source: <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/06/05/opinion/05sat2.html?ref=global>



Editorial, 5 June 2010, Saturday

Turkey's Erdogan bears responsibility in flotilla fiasco

Western governments have been right to be concerned about Israel's poor judgment and botched execution in the raid against the Free Gaza flotilla. But they ought to be at least as worried about the Turkish government of Recep Tayyip Erdogan, which since Monday (31 May) has shown sympathy toward Islamic militants and a penchant for grotesque demagoguery toward Israel that ought to be unacceptable for a member of NATO.

On the opposite page today, Turkey's ambassador to the United States makes the argument that Israel had no cause to clash with the "European lawmakers, journalists, business leaders and an 86-year-old Holocaust survivor" who were aboard the flotilla. But there was no fighting with those people, or with five of the six boats in the fleet. *All* of the violence occurred aboard the Turkish ferry Mavi Marmara, and *all* of those who were killed were members or volunteers for the Islamic "charity" that owned the ship, the Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH).

The relationship between Mr. Erdogan's government and the IHH ought to be one focus of any international investigation into the incident. The foundation is a member of the "Union of Good," a coalition that was formed to provide material support to Hamas and that was named as a terrorist entity by the United States in 2008. In discussions before the flotilla departed, Turkish officials turned down offers from both Israel and Egypt to deliver the "humanitarian" supplies on the boats to Gaza and insisted Ankara could not control what it described as a nongovernmental organization.

Yet the IHH has certainly done its best to promote Mr. Erdogan. "All the peoples of the Islamic world would want a leader like Recep Tayyip Erdogan," IHH chief Bulent Yildirim proclaimed at a Hamas rally in Gaza last year (2009). And Mr. Erdogan seems to share that notion: In the days since an incident that the IHH admits it provoked, the Turkish prime minister has done his

best to compete with Iran's Mahmoud Ahmadinejad and Hezbollah's Hasan Nasrallah in attacking the Jewish state.

"The heart of humanity has taken one of her heaviest wounds in history," Mr. Erdogan claimed this week. He has had next to nothing to say about the slaughter of Iranians protesting last year's fraudulent elections, but he called Israel's actions "state terrorism" and a "bloody massacre" and described Israel itself as an "adolescent, rootless state." His foreign minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, said in Washington on Tuesday (1 June) that "this attack is like 9/11 for Turkey" -- an obscene comparison to events in which more than 2,900 genuinely innocent people were killed.

Mr. Erdogan's crude attempt to exploit the incident comes only a couple of weeks after he joined Brazil's president in linking arms with Mr. Ahmadinejad, whom he is assisting in an effort to block new U.N. sanctions. What's remarkable about his turn toward extremism is that it comes after more than a year of assiduous courting by the Obama administration, which, among other things, has overlooked his antidemocratic behaviour at home, helped him combat the Kurdish PKK and catered to Turkish sensitivities about the Armenian genocide. Israel is suffering the consequences of its misjudgements and disregard of U.S. interests. Will Mr. Erdogan's behaviour be without cost?

Source: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wppdyn/content/article/2010/06/04/AR2010060404806.html>



Tel Aviv, Editorial, 8 June 2010, Tuesday

Managing the Gaza blockade

Israel's blockade of Gaza is crumbling. In the wake of last week's clash between Israeli commandos and militants on a relief flotilla, the world at large has condemned it; the Obama administration has called it "unsustainable." Egypt reopened its crossing into Gaza for humanitarian aid and some travel. But the solution is not as simple as simply ending the checks on sea and land traffic by Israel. What's needed is a new regime that addresses the legitimate needs of Palestinians in Gaza without further empowering Hamas and its patron, Iran.

No one who supports a peace settlement in the Middle East can also favour the removal of all controls on ships travelling to Gaza. The result would be a repeat of what has happened in southern Lebanon since Israel's withdrawal: the massive supply of weapons, including medium-range missiles, to Tehran's client. Hamas used Iranian missiles against Israel during their 2008 conflict, and an open sea border would only multiply the odds that such a war would be repeated. It would hand Hamas, which vehemently opposes an Israeli-Palestinian settlement, the means to interrupt peace talks at any time.

But Israel's policy has not been aimed at weapons smuggling alone. It also has choked off many consumer goods and supplies needed to rebuild Gaza's economy. The worthy but futile purpose has been to pressure Hamas to alter its refusal to recognize Israel -- or at least to release an Israeli soldier whom it abducted from Israeli territory in 2006. Though Israeli officials say they allow adequate supplies of food and medicine, U.N. agencies report that malnutrition is growing. Power, fuel and water are in short supply, and sewage systems are not operating due to lack of repairs. Meanwhile, Hamas is receiving many of the goods its militants want thanks to hundreds of tunnels dug under the Egyptian border.

Egypt is constructing a wall that will block many of the tunnels, which should provide more impetus for Israel to relax the blockade. David Makovsky of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy proposes that instead of choosing which goods it allows, Israel should permit all save those it expressly bans on grounds that they can be used for military purposes. Ships should probably continue to unload goods in nearby Israeli ports. Proposals for international inspections of cargos sound good in principle -- but the failure of such schemes in Lebanon, and previously in Gaza, gives Israel reasonable cause to resist.

Easing controls over Gaza runs the risk of giving Hamas a major boost at the expense of the rival Palestinian Authority. So Israel should simultaneously push forward with plans to relax its control over the West Bank, by taking down more roadblocks, turning over more territory to Palestinian security forces and making trade and foreign investment easier. The already-dramatic contrast between the West Bank and Gaza can continue to grow, to Hamas's disadvantage, even if Gazans are a little less miserable.

The "Free Gaza" organizers contend their aim has been to relieve humanitarian suffering. If that is the case, they should welcome a relaxation of Israel's controls and end their provocative attempts to "break the blockade" by sea. More such confrontations won't benefit average Palestinians -- only Hamas.

Source: <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/06/07/AR2010060703785.html>

V. Asia

THE EXPRESS
TRIBUNE
WITH THE International Herald Tribune

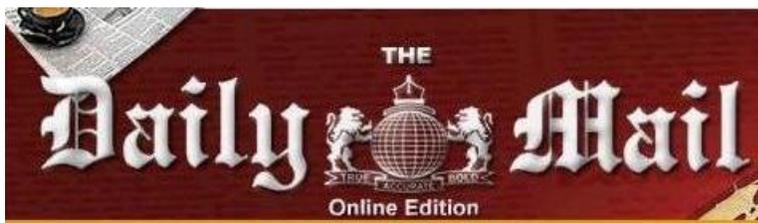
Karachi, 31 May 2010, Monday

Attack on Gaza peace flotilla

What country sends its soldiers to carry out a raid on a civilian ship, killing several people, and then blames the people on the ship for all the murder and mayhem? Israel. The head of the Israel Defence Force (IDF – a misnomer if ever there was one) was quoted as saying after the deadly attack on a flotilla of ships carrying activists from all over the world trying to break through Gaza’s naval blockade (in place since 2007) the following: “There is no connection between what occurred on the ship and peace efforts and humanitarian aid. Our forces were met with extreme violence from cold weapons, and in one instance, from firearms that were snatched from our fighters.” So, General Gabi Ashkenazi is saying that the soldiers of the much-vaunted Israeli army had to use all the resources – read weapons – at its disposal to quell the resistance it apparently faced from activists who were trying to break through the naval blockade. Perhaps one should ask the IDF chief if this indeed was the case, how come not a single Israeli soldier was killed or even wounded but 20 activists died?

