



A SHAMELESS ATTACK ON THE 'FREEDOM FLOTILLA'

By Rana Odeh

The Free Gaza Movement (FGM), the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedom and Humanitarian Relief, known as IHF, and many other humanitarian organizations acted with great generosity and gave their all when they gathered 10,000 tons of humanitarian aid for the Palestinian people in an effort to end the 3-year illegal Israeli blockade of Gaza. Israel, however, had a different agenda when the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) raided the "Freedom Flotilla" which carried nearly 700 unarmed peace activists from 42 different countries. The flotilla was illegally attacked in international waters 40 miles off the Gaza coast. In its act of piracy, the IDF shot and killed nine passengers aboard the Mavi Marmara, the largest of the six ships which were attacked on Monday, May 31.

Among the nine that have been affirmed dead (there are still many passengers in critical condition being held by the IDF), eight were Turkish, and Furkan Dogan, 19, has dual citizenship (American and Turkish). The autopsy results released Friday, June 4 by the Turkish authorities reveal the extent of force used by the IDF against the nine dead victims; all of the victims were shot at least once, and many of them five or six times with 9mm rounds. Dogan was shot in the back of the head, nose, back, left leg and ankle. Many of the other victims were also shot in the back or head.

Some witnesses have stated that most of the victims were shot in the head or upper part of the body first, and then later shot in the legs which was a "tactical move" by the commandos to make it appear as though they were shooting to wound rather than to kill. Witnesses also say the ship was under attack without warning and with no provocation. The ships were all unarmed; the peace activists defended themselves with whatever they found lying around the ship. Some passengers even got hold of the kitchen knives which were used for fruits and vegetables during the journey, but refrained from killing any of the Israeli soldiers who had fired live ammunition, even though they were capable of doing so. The humanitarian organizations and all the passengers on board were peace activists who only sought to bring aid to those in desperate need.

The IDF's actions were a serious breach of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) of 1982, which prohibits any criminal acts of violence, detention or deprivation committed on the high seas. This is not the first time, however, that Israel has committed

an international crime. The U.S. government's unshakable support of Israel's criminal activities through military aid has made Israel's barbaric attacks on Palestinians and other peace activists possible. Without the financial and military aid from America, which our tax dollars pay for, and the exemption from criminal prosecution under international law, Israel would not be able to act in the violent and cruel manner that it does and get away with it. The continuous use of the U.S. veto power in the UN Security Council is the equivalent of U.S. approval of Israel's actions. America is guilty by association yet the American people do not realize that our government officials have soiled their hands.

Prosecution without enforcement is nothing more than a slap on the wrist. If the UN Security Council takes action against Israel, even without a U.S. veto, the Security Council resolution would be meaningless without proper enforcement by the five permanent members of the Security Council; the U.S., the U.K., France, Russia and China.

Israel is already rejecting an international investigation of what happened during the attack. If the IDF has nothing to hide,

why would they refuse an investigation, take all the cameras and footage from the passengers on board, and release a doctored audio recording of the attack? Israel has admitted that the audio recordings were doctored and the ship was unarmed. Israel has also retracted the comment which connected some of the peace activists to terrorist organizations. What, then, would make the IDF fire live ammunition even after the white flag was raised? A 21-year-old IDF soldier shot and killed six of the nine victims. He stated that he did what he was trained to do, and is now being considered for a medal of valor.

No other country has ever been exempt from international law and defended the way that Israel has been. Justice has not been served in Israel's numerous breaches of international law in the past, and it is time for the Palestinian people and everyone in support of freedom to get the justice they deserve. I hope the tragic end to the "Freedom Flotilla" journey at least highlights Israel's criminal actions and awakens the conscience of the globe.

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ISRAEL'S NAVAL BLOCKADE: A LEGAL, MEASURED RESPONSE TO HAMAS THREAT



By David H. Landon

The reaction by the mainstream media, European leaders and the "Muslim street" to the ill-fated attempt by Israel to enforce its naval blockade of Gaza was quick and predictable. The anti-Israeli critics all joined the choir and with righteous indignation denounced the actions taken by Israel which resulted in the loss of nine of the protestors on the ship Mavi Marmara. A week ago six small ships, the so-called "peace flotilla," while in international waters off the coast of Gaza, attempted to ignore the 3-year-old naval blockade of Gaza by Israel. On one of the ships, as the Israeli commandos attempted to rappel from a hovering helicopter onto the ship, the commandos were met with lethal force and were forced to use deadly force in response. In an ultimate act of hypocrisy, which are becoming more and more common when dealing with Israel, the international community has condemned Israel for excessive use of force.

