

# The Other Israel

**TOI-picks - June 2010** <http://toibillboard.info>

*A choice of texts in print, selected from what was distributed electronically on the dates appearing. (Service started after termination of the printed newsletter.)*

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## *A Flotilla Raid Special*

*Statement published as ad immediately after the raid*

### **A CRIME AGAINST ISRAEL**

What happened yesterday is a crime. A crime against the State of Israel.

A band of foolhardy, irresponsible and power-drunk persons decided on an action that was bound to result in people being killed and injured.

No sensible person in Israel or abroad will buy the collection of lies and pretexts with which those responsible are trying to justify themselves. The more so since no one of the victims has been allowed to speak.

Not only was this operation immoral, but it is also turning against us the last of our sympathizers in the world and adding strength to those who call for a boycott on Israel.

There is only one way to limit the damage:

-- TO CALL for the immediate appointment of an international board of inquiry to investigate the event.

-- TO LIFT at once the immoral and illegal blockade against the million and a half inhabitants of the Gaza Strip.

-- TO IMPLEMENT the proposed prisoner exchange and free Gilad Shalit.

Huge damage has been done. We must try to repair it as best as possible.

GUSH SHALOM

*(Large special ad in Hebrew in Ha'aretz, June 1)*

## **Let the aid boats through to Gaza! End the Siege! a warning not heeded**

May 22, Gush Shalom sent a letter to the Defense Minister

*Press release* - The Gush Shalom movement calls upon the government to allow the eight-boat aid flotilla from all over the world to reach the shores of Gaza, where they are scheduled to arrive next week, and unload the humanitarian cargo which is urgently needed by the residents of Gaza. In a letter to Defense Minister Barak, Gush Shalom calls upon him to cancel immediately the instructions given to Israeli Navy ships off the Gaza shore to intercept the aid flotilla.

'The whole world is looking. The State of Israel has no interest in flooding the international television screens with images of Israeli sailors and naval commandos violently assaulting hundreds of peace activists and humanitarian aid workers, many of them well-known in their countries. Whose interest will it serve when hours long dramatic live reports arrive from the Mediteranean, with the world's sympathy given to hundreds of non-violent activists, on board eight boats, assaulted by the strongest military power in the Middle East?' were the words of a letter to the Defense Minister.

No harm whatsoever will be caused to Israel from the aid flotilla reaching Gaza Port and unloading a cargo of medical supplies and medicines, school supplies and construction materials to rebuild the houses destroyed by the Israeli Air Force a year and half ago and not yet been restored. On the contrary, it would be in Israel's best interest to declare without delay that as a humanitarian gesture, the boats' way will not be blocked. And in general, it is time to end once and for all the suffocating siege imposed on the Gaza Strip and causing terrible suffering to its million and a half inhabitants.

The siege on Gaza utterly failed in all the goals set for it by the government of Israel. The siege was supposed to result in toppling the Hamas government – and on the contrary strengthened this government, which relied on the support of a significant part of the Palestinian People. The siege was supposed to help in gaining the release of captured soldier Gilad Shalit - but on the contrary, the siege just delays that release, which could have been achieved long ago had the government of Israel agreed to the prisoner exchange deal, on which most of the details have been decided long ago. It's time to end this cruel and pointless siege.

The residents of the Gaza Strip, like the citizens of Israel and of any other country in the world, have the right to maintain direct contacts with the outside world - to leave their country and return to it, to develop their economy, to import the products they need and export their own produce to anyone who wants to buy it, without asking or needing for permission from Israel, Egypt or any other country.

Just as Israel needs no permit from any other country to operate daily the sea ports of Ashdod and Haifa and Eilat and the Ben Gurion International Airport, so are the

Palestinians and their state to be entitled to run their own sea port and airport in the Gaza Strip. Let the flotilla of humanitarian aid from all over the world be given the honour of inaugurating the sovereign Palestinian Port of Gaza!

## **`Security cannot be built on the corpses of protesters!`** ***Reporting of spontaneous May 31 protest***



*Photo Ma'ariv - Waiting in Ashdod for navy + captured boats to arrive (Adam Keller in the middle)*

More than 2000 people, old and young, gathered opposite the Ministry of Defense in Tel-Aviv in a spontaneous demonstration of anger and protest, after soldiers of the 'most elite units' of the IDF were sent to attack the Peace Flotilla that was on its way to Gaza. The number of killed and injured from among the peace activists on the boats proved that the aim of the action was to frighten and deter anyone who would undertake to break the blockade in future.

The demonstration was remarkable for the wide spectrum of activists who were urged by the sights of the night to take part. Side by side with Gush Shalom activists were members of Peace Now, people from Meretz and Hadash, the Women's Coalition and anarchists. All called in unison: 'Security cannot be built / on the corpses of protesters!'