The Israeli version has been contested by a reporter accompanying the activists who said that Israeli commandos began firing before they boarded the ship. At least 10 of the dead are reported to be Turkish citizens and three Pakistanis, including a well-known journalist, are on board one of the ships. We hope that Israel’s chief backer, America, will have some strict words to say to Tel Aviv after its latest exhibition of savagery and barbarism. There is absolutely no ground for justifying what Israel has done and to say, as Defence Minister Ehud Barak said on Monday (31 May), that the activists were ‘asking for it’ makes a mockery of logic and common sense. Israel’s response was disproportionate and borders on criminal given that the activists on the ships were not going to Gaza to fight a war but carrying aid for the beleaguered residents of the city. A word of advice for Washington — since that seems to be the only voice that Tel Aviv listens to. Please realise that it is your unequal treatment of Israel and Palestine which enables Taliban and al Qaeda to find ready recruits.

Source: <http://tribune.com.pk/story/17622/attack-on-gaza-peace-flotilla/>



Islamabad, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Israeli barbarism

Once again Israel has exposed its vile, barbaric and brutal face to the world by attacking in open seas the unarmed “Freedom Flotilla” comprising 600 passengers from over 40 nationalities carrying 10,000 tons of supplies for the besieged Palestinians in the Gaza Strip. In an act of naked aggression, Israeli forces stormed the eight ship flotilla sailing under

Irish, Turkish and Greek flags, butchered 20 passengers and took the rest in custody, in total disregard of all international rules and even human rights considerations. Israel imposed the blockade on Gaza three years ago, after the Palestinian political group Hamas assumed control. The aim of the Israeli sanctions is to isolate and weaken Hamas, which Israel regards as a terrorist group. Only three days before the Israeli extreme action against the freedom flotilla, a delegation of nine Members of the European Parliament, from the Foreign Affairs, Budgets and Development committees, left the Gaza Strip after a fact-finding mission hosted by UNRWA. The delegation monitored and assessed the humanitarian situation in Gaza and the impact of EU financial assistance. The delegation pointed out that the siege has completely isolated the people of Gaza, condemning them to a life of extreme poverty, with 80% of the population dependant on food aid. The MEPs declared that “The blockade must be lifted in order to allow full access to humanitarian assistance, to enable reconstruction and to give a new lease of life to legitimate economic activity and hope to the population.” UN Relief and Works Agency for Palestine Refugees (UNRWA) Adnan Abu Hasna told the German Press Agency (DPA) on Saturday, as the Freedom Flotilla set sail from Cyprus, that “There is a severe humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip. There are two aspects to it: firstly human development, mainly the sectors of health and education as well as the psychological stress the population is undergoing.” The UN was of the opinion that providing aid to the besieged Palestinians of Gaza was a humanitarian act.

The massacre that took place in the wee hours of Monday (31 May) was a premeditated Israeli operation. Israel wanted blood because it believes that its ‘power of deterrence’ expands with the more dead it leaves behind. The Israeli decision to use hundreds of commando soldiers against civilians was taken by the Israeli cabinet together with the Israeli top military commanders. What has been witnessed isn’t just a failure on the ground. It was actually an institutional failure of a morbid society that a long time ago lost touch with humanity. It is no secret that Palestinians are living in a siege for years. But it is now down to the nations to move on and mount the ultimate pressure on Israel and its citizens. Since the massacre on Monday (31 May) was committed by a popular army that followed instructions given by a ‘democratically elected’ government, from now on, every Israeli should be considered as a suspicious war criminal unless proved different. Considering the fact that Israel stormed naval vessels, both NATO members and EU countries must immediately cease their relationships with Israel and close their airspace to Israeli airplanes. Israeli Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon has charged that the mission was simply an attempt to provoke the Israelis is blatant lie. At a press briefing following the massacre by Israel Defence Forces (IDF) commandos of passengers on board the Mavi Marmara, one of the boats pertaining to the Freedom Flotilla attempting to break the siege of Gaza, IDF spokeswoman Avital Liebovitch claimed that the passengers had engaged in “severe violence against our soldiers.” The Daily Mail believes that one does not board a vessel this way on a routine denial of entry mission. Having studied blockades at sea, the Daily Mail opines that nobody does it by rappelling armed commandos onto decks of ships. On the contrary, a legitimate policing action announces its intention to board and search the ship; they do not attack using stealth in the dead of night, massacring innocent unarmed civilians. The Daily Mail strongly recommends that considering Monday’s (31 May) news about Israeli nuclear submarines being stationed in the Gulf, the world must react quickly and severely. Israel is now officially mad and deadly. The Jewish State is not just careless about human life, as we have been following the Israeli press campaign leading to the slaughter, Israel actually seeks pleasure in inflicting pain and devastation on others, and it must be stopped!

Source: http://dailymailnews.com/0610/02/Editorial_Column/DMEditorial.php#1

Daily Times

Your right to know A new voice for a new Pakistan

Lahore, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Israeli terrorism on the flotilla

Israel's deadly high-seas attack on the aid flotilla bound for the Gaza strip on Monday (1 June) has, once again, put the spotlight on typical Zionist aggression and its complete defiance of international law.

A contingent of six ships, loaded with humanitarian aid and hundreds of activists who were determined to peacefully challenge the illegal three-year blockade of the Gaza Strip, was still some 150 km off the Gaza coast — in international waters — when Israeli commandos violently boarded the Mavi Marmara and opened indiscriminate fire. The death toll, so far, has reached 19 — most of whom were Turks — with scores more injured. Israel has also arrested all the other activists, who include Pakistani journalist Talat Hussain. Reports indicate that all three Pakistanis who were on board will be deported back home within 48 hours.

This brazen attack, which has crossed all red lines in international law, has brought about a global diplomatic crisis with all out condemnation pouring in from the Muslim world and cautious regret expressed by the US and Europe. The strongest denunciation has come from Israel's only Muslim friend, Turkey. This dastardly incident could well reverse that relationship.

As usual, Israel has completely absolved itself of responsibility as it cites 'provocation' and 'self-defence' as the reasons its naval commandos attacked the flotilla. It begs to be asked then: what did the activists attack them with? Perhaps food supplies. There is no justification for this massacre of non-violent activists, but little else can be expected from an illegal state that has, time and again, flouted all values established by the UN and international law. The only reason Israel attacked the flotilla was because this demonstration was set to defy Israeli brutality which allows only a quarter of the needed aid to go through to Gaza every week. As a result, conditions have become so horrific for the Palestinians residing there that; reportedly, every drop of drinking water is highly contaminated. Instead of kowtowing to Israeli demands that the aid dock at their port and be transported to the Gaza Strip under Israeli supervision, the activists were determined to transport the goods directly to the affected as a symbolic breach of the illegal blockade.

The Israeli government refuses to disengage from Gaza after its 2007 invasion and it continues to flout all norms by murdering at will and with impunity. Its arrogance has also recently been

witnessed in its refusal to attend a convention aimed at complete nuclear disarmament in the Middle East. It is well known that Israel possesses a large stockpile of nuclear weapons and, given its track record of violence and oppression, it is appalling that this Israeli threat is being swept under the diplomatic rug.

The slow genocide of the Palestinians and the criminal silence of the international community all serve as triggers for the rising cloud of hatred and anti-western sentiment being witnessed in the Muslim world. It is no wonder then that the US is seen as being as big a foe as the Zionists themselves, considering its blind support.

The attack on the flotilla is, as expressed by the Turkish Foreign Minister, Ahmet Davutoglu, an act of piracy and banditry. It is state-sponsored terrorism and the rest of the world now waits to see how the UN, US and the rest of the west will react, given their constant homilies on the ‘war against terror.’

Source: http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=2010\06\02\story_2-6-2010_pg3_1

The Jakarta Post

Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Condemning heartless Israel

For the Israeli government, receiving international condemnation for its behaviour and brutality against the Palestinians is apparently just a matter of routine. Even if the world and the United Nations Security Council is united to denounce the state, it will not mean anything because the Israeli government will never hesitate to do anything it wants to do – ignoring universally acceptable values.