Let's see if we can set the stage for what is occurring. Iran is just short of becoming a nuclear power, and has threatened to "wipe Israel off the map." Hezbollah rains missiles down onto Israeli citizens from their safe hold in Southern Lebanon. Hamas rains missiles down onto Israeli citizens from the Gaza strip. Call them paranoid if you must, but can you blame Israel for wanting to intercept arms and rockets before they fall into the hands of the people shooting them into Israel?

Fortunately for Israel, the entire incident was caught on a video, documenting the takeover of the vessel by the commandos. As the first four rappelled onto the deck of the Mavi Marmara, they were set upon by "peace activists" with metal bars, wooden clubs and knives. As the fourth commando reached the deck he saw one member of his team sprawled across the deck with a Turkish activist holding the pistol he had taken from the commando, pointing it at his head. The commando jumped from the rope and shot the Turkish "peace activist" before he could shoot the fallen commando. At least two other commandos suffered gunshot wounds. After the incident a number of 9mm bullet casings were found on the deck. These casings were not the type of ammunition used by the commandos. The ship's captain later told investigators that the weapons that fired those casings had been thrown overboard.

As another commando landed on the deck he saw three members of his team lying wounded on the deck. One had a gunshot wound to the stomach and one with a gunshot wound to the knee. The third lay unconscious, his skull fractured from a blow to the head with a metal bar. This commando formed a perimeter around these injured Israeli team members and protected them with his pistol to stave off the attacking "peace activists" who were charging the commandos and repeatedly firing at them. During this exchange of gun fire, nine of the "peace activists" were killed.

Since the takeover of Gaza by Hamas there have been over 4,000 rocket attacks on Israel. Since 2007, the Israelis have attempted to stem the flow of arms arriving into Gaza by means of a naval

blockade. The use of the blockade is not only sound military theory, it is perfectly legal. Hamas is a self-declared enemy of Israel. Israel has the right to protect itself from the rocket attacks of this sworn enemy by intercepting the arms on the open sea. The U.S. has previously used this same military tactic. During World War II, the United States blockaded Germany and Japan. In an instance closer to our own shores, John F. Kennedy blockaded Cuba during the October 1962 missile crisis. Israel has already twice intercepted weapons-laden ships from Iran destined for Hezbollah and Gaza. What country would allow that?

Imagine the following scenario. A group that is recognized by the world community as a terrorist organization takes control of a state within Mexico that shares a border with the Texas border. This group, which through force and intimidation has driven out a more moderate government, swears to wipe out the state of Texas. They receive weapons by Turkish and Iranian ships coming across the Gulf of Mexico. They begin to fire missiles into Texas killing children inside schools and citizens as they shop. What would the U.S. response be? If they even fired one rocket into Texas, not 4,000, what do you suppose our response would be?

I can safely predict that the least aggressive action the U.S. military would take is a blockade to prevent new weapons from arriving. The probable response would be a direct and decisive military engagement by the U.S. where, upon its conclusion, the problem would be eliminated. And yet, Israel is being condemned for using this least aggressive option: the naval blockade.

Those aboard the Mavi Marmara who assaulted Israeli Special Forces on the deck of the Turkish ship were not motivated by peace. The leader of the flotilla admitted they were intending to provoke an international incident. Maybe the world agrees with the now disgraced and unceremoniously retired Helen Thomas. The Israelis, according to Thomas, should "get the hell out of Palestine" and "go back to Germany, Poland and the U.S." Ignoring the history of the region seems to be a habit of Israeli bashers. Can someone please point out to Ms. Thomas that the Jewish people occupied these lands for thousands years before the Palestinian victims she champions arrived on the scene?

Israel has a right and a duty to defend itself from Hamas and those who back this terrorist organization. The fight is not with the people of Gaza but only with the radical regime that overthrow the legitimate Palestinian Authority. Their pledge to seek Israel's destruction is real and they are determined to carry it out. We should celebrate Israel's show of restraint and encourage them to continue their use of this least aggressive form of self-defense: the naval blockade.

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