Many of the demonstrators had themselves participated in the past in efforts to get food, medicines and building material into Gaza through the roadblocks, under the slogan 'Break the Blockade!' They followed with sympathy the efforts of peace ships from several countries to do this by sea.

"Bibi, Barak / the blood of the activists is on your hands!" called one poster. Another said: 'The government is leading us all into suicide!', 'They shoot protesters too!', 'IDF / Terrorism in uniform!' and 'No to piracy / Yes to peace!'

A large force of police and Border Guard officers was deployed to guard the ministry, obviously out of fear that the protesters might try to storm the building. However, there

was no violence, except for a few arrests.

Some dozens of the protesters came to the Defense Ministry straight from Ashdod, where they had been demonstrating at the gates of the harbor while the attack was still under way.

'The blockade imposed on 1.8 million inhabitants of the Gaza Strip, men, woman and children, is inhuman, immoral and illegal, and must be broken!' a Gush Shalom activist told the many media people who covered the demonstration. 'There is no doubt that after this flotilla, more will come, and that the dimensions of the action will grow, until the leaders of Israel realize that the blockade is hurting Israel much more than Hamas.

[From the Gush Shalom site - similar protests took place within hours after the bloody assault of the flotilla in Ashdod, Jerusalem, Haifa and Be'er Sheba]

## **“The Government Is Drowning Us All”**

### **Uri Avnery attacked by rightist thugs**

Report of the 15000-strong protest in Tel-Aviv, June 5

A disaster was averted yesterday (June 5) at Tel-Aviv's Museum Square, when rightists threw a smoke grenade into the middle of the protest rally, obviously hoping for a panic to break out and cause the protesters to trample on each other. But the demonstrators remained calm, nobody started to run and just a small space in the middle of the crowd remained empty. The speaker did not stop talking even when the cloud of smoke reached the stage. The audience included many children.

Half an hour later, a dozen rightist thugs attacked Gush Shalom's 86 year old Uri Avnery, when he was on his way from the rally in the company of his wife, Rachel, Adam Keller and his wife Beate Zilversmidt. Avnery had just entered a taxi, when a dozen rightist thugs attacked him and tried to drag him out of the car. At the critical moment, the police arrived and made it possible for the car to leave. Adam Keller, who is the Gush Shalom spokesperson, commented: "These cowards did not dare to attack when we were many, but they were heroes when they caught Avnery alone."

The incident took place when the more than 10 thousand demonstrators were dispersing, after marching through the streets of Tel Aviv in protest against the attack on the Gaza-bound aid flotilla.

Not only was this one of the largest peace demonstrations for a long time, but also the first time that all parts of the Israeli peace camp - from Gush Shalom and Hadash to Peace Now and Meretz – did unite for common action

The main slogan was "The Government Is Drowning All of Us" and "We must Row towards Peace!" - alluding to the attack on the flotilla. The protesters called in unison "Jews and Arabs Refuse to be Enemies!"

The demonstrators assembled at Rabin Square and marched to Museum Square, where the protest rally was held. Originally, this was planned as a demonstration against the occupation on its 43th anniversary, and for peace based on “Two States for Two Peoples” and “Jerusalem – Capital of the Two States”, but recent events turned it mainly into a protest against the attack on the flotilla.

One of the new sights was the great number of national flags, which were flown alongside the red flags of Hadash, the green flags of Meretz and the two-flag emblems of Gush Shalom. Many peace activists have decided that the national flag should no longer be left to the rightists.

“The violence of the rightists is a direct result of the brainwashing, which has been going on throughout the last week,” Avnery commented. “A huge propaganda machine has incited the public in order to cover up the terrible mistakes made by our political and military leadership, mistakes which are becoming worse from day to day.”

*From www.gush-shalom.org*

## **Veteran peace activist: Israel trying to get Gaza people to overthrow Hamas**

Benjamin Netanyahu is lying when he says the Gaza blockade exists in order to prevent the transfer of weapons to Gaza, Uri Avnery tells Haaretz.

### **Mazal Mualem, *Ha'aretz* June 6**

Journalist and former Knesset member Uri Avnery is one of the most prominent political activists identified with the Israeli peace camp. As has been the 86-year-old's habit for decades, he did not miss the leftist demonstration in Tel Aviv, on Saturday night - this one protesting the government's handling of the Gaza-bound flotilla incident last week.

All told, only 6,000 people took part in the demonstration. Is the Israeli peace camp in fact just a negligible minority?