Indonesia and many other countries and organizations strongly condemned Israel’s brutal attack on a Turkish ship carrying humanitarian aid where 16 volunteers on board were reportedly killed. The Indonesian government, whose 12 citizens were also on board the attacked ship, has also joined the international community in issuing the harshest expression of anger on Israel military actions against a group of civilians who intend to deliver humanitarian aid to the Palestinians on Gaza Strip.

Foreign Minister Marty Natalegawa has vowed to take all possible diplomatic steps to ensure the safety and the return of the Indonesians. The minister reportedly had warned the Indonesians over the great danger they might face in their mission to defy Israeli’s blockade.

Marty fully acknowledged the noble purpose of the mission to help Palestinians who have been suffering for years following the isolation of the Gazans – most of them supporters of Hamas –

from the outside world. We fully support the position of the Indonesian government as it has the constitutional obligation to ensure the safety and security of its citizens wherever they are.

Only Israeli citizens can change the stubbornness of their government.

The Israelis also need to remember that the whole population of this planet very often has to pay the expensive price for their government's barbaric acts against the Palestinians. Global terrorists often use the Palestinian issue as their reason or pretext to terror innocent people in many parts of this globe.

Indonesians also have a bitter and painful experience with terrorism.

We should acknowledge, however, that Israelis also have the right to be free from fear, terror and intimidation from other people or groups who wrongly insist that Israel has no right to exist in this world.

But when the attitude of the Israeli government is against internationally acceptable norms, and while the Israelis are not united to force their government to behave better, they cannot expect sympathy or support from the rest of the world.

Source: <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2010/06/02/editorial-condemning-heartless-israel.html>

The World's Window on Japan
The Japan Times
ONLINE

Tokyo, Editorial, 4 June 2010, Friday

Israel overreacts

There are real threats to Israel's security. A flotilla of peace activists that was trying to breach the blockade of Gaza is not one of them. A heavy-handed and poorly prepared response has further blackened Israel's image, claiming innocent lives and alienating close friends and allies. Israel needs a more subtle and sophisticated approach to isolate its enemies; at a minimum, it must avoid such misguided efforts.

Israel and Egypt have blockaded the Gaza Strip since 2007, when the Islamic group Hamas took control of the territory from its Palestinian rival, Fatah, after winning parliamentary elections in January 2006. Hamas opposed security arrangements whereby the Gaza authority patrolled its side of the border to keep contraband from coming into or going out of the territory. So, Israel and Egypt blocked most commerce out of fear that the territory would be used as a haven for attacks against Israel.

As a result, living conditions in the territory have deteriorated. Few Gazans are starving and shops are full, but a once vibrant society is now living on handouts, watching its future is

destroyed. Eighty percent of the population depends on food aid to survive and much of the water is undrinkable. Although the territory is dotted with ruins from Israeli raids, construction is difficult because concrete is on the list of controlled items — it can be used for bunkers as well as homes.

Human Rights Watch concedes that the blockade is legal, but argues that it "constitutes a form of collective punishment in violation of Article 33 of the Fourth Geneva Convention." Humanitarians and peace activists are trying to provide aid to Gaza. They are also eager to spotlight conditions in the territory while casting Israeli actions in the most negative light possible.

In recent years, flotillas of vessels have been allowed to reach Gaza or were diverted by the Israeli navy without incident. This time, an international group with representatives from more than 30 countries was assembled to increase visibility and increase pressure on Israel. Six boats were enlisted to deliver 10,000 tons of aid including 6,000 tons of cement, more than 2,000 tons of iron, 100 prefabricated houses, 500 wheelchairs, medical equipment, additional building supplies, electric generators and food.

Israeli officials warned the organizers that they would not be allowed through and undertook measures to ensure that they were not. When "covert measures" failed — probably including the fouling of propellers — commandos rappelled onto the ships to take control of them.

According to Israel, what should have been a peaceful assault turned ugly. When they landed on one ship, the commandos were attacked with knives and clubs by activists and were forced to defend themselves with guns. Individuals on the boat tell a different story, saying Israel used live ammunition without provocation. At least nine activists were killed, more than 30 people wounded, including Israeli soldiers, and more than 600 people were arrested and taken into detention in Israel.

The backlash that followed the incident, which was broadcast live until Israeli soldiers stopped the video feeds, was loud. International condemnation has been uniform and the U.N. Security Council in a presidential statement — less authoritative than a resolution — condemned "acts" leading to the loss of life, without naming Israel. The statement also called for a "prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation conforming to international standards." It decried the situation in Gaza and called for prompt humanitarian action to ease the territory's woes.

Israel insists that the group that organized the flotilla is a dangerous Islamic organization with terrorist links. Supporters counter that the group is active in more than 100 countries and has contributed to disaster relief efforts in Haiti and New Orleans. Israel says its commandos were ambushed; clearly they were not ready for the resistance they encountered. It is yet another black eye for a military whose recent efforts have been distinguished by their failure.

The incident further erodes Israel's international image. It also alienates Turkey, where the group that organized the flotilla is headquartered and from which the majority of participants came.

Seven of the dead were Turkish citizens. Turkey, considered Israel's best friend in the Muslim world and a strategic partner, recalled its ambassador from Tel Aviv and cancelled joint military exercises with Israel. Ankara has indicated, however, that it will continue to buy weapons from Israel; a \$183 million sale is in the pipeline as the follow-up to a \$1 billion aircraft deal. It may be hard for the government to walk that line given the mounting public outrage.

Israel's concern about the use of Gaza to launch attacks against it is legitimate. Earlier this week, militants fired rockets from there into Israel; two other militants were killed trying to infiltrate Israel from the territory. But Israel cannot punish 1.5 million people for the activities of a few. Indiscriminate retaliation breeds more militants and makes it easier to paint Israel as the villain. Incidents such as these make Israel less safe and more insecure.

Source: <http://search.japantimes.co.jp/cgi-bin/ed20100604a1.html>



Islamabad, Editorial, 7 June 2010, Monday

Confronting Israel

In the backdrop of Israeli commandoes' barbaric attack on 'Freedom Flotilla' on May 30 (2010), Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan's wish to join the struggle to break the three-year old inhuman blockade of Gaza, by boarding the next humanitarian ship sailing towards the besieged strip, is an act of defiant courage, worthy of emulation by the rest of the Muslim world. It is time other right thinking people also joined the Muslims and stepped up their efforts to save the 1.5 million Gazans from hunger, ill-health and death and work together for a just solution of the Palestinian issue. In the unprovoked raid, it hardly needs recounting; the Israeli commandoes had killed nine Turkish peace activists aboard one of the ships in a humanitarian flotilla carrying 10,000 tons of food, medical supplies, toys and construction material. Aboard were about 600 peaceful supporters of Palestinians from 36 different lands, including a Nobel Laureate and European parliamentarians.

Pressure has since been building up on Tel Aviv to lift the blockade and agree to an international investigation of its outrageous act of murdering unarmed civilians. UN Secretary General Ban Ki-moon is the latest to call for an international commission to see whether there was any truth behind the Israeli allegation the passengers had weapons or the activists were only armed with a strong sentiment of sympathy for the poor wretched Gazans. There have also been angry protests almost everywhere. Even the US has now felt compelled to term the blockade "unsustainable", though President Obama's words have a ring of allusion to the flotilla posing danger to Israeli security. While talking about the need to convert the "tragic situation" into "an opportunity", he stressed, "the importance of finding better ways to provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza without undermining Israel's security", without spelling out what "better ways" could there be in the face of an adamant brute like the state of Israel. The truth is that the first step on

the way to ensuring Israeli security is for the Americans to change their way of looking at the Middle Eastern scenario. It is the US that has pampered the Jewish entity into a bully, feeding it with atomic secrets, regular and massive financial assistance and shameless support to its wild acts of brigandage at every international forum.

