



**Blaming Israel
Completely Unacceptable**

Tabula

June 14-20, 2010

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Early morning on May 31, Israeli commandoes slid from hovering helicopters onto the Turkish ship *Mavi Marmara*. They prevented embarked so-called peace activists from gaining the shore of the Gaza Strip, which is controlled by the terrorist group Hamas. The on-deck fracas also sparked a new round of international “blame the victim,” a game with which we in Georgia are all too familiar. But blaming Israel for defending itself ignores the facts and the underlying geopolitical developments.

Mavi Marmara was the largest in a flotilla of 6 ships and boats that left Turkey, trying to “open a sea lane between Gaza and the rest of the world,” said Greta Berlin of the Free Gaza Movement, one of the organizers. The other main organizer was the Turkish *Insani Yardim Vakfi* or Foundation for Human Rights, Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, which some allege has terrorist ties.

Among hundreds of naïve but no doubt sincere peace activists from Turkey, Western Europe and America were embedded some hard core *jihadis*, there to precipitate a bloody incident for the television reporters also aboard. Chanting, “Khaibar, Khaibar”—the name of a Jewish settlement defeated by Muhammad in 629 A.D.—they attacked the descending Israeli troops with pipes, knives, sling-shots and small firearms. Nine so-called activists died.

The six vessels were diverted to the nearby Israeli port of Ashdod, where their passengers were processed and deported. Israeli authorities will inspect their cargo—dangerous contraband unlikely to be found in this instance—and forward it overland to Gaza, fulfilling the aim of the sincere activists. But delivering aid to needy people was secondary to the flotilla organizers.

Their objective was to open an unfettered sea lane to Gaza, either by establishing a precedent if Israel had relented, or by provoking an international outcry if it intercepted the six vessels.

“Bloody massacre...inhumane state terrorism,” cried Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdoğan. “Disproportionate use of force,” opined French President Nicolas Sarkozy. “Completely unacceptable,” said British Prime Minister David Cameron. The German Government was “shocked,” as was United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon. Then—as night follows day—began calls to end Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip.

Righteous indignation may serve Erdoğan’s geopolitical purpose as he distances Turkey from the west and plays big power politics, at once in consonance and in competition with Iran. And it may afford western leaders useful noise as their naïve countrymen arrive home from their flotilla holidays. But blaming the victim is, to borrow Cameron’s phrase, completely unacceptable.

Recall that in 2005, under international pressure, Israel withdrew from Gaza, its army forcibly removing recalcitrant Jewish settlers. Four months later, Hamas won a plurality of votes and took over the government. The US and the European Union ceased direct aid to Gaza. Hamas booted its

enemies in a civil war and now runs the place as a 360 Km² terrorist camp. Since 2007, tens of thousands of rockets have rained upon Israeli cities and towns from Gaza.

Now, make no mistake—with unfettered access to Gaza under current circumstances, Iran and Syria would flood Hamas with weapons, likely including M-600 missiles, as surely as they have armed Hizbullah in Lebanon.

US Secretary of State Clinton is correct to say, “The situation in Gaza is unsustainable and unacceptable.” However, the short-sighted reaction of most western diplomats will be to blame Israel, craft some new Gaza access scheme and profess renewed vigor in the peace process.

But connected geopolitical matters cannot be sorted into separate bits for the convenience of diplomats and politicians. There will be no enduring positive results to the Middle East peace process until we accept the inconvenient reality that peace must include Gaza. And Gaza is now run by Hamas, beholden to Iran, whose great power aspirations include nuclear weapons and the destruction of Israel. That is what should be completely unacceptable.

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