That number is wrong. There were at least twice as many demonstrators, and that is a huge amount when you take into account the unprecedented brainwashing the country experienced during the week, when a near-totalitarian propaganda machine repeated a single picture and a single story, and prevented citizens from seeing or hearing anything else. We hardly saw anything except for a few minutes shot and edited by the Israel Defense Forces spokesman's office, which confiscated the films shot by journalists. The question may be asked: Why? What are they afraid of?

The photos published by the IDF and the Turkish media clearly show Israeli naval commandos being attacked, thrown from the deck and bleeding. Are you saying those photos were fabricated?

The gap is created when you see only two minutes [of footage]; you don't see what came before or after, and so it is possible to get the impression that the Turks attacked a Jewish ship. Imagine if Jews were in distress, attacked on the high seas, with dead and wounded - just imagine the uproar. Not only the Turks see this as an Israeli attack, but the whole world does.

Are you convinced this was an aid flotilla?

There is no doubt. The intention of the Israeli government is to create a crisis that is so terrible that the people of Gaza will overthrow Hamas. Meanwhile, four years have passed and Hamas is stronger than it was. What is the siege for? Who is it good for? If the Israeli government hadn't sent the poor soldiers to attack the ship, just as the cabinet secretary [Zvi Hauser] suggested, all of this could have been prevented. They could have stopped [the ships], examined them and let them go on. It seems we have to protect IDF soldiers from [Defense Minister] Ehud Barak and [Prime Minister] Benjamin Netanyahu.

When Netanyahu calls it a flotilla of hate, is he lying?

Not only Netanyahu, the ministers, too, in addition to a few people in uniform: the army chief of staff and the commander of the navy. In any well-run country, the head of the navy would have resigned that same night. The operation itself reflected an astounding and disastrous lack of military capability. What is the nature of an army whose admiral personally commands such a stupid undertaking? I was a soldier and I don't remember any of my commanders ever putting me in such an idiotic situation. A person who can give such an order cannot command our soldiers.

And the mounting evidence that the flotilla was a provocation by terrorists fails to convince you?

The story begins with the fact that Israel attacked a Turkish ship because it was bringing aid. The ship was attacked and [the forces] did what they did. After all, we experienced this ourselves with the Exodus, when British soldiers attacked and the illegal immigrants defended themselves any way they could. Three immigrants were killed and dozens were injured. That was the beginning of the end of the British Mandate just eight months later.

Continuing this parallel that you are making, what does this say about us?

Parallel? Then there was a British government minister named Ernest Bevin who was stupid and coarse, and now we have a defense minister who is stupid and coarse. We are led by a gang of idiots. After last week a big change has taken place en route to ending the occupation and the siege on Gaza, which is a siege based on lies and wrapped in stupidity.

Benjamin Netanyahu said the siege exists in order to prevent the transfer of weapons to Gaza. This is a lie. He prevents the entrance of noodles, fruit, children's toys and paper for books. The damage caused to Israel's standing this week is greater than that caused by Operation Cast Lead [in Gaza, in December 2008-January 2009]. I am receiving messages from liberal Jews [abroad] and they see this as a disaster. We are moving forward with the blindness of the people of Sodom - struck blind and going on, increasing the wave of hatred against Israel.

Is it possible that something good can come from this low point, as it did with the Exodus

incident?

In Goethe's "Faust," Satan appears and says: I am the power that always wants evil, but causes good. It might happen that, paradoxically, something good comes out of the bad.

Who will lead? After all, the peace camp has no political leadership.

All of the disasters in Israel began with Ehud Barak declaring himself the head of the peace camp. He went to Camp David unprepared and failed. When he returned he did not say that the negotiations would continue. Instead he said: I have turned over every stone on the way to peace; we haven't got a partner. These words caused a disaster we haven't yet recovered from.

But perhaps now, because of this incident, people who have been standing on the sidelines will understand that we have an existential problem. I see the demonstration [Saturday night] as a new awakening. We have a long way to go. We are in a situation in which the political system is split wide open. Last week in the Knesset we saw that Kadima is not a different version of the Likud; it is even worse. I was a Knesset member for 10 years and I don't remember any disgrace that came even close to this: physical attacks [on Arab MKs] by nearly all the Jewish members accompanied by the shouting of racist and sexist remarks.

And the Arab MKs did not take part in the uproar?

There is polarization on both sides. Actions create reactions. There's a vicious cycle here when the parliament descends to such a nadir. I am looking for the right word: parliamentary rabble. It terrifies me anew. It is a death blow to parliamentary democracy.

Did [Turkish Prime Minister] Erdogan incite the region?