Source: <http://www.nation.com.pk/pakistan-news-newspaper-daily-english-online/Opinions/Editorials/07-Jun-2010/Confronting-Israel>

VI. Europe

Belfast **Telegraph**

Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

Israel must relax blockade of Gaza

Even for a country noted for its steely response to any perceived threat, the military exercise undertaken by Israel against an international aid convoy sailing towards Gaza was a political and security disaster.

At its utmost, the convoy was a two-fingered salute to the Israeli blockade of Gaza. It posed no threat to the state and was as much a propaganda exercise as a pressing shipment of aid.

However, Israel grossly over-reacted, sending commandos to board one of the vessels, a decision which ended with at least nine civilians on the ship being killed and many more injured. Quite rightly, the deaths have provoked a storm of protest around the world and even Israeli allies like the UK and Ireland have summoned that country's ambassadors to explain what happened and to register their protests at the needless deaths.

To compound matters, the deaths occurred on a vessel carrying aid from a Turkish agency with direct links to that country's government. Turkey has been the friendliest Muslim country in the region towards Israel, although relationships have been deteriorating in recent times. They will plummet to a new low after these deaths.

It is vital that Israel now conducts a full, transparent investigation into what happened when the commandos boarded the vessel in international waters. Israelis are notorious for defending their military actions even when it is apparent they went too far. The country will find itself further isolated if it attempts to cover up these deaths.

Of course our immediate sympathies must lie with the relatives of those killed and with those injured. Given that there were a number of Irish people on the convoy, including Nobel Laureate Mairead Corrigan Maguire, the mourning could have been on our own doorsteps.

Now there will be vociferous calls for Israel to slacken its blockade on Gaza. To deny ordinary Palestinians the necessities of life is unacceptable, even if there are real security issues in the region.

Source: <http://www.belfasttelegraph.co.uk/opinion/viewpoint/editors-viewpoint-israel-must-relax-blockade-of-gaza-14827069.html>

guardian.co.uk

London, Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

Gaza: From blockade to bloodshed

Nothing has done more to establish Israel's status as a pariah state among its neighbours than the actions of its armed forces.

If an armed group of Somali pirates had yesterday (31 May) boarded six vessels on the high seas, killing at least 10 passengers and injuring many more, a NATO taskforce would today (1 June) be heading for the Somali coast. What happened (31 May) yesterday in international waters off the coast of Gaza was the work of Israeli commandos, not pirates, and no NATO warships will in fact be heading for Israel. Perhaps they should be.

Nothing has done more to establish Israel's status as a pariah state among its neighbours than the actions of its armed forces. Israel's navy said it met with "pre-planned violence" when it boarded the ships and opened fire in the middle of the night. Their intention was to conduct a mass arrest, but the responsibility for the bloodshed was entirely theirs. Having placed themselves in a situation where they lost control and provoked a riot, the Israeli navy said they were forced to open fire to avoid being lynched. What did the commandos expect pro-Palestinian activists to do once they boarded the ships – invite them aboard for a cup of tea with the captain on the bridge? One of those shot and severely wounded was a Greek captain, who refused medical aid in Israel and demanded to be flown back to Greece. Presumably he, too, was threatening the lives of Israeli naval commandos.

There was nothing on board those ships that constituted a threat to Israel's security, so Benjamin Netanyahu's argument that his troops were acting in self-defence has no validity. They should not have been there in the first place. The convoy was carrying construction materials, electric wheelchairs and water purifiers for Gaza's people. This was recognised by the Israeli navy, who said in a statement that it had offered to transfer the aid by land to Gaza. Four years into a blockade mounted ostensibly to prevent weapons from being smuggled into the enclave, this claim, too, is utterly specious. Two years of pressure from Washington failed to persuade Israel to let these construction materials in, for the benefit of the 5,000 families still in tents after the ruin wreaked by Operation Cast Lead. If Israel was so obdurate to the entreaties of its ally, why would it now acquiesce in the demands of its enemies? The fact is that Israel has used its blockade not only to prevent Hamas from rearming, but also to impose collective punishment –

as a boot which it applied to the Palestinian throat. This pressure on the jugular has the opposite of its intended effect. Defiance has only grown in Gaza, and the Islamic resistance movement is reaping the benefits – as any Fatah man will admit.

In one operation Israel has destroyed whatever hold it had over the international community on Gaza. It is not simply the fury that it has created in Turkey, which will only grow as the bodies of its dead are buried. Egypt too is complicit, because its government has sealed the southern border of the Gaza strip. It has done so amid mounting popular opposition, and as a nervy transfer of power in Cairo is about to take place. The Egyptian government will not welcome the intense embarrassment that Israel has caused it. There were many calls yesterday (31 May) for the siege to be lifted, notably from Britain's new foreign secretary William Hague. After what Nick Clegg, his coalition partner wrote in this newspaper about Gaza last year (2009), he could hardly do otherwise. But as Mr Clegg said, it is action, not words, that counts now.

The blockade should end, but that will only be the start of the U-turn which is now required. Closely allied to Gaza's physical isolation is its political one. The international consensus is also crumbling on isolating Hamas by insisting it recognise Israel before it is allowed to join a national unity government with Fatah. Russia broke the taboo first two week ago when its president, Dmitry Medvedev, met Khaled Masha'al, the Hamas leader in Damascus, but other countries in Europe are now planning to follow suit. Brick by brick, this policy is coming apart, and in a strange way Israel is helping.

Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jun/01/gaza-blockade-bloodshed-editorial>

Independent.ie 

Dublin, Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

Israel can't defy world forever

Early yesterday (31 May) morning, Israeli commandos attacked the flotilla trying to run the blockade of Gaza and bring 10,000 tonnes of humanitarian aid to the 1.5 million inhabitants. At least 10 people were killed.

In military terms this was not a big operation, but its repercussions are enormous and could be disastrous. The forces of a sovereign nation have attacked unarmed vessels on the high seas, in flagrant violation of international law. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has demonstrated once again his contempt for legal norms and human rights, and his belief that his country, uniquely, can behave with impunity in any way it pleases.

He has also shown an astonishing lack of common prudence. He has offended the United States and his one truly friendly neighbour, Turkey, a country of massive geopolitical importance and a mainstay of NATO.

Yesterday in Istanbul, thousands of people took part in anti-Israel demonstrations. The Turkish government recalled its ambassador from Israel and cancelled three joint military exercises. That may not suffice to placate public opinion, which wants a boycott of Israeli goods. The government itself says that the incident "might cause irreversible consequences in our bilateral relations".

Elsewhere in the region and the wider world, the initial shock and disbelief swelled to condemnation, varying from standard regrets for the loss of life to apocalyptic forecasts of far greater violence, even war.

The Syrian and Libyan leaders jointly declared that the incident could lead to war spreading beyond the region. A statement from Amr Moussa, secretary general of the Arab League, was less heated but in its way more dismaying. Israel, he said, was not ready for peace.

The tentative negotiations now under way could not succeed. "We must re-evaluate how to deal with the conflict."

In Ireland and many other countries, Israeli ambassadors were summoned to hear the views of the relevant countries' foreign ministers. Their response to those ministers' criticisms was not such as to soften attitudes.

They and their government argued that the flotilla was warned to stay away from Gaza and sail instead to the Israeli port of Ashdod. They also claimed that the campaigners on board the leading ship attacked the commandos, who acted in self-defence. Did they expect anyone to believe that?

Perhaps they did not care. The most striking feature of the Netanyahu government is its contempt for the feelings of any other country (as witness its attitude to Turkey) which extends on occasion even to the United States, its patron and protector.

Since early in the reign of President Barack Obama it has been evident that he and Secretary of State Hillary Clinton are baffled by Israel's constant refusal to take the most tentative steps towards accommodation with the Palestinians. Instead, Israel has continued with the construction of Jewish settlements and it is difficult to believe that Mr Netanyahu has acted in good faith at any time.

When he last visited Washington, Mr Obama inflicted on him a devastating snub, leaving him alone while he went to dine with his wife and daughters. That, however, did nothing to help solve the Palestinian problem.

Yesterday Mr Netanyahu was in Canada. He was due to meet the President in Washington today (1 June). In the wake of the attack on the aid flotilla, he decided to cancel that part of his trip and go home.

But whatever the location on the field of these players, they will have to meet. The Israeli premier must learn that he does not have complete freedom of action; that he cannot defy world opinion forever. And only the President of the United States can bring that home to him.

Yesterday's (31 May) shocking events brought forth a mealy-mouthed statement from the White House. Mr Obama will have to do better than that. At a minimum, he can remind the Israeli premier of his country's dependence on the United States. He can advise him to show some respect for the United Nations and the international inquiry for which Brian Cowen and others called yesterday (31 May).

And none of these conflicts with the great overriding principle to which Ireland, no less than the US, subscribes wholeheartedly. Israel's right to exist and live in peace is absolute. But it does not include leave to breach the rights of others.

What happened yesterday (31 May) was not an accident. It was a crime.

Source: <http://www.independent.ie/opinion/editorial/israel-cant-defy-world-forever-2202068.html>

TIMES ONLINE

London, Editorial, 1 June 2010, Tuesday

Violence at Sea

Israel has the right to prevent arms being smuggled to Gaza. But too often its actions have been counter-productive and damaged its cause.

From the start, the flotilla was heading for trouble. The ships set out to break the blockade of Gaza. They knew that Israel would interdict the attempt. They knew there would be a confrontation: that and the consequent publicity was indeed largely the aim of the anti-Israel activists and Hamas supporters aboard. The Israeli Government was prepared for the encounter, warning its naval commandos to avoid provocation. They knew they would meet resistance. They may have had intelligence that there would be weapons aboard. Nevertheless, the storming of the ships, the death of at least ten people and the worldwide condemnation of Israel's actions are a disaster for Benjamin Netanyahu's Government.

Israel has a right to protect itself from its enemies. It has a right to stop the smuggling of arms to Gaza, to prevent the infiltration of rockets and weapons that could be fired by Hamas militants against Israeli targets. The Israeli armed forces know, from bitter experience, that even humanitarian operations can be exploited by the country's enemies. It is neither unreasonable nor a breach of international law to insist that ships on the high seas, suspected of carrying weapons, submit to inspection before they are allowed to dock.

The violent outcome, however, was all too predictable. Tactics are partly to blame: was it sensible to lower commandos from helicopters, exposing them to the danger of attack as they boarded the ships? Was it politically astute to target Turkish nationals, exacerbating Israel's deteriorating relationship with the one Muslim neighbour with which it has formerly enjoyed close political and military relations? Was it good public relations to be seen trying to turn back ships carrying crayons for schools, medicines for hospitals and cement to rebuild bomb-damaged towns?

The incident could have been avoided had the Israeli Government relaxed the blockade of Gaza. The restrictions were put in place — by Egypt as well as Israel — three years ago after the Hamas electoral victory to put pressure on the Islamist militants to recognise the existence of Israel, deal with its Government and end the barrage of rockets against towns in southern Israel. The aim was reasonable; the outcome has been wholly counterproductive. The blockade has handed Hamas a propaganda advantage that it has used across Europe and the Muslim world to win sympathy and support. The restrictions have been largely ineffective because of the network of tunnels under the border with Egypt through which a vast array of weapons, as well as other goods, have been smuggled. And the moral argument against the Hamas Government's militant intransigence has been blunted by the suffering caused by shortages and economic stagnation.

The Netanyahu Government will now come under pressure, not least from the Americans, to change its policies. But to many in Israel, this would now appear as surrender to pro-Hamas militants; to Israel's enemies it would justify the foolhardy attempt to break the blockade by force. Mr Netanyahu was due to meet President Obama today, to discuss ways to return to indirect talks with the Palestinians. The meeting has now been postponed, and with it a chance to repair what should be a strong and enduring alliance. That, and the fractured relationship with Turkey, is perhaps the biggest casualty of yesterday's violence.

Too often recently the Netanyahu Government has reacted to events in ways that have hurt Israel's cause. Its announcement on settlement building was spectacularly ill timed. Its refusal of a visa to Noam Chomsky undermined its longstanding commitment to free speech. And its attack on the flotilla has strained relations with friends around the world. It is time to seize the initiative: the goal is peace, and Mr Netanyahu should set the agenda to achieve it.

Source: http://www.timesonline.co.uk/tol/comment/leading_article/article7141295.ece



Nicosia, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Our View: Israel's Pyrrhic victory in Gaza standoff

It will be some days until there is a clear picture of what really happened off the coast of Gaza yesterday (1 June) when a number of pro-Palestinian activists were killed.

What is certain is that the political and public relations repercussions are huge for the Israeli government, which spent most of yesterday defending its position, even in the face of global condemnation.

Already under fire over the three-year blockade of Gaza, which the UN has condemned as a violation of the rules of warfare by causing suffering to a civilian population, Israel is also facing widespread criticism for continuing to build illegal settlements, and has only just about lived down the Dubai passports scandal.

The fact that Israeli commandos boarded one of the Free Gaza boats while it was still in international waters in the early hours of yesterday (1 June) is undisputed. Legally it had no right to do so at least until the boats had entered what Israel defines as the 'territorial' waters off Gaza.

The move was therefore not only illegal, but was followed by an excessive use of force after the Israeli government had previously pledged to use 'limited force' to stop the flotilla reaching Gaza.

If the boat's occupants were wielding sticks or knives, as Israel says, they clearly felt they had the right to defend themselves from an attack in international waters. It is rather difficult to believe that one of the best-equipped and elite armies in the world could not have found another less violent way to stop a rag-tag flotilla of limping civilian boats.

Now Israel is facing seriously – possibly even irreversibly-damaged - relations with Turkey and Greece, which cancelled joint war games, the rest of the Arab world, and worse with the Palestinians themselves, which could lead to a new escalation of conflict and possible terrorist attacks.

It was always going to be a lose-lose situation for Israel. Allowing the flotilla to reach Gaza would have weakened its domestic stance on the blockade, even though casualties would have been avoided. The world – other than the leftie blocs - would have paid very little attention to the whole affair.

A confrontation involving seizure of boats, cargo and the temporary detention of activists was always going to engender bad publicity, and turn some of the world's attention on Gaza. But there would have been limited exposure as the mass media in friendly countries would likely have paid little heed.

If yesterday's (1 June) bloodbath was all about stopping aid getting into Gaza, and deterring future aid voyages, then Israel has scored a pyrrhic victory, the full price of which remains yet to be seen.

Source: <http://www.cyprus-mail.com/category/article-categories/opinions>

guardian.co.uk

London, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

US and the Middle East: Holed below the water line

Work has to finally start on rebuilding a peace process worthy of the name

Day two of the aftermath of Operation Sea Breeze, and it was anything but. The Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, flew back from the US, postponing a kiss-and-make-up session with Barack Obama to discuss the Israeli premier's pet subject, Iran. Egypt opened its border with Gaza, as much to give vent to domestic anger as to provide temporary relief to its hapless neighbours. The UN huffed and puffed, as the first eyewitness accounts of what happened on the high seas on Monday (31 May) morning began to emerge. "There was a plan, and they went according to the plan," concluded Annette Groth, a German politician on board the Mavi Marmara. "They created terror and were shooting without warning. They wanted to demonstrate their power and demonstrate if you want to go to Gaza, don't even try it." An Israeli cabinet meeting demanded a probe into a decision which seven of its most senior members took. Don't hold your breath.

None of these matters. The real question is: will anything change? Or will the deaths of those on board the convoy pass loudly but swiftly into history, as the killings of Rachel Corrie, Tom Hurndall and James Miller have before them? The few clues around yesterday (1 June) were all depressing ones. Opening the Egyptian border temporarily to humanitarian aid is gesture politics. What Gaza wants is what was in those ships – concrete, steel, building materials with which to repair the damage inflicted by Israel's punishment raid last year. But as an Egyptian security source told Reuters, those are the last things that will be let through the Rafah crossing. "Hard materials" will still have to go through Israel. No change there.

Nor was there any discernible movement in the UN Security Council debate. Turkey, whose citizens had been killed by Israeli naval commandos, proposed a statement condemning Israel for violating international law, demanding a UN investigation and the prosecution of those responsible. What did the administration of the man who promised a new approach to the Middle East do? It went back to the old approach. The US watered down Turkey's just demands, so the shootings became "acts", and blame was neatly apportioned to both sides. Alejandro Wolff, the deputy permanent representative of the US on the council, said the direct delivery of humanitarian aid to Gaza by sea was neither appropriate nor responsible. Forget the signals that words like these send to Gazans. They are used to them. The next time Barack Obama appeals to the Muslim world it will be to deaf ears, and for this his administration has only got itself to blame.

As Robert Malley, director of the International Crisis Group's Middle East programme, said yesterday (1 June), the international community has been complicit in a policy of isolating Gaza and weakening Hamas – a policy that he called both morally appalling and politically self-defeating. Yesterday (1 June) there was scant sign of Washington abandoning an approach which has repeatedly failed.

The reason is that so many other failing US policies depend on it: the support for a beleaguered Palestinian Authority as the sole representative of Palestinians; the attempt to talk up the work of one man without a party, the Prime Minister Salam Fayyad, as transformative; and proximity talks which will never be able to bridge the gap between the maximum Mr Netanyahu can give and the minimum even a weakened Palestinian leader like Mahmoud Abbas can accept. One error of judgment reinforces another, and another, and another. Meanwhile the settlements keep on growing.

As the edifice underpinning these misjudgements starts to fall apart, work has to finally start on rebuilding a peace process worthy of the name: one based on dealing with both wings of the Palestinian national movement without preconditions. That is the only realistic way out of this morass.

Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jun/02/us-middle-east-israel-editorial>

Telegraph.co.uk

London, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Gaza aid flotilla attack: Israel is always shooting... and fast losing friends

Israel's policy of meeting force with greater force is proving ever more counter-productive. Adrian Michaels reports on the fall-out from the Gaza aid convoy deaths.

For Israel, a garrison state, almost every challenge is framed as a threat to its existence, just as the Battle of Britain threatened the survival of these islands. That the latest existential challenge, as Israel saw it, took the form of an aid flotilla, possibly infiltrated by extremists but seemingly packed with civilian Turks and Western intellectuals, is an indication of the growing gap in understanding between Israel and its friends.

Amos Harel, a military and defence commentator, wrote in the Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* yesterday: "No matter how much effort it invests, Israel will never be able to explain to the world how ... civilians were killed, without a single death on our side – and the dead are citizens of the country [Turkey] that was until recently our best friend in the region."

Gaza was the intended destination of the flotilla. Israel holds to its blockade of Gaza, a sliver of land from which it withdrew forces in 2005, because it wants to stop the flow of weapons to

Hamas, an extremist Palestinian organisation that rules Gaza and is among those that really do question Israel's right to exist. Hamas is weak and corrupt, though it launches crude and terrorising rocket attacks on Israeli citizens. And Israel demonstrated clearly with its bombardment of Gaza at the end of 2008 that it can blow the militants to smithereens. None the less, Hamas is seen as a deadly threat, and the maintenance of the siege is viewed as crucial to Israel's existence.

To understand this, you just need to look at Temple Mount, the small hill in Jerusalem where two important mosques sit above the remains of the ancient Jewish temple. In Israel, perhaps as nowhere else, archaeology is a crucial part of today's politics, discourse and diplomacy. Excavations in such areas affirm for Jews their historical presence and continued right to live in the region; spades are powerful tools to deploy against increasingly shrill attempts to "delegitimize" the country.

Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Iran's president represents the extreme example of that delegitimizing trend when he questions whether the full horrors of the Holocaust took place and undermines by assertion and implication Israel's sovereignty. But elsewhere, there is no doubt that a broad-based and widely accepted narrative that has helped to sustain Israel for decades looks in danger of running its course.

Sympathy is running out and the feeling that the Palestinians and other deserving groups were cheated in the process of establishing the Jewish state is growing. Presumably, many of the people on the aid flotilla to Gaza would not have been staunch backers of the Jewish claim to a country somewhere between the river Jordan and the Mediterranean.

No wonder Benjamin Netanyahu, Israel's prime minister, and many others in the country were so sensitive to the flotilla and the shifting international sands it may represent. The over-reaction by the Israel Defence Forces is far harder to justify, but it is only the latest in a long line of dreadful miss-steps by Israel's administration.

A fresh round of settlement construction in disputed East Jerusalem was announced as Joe Biden, US vice-president, was in town. Turkey's ambassador was humiliated on television in January (2010) by being summoned for an admonition and given a small, low chair from which to stare up at a hectoring Israeli minister. Israel turned down friendly overtures from Qatar, an important Arab state; it forged British and other passports while assassinating an enemy in Dubai; it took the ludicrous decision to ban Noam Chomsky, the American gadfly academic, from entering the disputed West Bank. And even as the aid flotilla approached, Israeli officials were saying it was untrue that there was a humanitarian crisis in Gaza, pointing to the lush restaurant menus that a tiny few can enjoy.

All of these events have contributed to a change in the rhetoric around Israel. Its critics decry its lack of devotion to freedom of speech and some happily dub it a "rogue" state, a sobriquet normally reserved for countries or governments that are deemed out of control. The crazy coalition that Mr Netanyahu leads is partly to blame: his government is composed of ministers spanning the religious far Right and the Labour Left, while excluding the centrist Kadima party

that actually won most seats at the last election. But Mr Netanyahu has also built an inner circle made up mostly of hardliners, and they appear to be delivering bad advice. While Hamas is today celebrating a public relations triumph, Israel continues to show that it is not fighting this century's wars with this century's weapons.

Meir Javedanfar, an Israeli-based expert on Iran, says the government must stop seeing the armed forces as the first solution to everything. Israel, he thinks, is still following Sean Connery's advice as policeman Jimmy Malone in *The Untouchables*: "[Al Capone] pulls a knife, you pull a gun. He sends one of yours to the hospital; you send one of his to the morgue. That's the Chicago way.'... This is how Israel survived in a neighbourhood where it has been surrounded by powerful enemies, many of whom have been hell-bent on its destruction."

Mr. Javedanfar says that philosophy worked well against Syrians, Egyptians and Jordanians, even bringing peace with Jordan and Egypt, but it is out of step today. Israel has not been, for years, the plucky little guy in the playground, and it would do better to start talking from a position of strength. He suggests that Israel could lift the Gaza blockade, explaining that it did so at the request of the moderate Palestinians who run the West Bank, demonstrating how diplomatic engagement leads to results.

In an editorial, *Ha'aretz* says of the flotilla deaths: "The violent confrontation, whether caused by poor military planning or poor execution, resulted from flawed policy, wars of prestige, and from a profound misunderstanding of the confrontation's meanings and repercussions."

Israel may now further undermine some of its most reliable alliances as a result. Egypt and Jordan are probably squirming with embarrassment. As for the US, its craven call for more investigation and understanding rather than a swift condemnation of the flotilla deaths looks almost as bad as China's refusal last week to condemn North Korea's sinking of a South Korean ship. China, incidentally, has had no such inhibitions over Israel; the foreign ministry said it was "shocked" at Israel's attack.

It is not just in the Middle East that the international consensus which has sustained Israel has been eroded. We can see the post-1945 view of the world being ripped up almost daily, from the emergence of the new powers of China and India and a perceived weakening of the US's superiority, to a moderating of Germany's ardour for the European Union and a loosening of the commitments that have helped to prevent war in Western Europe for decades.

Israel's view of itself has changed hugely, too. It was a society that tended to frame itself within the context of Arab wars, a devotion to a secular, democratic society and the staunch backing of America. But Israelis have changed in composition and outlook. A huge influx of Russians after the dissolution of the Soviet Union changed the mix of the country's peoples; the controversial and rapidly expanding settlements in the disputed territories of the West Bank and East Jerusalem have fractured public opinion; and the increasing influence and numbers on the religious Right have seemed to make an unwieldy political system even more unworkable.

"Israel itself does not know what it stands for," says one sympathetic observer. "There is a cacophony of voices and its enemies are using the international community and media much better."

Israeli officials can counter legitimately that their extreme sensitivity is justified. Iran's attempts to build a nuclear bomb could be explanation enough, but they can also see countries from Russia and North Korea to Brazil and Turkey probing and prodding the White House for weakness. Israel can point to occasions when diplomacy has supplanted military action as the first option. It let Hamas fire rockets on Israelis for years before losing patience and bombarding Gaza. It has pursued, fruitlessly, numerous peace talks and discussions about a Palestinian state with moderate and not-so-moderate Palestinians. It feels that having the strength to offer concessions is just taken as weakness by its enemies and not rewarded enough by its friends.

Mr Netanyahu has given the impression that doing nothing is the best strategy. He has maintained his domestic popularity, at least until recently, by allowing the vast security wall between Israelis and Palestinians to limit terrorism, and by largely facing down US demands to halt settlement construction.

But time, international opinion and Palestinian birth-rates are not on his side. Ehud Barak, the defence minister and former prime minister, sounded a clear warning in February (2010) about the lack of progress in establishing a Palestinian state: "As long as in this territory west of the Jordan River there is only one political entity called Israel, it is going to be either non-Jewish, or non-democratic. If this bloc of millions of Palestinians cannot vote, that will be an apartheid state."

It may seem crass to compare Israel with apartheid-era South Africa – another state viewed as rogue – but it is a measure of how far behind the discussion Israel has fallen. Something needs to change if Israel is to shore up its international allies and undermine those who would erode its right to exist.

Source: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/middleeast/israel/7795976/Gaza-aid-flotilla-attack-Israel-is-always-shooting...-and-fast-losing-friends.html>

Independent.ie 

Dublin, Editorial, 3 June 2010, Thursday

Eyes of the world are now on Israel

On its record, Israel is unlikely to bow to international opinion. Again today, words will fly but, hopefully, not bullets, as an Irish aid ship approaches Gaza. The Government has officially condemned Monday's (31 May) Israeli action, which resulted in at least nine deaths, and the Taoiseach has warned of "serious consequences" if any harm comes to Irish citizens detained in Israel.

Through the Minister for Foreign Affairs, the Government has also issued a number of demands, including safe passage to Gaza for the Irish aid ship 'Rachel Corrie' and a full, independent, inquiry into Monday's (31 May) storming.

We will know later today (3 June) whether the Israeli government will respond sympathetically to that first appeal, make an exception of the Irish vessel, and allow its humanitarian cargo to be delivered to Gaza.

It seems unlikely. An Israeli officer boasted on radio yesterday (2 June) that he looked forward to an easy takeover of the ship. More ominously, the Israeli government has said it will "do whatever is necessary" to prevent any breach of the Gaza blockade.

As to the Government's call for an inquiry, it remains to be seen whether the international community will accept the US position that Israel should effectively be left alone to investigate the flotilla raid itself.

After much wrangling yesterday (2 June), the word "independent" was deleted from an eventual UN call for "a prompt, impartial, credible and transparent" investigation, apparently at the insistence of the US.

If President Obama truly believes that Israel can be relied upon to conduct a credible and transparent investigation, as stated by his deputy ambassador at the UN, his confidence will not be shared by the many countries which have condemned Monday's (31 May) operation.

Throughout Northern Ireland's violent years, Sinn Fein spokesmen consistently refused to engage in what they derided as "the politics of condemnation", preferring some form of words which would walk a well-worn line between criticism and approval of this bombing or that shooting. Today, in the Middle East, the politics of the last atrocity lives on, and Gerry Adams finds no difficulty in condemning what he recognises as an outrage. He is right about one thing when he says that the eyes of the world will be on how the people aboard the 'MV Rachel Corrie' will be treated today.

Source: <http://www.independent.ie/opinion/editorial/eyes-of-the-world-are-now-on-israel-2203387.html>

guardian.co.uk

London, Editorial, 5 June 2010, Saturday

Turkey: Not lost but found

Turkey's stance may be shifting – but this is not necessarily something western nations should fear

Relations between Turkey and Israel, once an axis of stability in the Middle East, will never be the same again, warned Turkish president Abdullah Gül, after this week's killing of nine Turkish nationals in the assault on the Gaza aid flotilla. It is tempting to agree. Yesterday, at the end of a week of stormy rhetoric triggered by the attack, and with crowds in the streets of Istanbul again vowing vengeance, Turkey was still rattling its sword. Two claims against Israel through the international courts were reportedly being mulled in Ankara. Meanwhile Turkey's deputy prime minister said that economic and military ties with Israel would now be cut to a minimum, though he was careful to insist that existing defence contracts, some of which are very large, would be honoured.

The week's events have accelerated a falling-out between Turkey and Israel that has been building over Gaza for at least two years. On both sides this is partly about domestic politics and partly about the substance of the issue itself. But the row bolsters wider speculation that Turkey is in the process of weakening the west-facing, secular stance it has held since the era of Kemal Atatürk and is beginning to redefine itself more as an eastern and Muslim nation. Given Turkey's pivotal role not just in the Middle East but in the diplomacy of nuclear anti-proliferation, in relations with Russia, in the evolution of the European Union and in world energy supply, this is a speculation full of possibilities, some of them threatening.

It is true that Turkey's international position can no longer be taken for granted as it was when Kemalist diplomats and military leaders shaped Turkey unchallenged. But this is not something to fear. Those days have gone, though there is substantial continuity, which is sometimes overlooked in more the alarmist western commentary emphasising that Turkey is being "lost". Turkey's response to the Gaza blockade is indicative of the more autonomous and distinctive nation that elected Recep Tayyip Erdogan's moderate Islamist AKP government in 2003 and for which he continues to speak. The AKP sees Turkey as neither western nor eastern but as central to its own region, a policy sometimes dubbed neo-Ottoman, hence the engagement with states such as Iran and Syria and with movements including Hamas.

The truth is that, internally and externally, Turkey is in flux. Democracy and human rights are not fully consolidated, though great strides have been made. Internationally, Turkey has its own priorities, which it pursues with some success. This is both right and realistic. Turkey is certainly changing. It has many cards in its hand. But the rest of the world should work with those changes and not fear them.

Source: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2010/jun/05/turkey-israel-relations>

VII. Australia and New Zealand

nzherald.co.nz

Auckland, Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Israeli overkill benefits only the extremists

Israel can hardly claim to be surprised by the universal international condemnation of its commando raid on ships taking humanitarian aid to the blockaded Gaza Strip.

There is a sad familiarity about the episode, which left at least nine activists dead.

Here, as in last year's (2009) military offensive against Gaza, Israel has reacted with force completely disproportionate to the situation.

In so doing, it has placed itself even further offside with the international community and, worse still, undermined the prospects of an easing of Middle East tensions.

The aid flotilla, conceived by the Free Gaza Movement, was undoubtedly provocative.

Its aim was to bring world attention to the deteriorating humanitarian and economic circumstances in the narrow Palestinian enclave.

Israel imposed a blockade in 2007 after the militant Islamic group Hamas won power, and has blocked ships from delivering aid since its 2009 offensive.

The stated aim of the blockade is to stop the delivery of arms to Hamas, especially of rockets that can be fired indiscriminately at Israeli villages.

But the number of such attacks has dwindled, and Israel stands accused of being more intent on creating hardship for Gaza's 1.5 million people in the hope that they will rise up against their extremist governors.

That strategy is as ill-judged as an assault on aid ships in international waters.

Turkey, until recently one of Israel's few friends in the region, had warned that action against the flotilla, which was manned mainly by Turks, would have "irreversible consequences".

Yet in the end, Israel was again unable to come up with anything other than armed might.

Resistance to this should have been of little surprise, but, in circumstances that are not yet totally clear, the attack went awry.

It should be noted that Israel had suggested that the flotilla should offload its 10,000 tonnes of medical and building supplies at the Israeli port of Ashdod before it was handed over to the United Nations for delivery to Gaza.

That was a reasonable compromise. Indeed, if such moderation were pursued, the people of Gaza might come to recognise an alternative to an extremism that, according to Israel, has led Hamas to place a higher emphasis on the securing of arms than the wellbeing of the Palestinian people.

They could conclude that the approach of Mahmoud Abbas' Fatah on the West Bank offered greater dividends.

As it was, the Ashdod option was rejected by the Free Gaza Movement, which was determined to breach the blockade. At that point, a collision with Benjamin Netanyahu's Israeli Government became inevitable.

In his previous period in power, Mr Netanyahu was a thorn in the side of international peace proposals, and in 2005 he opposed Israel's withdrawal from Gaza after a 38-year occupation.

He has shown little appetite for negotiations that would end Gaza's isolation, albeit those talk between Israel and the Palestinians, mediated by the United States, have resumed.

Pressure to lift the blockade will now increase. Having already shown himself quite willing to risk the wrath of President Barack Obama, Mr Netanyahu is unlikely to feel inclined to bow to international entreaties.

The consequence of these hardliner tactics will be a strengthening of the status of Hamas as the flag-bearers of Palestinian nationalism, the increased sidelining of Fatah, and the encouragement of a greater stridency.

That, and the increasing desperation of the people of Gaza, enhances the prospects of a new Palestinian uprising. A dramatic new approach from the Israeli leadership is required to address that.

The attack on an aid flotilla that posed no real threat suggests the chances of such a change are, in fact, receding.

Source: http://www.nzherald.co.nz/world/news/article.cfm?c_id=2&objectid=10649049

The Sydney Morning Herald

Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Israel cannot shift blame for flotilla deaths

It has become a familiar pattern. Israel takes military action in support of a policy that is contested at home and abroad, in this case its naval blockade of Gaza. The action meets unexpected resistance, to which Israeli forces respond by shooting at those who have attacked them with whatever may have been to hand. In the latest incident, the attackers wielded iron bars, hatchets and knives. The resort to superior force results in the deaths of a considerable number of people - in this case at least nine - and the wounding of many more. And Israel's official explanation? Defence Minister Ehud Barak echoed sentiments that have also become

familiar: "We express remorse for the injured activists. However, the full responsibility rests on the organisers ... and those participants who acted violently." Hence Israel is not at fault.

That even the government of which Mr Barak is a part does not privately think his curt allocation of blame to be the whole story, let alone justification of what happened, may be inferred from the actions of Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. On Monday (31 May) Mr Netanyahu had been due in Washington, to meet US President Barack Obama for discussions aimed at repairing the strained relations between Israel and its main ally. But when news broke that Israeli commandos had boarded the largest vessel in a flotilla of six trying to run the blockade, with the ensuing loss of life, Mr Netanyahu returned home instead. The message in the cancelled meeting was clear, despite a cautiously phrased statement by Mr Obama on the need for an inquiry to ascertain all the facts. There is not going to be a bright new dawn in relations between Israel and the wider world - including its staunchest ally - when Israel has once again displayed blithe indifference to the consequences of its actions.

The hatchet-swinging activists aboard the Turkish vessel boarded by the commandos were evidently not meek peace protesters, as Israeli spokesmen have noted. It may even be true that their intention was to provoke the commandos into behaving as they did. It does not follow, however, that Israel had no other option in responding to the approach of the flotilla assembled by the Free Gaza Movement. Even the Israel Defence Forces does not pretend that the flotilla was carrying armaments destined for Hamas, the Islamist movement whose continued dominance of Gaza is the notional justification of the blockade. The cargo consisted of electric wheelchairs, water purifiers and building materials. Israel insists that it allows sufficient food, medicine and other humanitarian aid to enter the Gaza Strip, but much of the territory has remained in ruins since Operation Cast Lead, Israel's invasion of the strip in December 2008 and January 2009. Five thousand families live in tents, and the UN estimates 60 per cent of Gazans have no daily access to water. Yet Hamas still controls the territory, and kidnapped Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit remains its prisoner.

Quite apart from the human suffering caused by the blockade, it is demonstrably a policy that has not achieved its aim. Israel, however, persists in it even to the point shown this week. The flotilla could have been allowed to proceed with no harm done to Israel's security, but instead it was intercepted and the subsequent violence has done great harm to Israel's global reputation. Not the least damaging aspect of that harm is that the Jewish state seems to have earned the enmity of Turkey, hitherto its strongest friend in the Islamic world. Many of those aboard the flotilla were not militants - they included a Nobel peace laureate - and some were not even activists but members of the international media. Among them were two Fairfax journalists, now detained by Israel. As a columnist in Israeli newspaper *Ha'aretz* commented, it is a case of a second Gaza war being lost at sea.

Source: <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/editorial/israel-cannot-shift-blame-for-flotilla-deaths-20100601-wv4t.html>

The Sydney Morning Herald logo, featuring the text "The Sydney Morning Herald" in a stylized, gothic font.

Editorial, 2 June 2010, Wednesday

Commando raid has harmed Israel

Having a former commando for a prime minister is not turning out to be such a good idea for Israel, if the debacle of the Gaza convoy's interception indicates Benjamin Netanyahu's approach to problems. The idea of a quick, precise Special Forces operation is appealing and the Israel Defence Forces are second to none in their commando skills. But unless employed in a well thought-out strategic context, such operations can sometimes compound the situation.

The convoy of several supply ships packed with activists was a stunt designed to highlight the effects of Israel's blockade of a Gaza strip supposedly released from military occupation, a blockade that after three years has no end in sight. It was conceived to present Israel with a set of unpalatable options. Netanyahu has fallen for the one leading to the most embarrassing outcome.

There are calls within Israel and without for a detailed, independent investigation of what happened in the seizure of the Gaza flotilla, leading to the deaths of at least nine activists and injuries to several Israeli soldiers. Many Israelis will be hoping such an inquiry will bear out their government's claims that some activists attacked the commandos with knives and axes, seized pistols, and opened fire - causing the soldiers to return fire in fear of lynching. But it may be that the sequence of events as the shock troops landed by ropes from helicopters or clambered aboard from speedboats is impossible to unravel conclusively.

Such an inquiry would have to study what diplomatic efforts were made with Turkey, where the main ships and many of the activists originated, to achieve a peaceful outcome. Or had Netanyahu's government, by its deliberate humiliation of the Turkish ambassador this year, already burnt its valuable bridge to this important, majority Muslim nation? It would also look at the decision to intercept the convoy in international waters, instead of when it entered the territorial zone off Gaza when use of force would have had more validity. And why not simply use a conventional naval interception, instead of bringing commandos with their hair-trigger reactions face to face with highly emotional Palestinians and supporters in the pre-dawn hours?

Netanyahu may have wanted this outcome - as a further lesson in toughness and willingness to buck international opinion - but it has been highly counterproductive for Israel. The Palestinians have been presented with an incident that some Israelis believe could resonate like the Royal Navy's interception in 1947 of the ship Exodus trying to take Holocaust survivors into Palestine. Israel has lost more international regard. Hamas may have been strengthened in its grip on Gaza and in its appeal on the West Bank. A third intifada may be gathering. Israel is being led into the wilderness.

Source: <http://www.smh.com.au/opinion/editorial/commando-raid-has-harmed-israel-20100601-wv5h.html>

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