That is part of the stupidity. We have had one very important friend in the Middle East for decades: the Turkish army. Turkish politics has been changing over the last two years; Turkey wants to position itself as a Middle East superpower, and wanted to mediate between Israel and the Moslem world. And let's assume we didn't like the fact that Turkey moved closer to Iran. What did we do? We united all of Turkey in hatred for Israel. Was it worth it?

## **J-boat to sail to Gaza from Europe**

Press release, June 4, 2010

In a harbour in the Mediterranean (we're not yet disclosing which one) a small vessel is waiting for a special mission. She will be sailing to Gaza. In order to avoid sabotage, the exact date and name of the port of departure will be announced only shortly before her launch.

"Our purpose is to call an end to the siege of Gaza, to this illegal collective punishment of the whole civilian population. Our boat is small, so our donations can only be symbolic: we are taking school bags, filled with donations from German school children, musical instruments and art materials. For the medical

services we are taking essential medicines and small medical equipment, and for the fishermen we are taking nets and tackle. We are liaising with the medical, educational and mental health services in Gaza..

"In attacking the Freedom Flotilla, Israel has once again demonstrated to the world a heinous brutality. But I know that there are very many Israelis who compassionately and bravely campaign for a just peace. As broadcasting journalists from mainstream television programmes are accompanying our boat, Israel will have a great chance to show the world that there is another way, a way of courage not fear, a way of hope not hate", says Edith Lutz, one of the organizers and passenger on the "Jewish boat".

The "Jüdische Stimme" (Jewish Voice for a Just Peace in the Near East), along with her friends of EJJP (European Jews for a Just Peace in the Near East) and Jews for Justice For Palestinians (UK) are sending a call to the leaders of the world to help Israel find her way back to reason, a sense of humanity and a life without fear. "Jewish Voices" expects the political leaders of Israel and the world to guarantee a safe passage for the small vessel to Gaza, thus helping to form a bridge towards peace.

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## Kill a Turk and Rest

*Uri Avnery, June 5, 2010*

ON THE high seas, outside territorial waters, the ship was stopped by the navy. The commandos stormed it. Hundreds of people on the deck resisted, the soldiers used force. Some of the passengers were killed, scores injured. The ship was brought into harbor, the passengers were taken off by force. The world saw them walking on the quay, men and women, young and old, all of them worn out, one after another, each being marched between two soldiers...

The ship was called "Exodus 1947". It left France in the hope of breaking the British blockade, which was imposed to prevent ships loaded with Holocaust survivors from reaching the shores of Palestine. If it had been allowed to reach the country, the illegal immigrants would have come ashore and the British would have sent them to detention camps in Cyprus, as they had done before. Nobody would have taken any notice of the episode for more than two days.

But the person in charge was Ernest Bevin, a Labour Party leader, an arrogant, rude and

power-loving British minister. He was not about to let a bunch of Jews dictate to him. He decided to teach them a lesson the entire world would witness. “This is a provocation!” he exclaimed, and of course he was right. The main aim was indeed to create a provocation, in order to draw the eyes of the world to the British blockade.

What followed is well known: the episode dragged on and on, one stupidity led to another, the whole world sympathized with the passengers. But the British did not give in and paid the price. A heavy price.

Many believe that the “Exodus” incident was the turning point in the struggle for the creation of the State of Israel. Britain collapsed under the weight of international condemnation and decided to give up its mandate over Palestine. There were, of course, many more weighty reasons for this decision, but the “Exodus” proved to be the straw that broke the camel’s back.

I AM not the only one who was reminded of this episode this week. Actually, it was almost impossible not to be reminded of it, especially for those of us who lived in Palestine at the time and witnessed it.

There are, of course, important differences. Then the passengers were Holocaust survivors, this time they were peace activists from all over the world. But then and now the world saw heavily armed soldiers brutally attack unarmed passengers, who resist with everything that comes to hand, sticks and bare hands. Then and now it happened on the high seas – 40 km from the shore then, 65 km now.

In retrospect, the British behavior throughout the affair seems incredibly stupid. But Bevin was no fool, and the British officers who commanded the action were not nincompoops. After all, they had just finished a World War on the winning side.

If they behaved with complete folly from beginning to end, it was the result of arrogance, insensitivity and boundless contempt for world public opinion.

Ehud Barak is the Israeli Bevin. He is not a fool, either, nor are our top brass. But they are responsible for a chain of acts of folly, the disastrous implications of which are hard to assess. Former minister and present commentator Yossi Sarid called the ministerial “committee of seven”, which decides on security matters, “seven idiots” – and I must protest. It is an insult to idiots.

THE PREPARATIONS for the flotilla went on for more than a year. Hundreds of e-mail messages went back and forth. I myself received many dozens. There was no secret. Everything was out in the open.

There was a lot of time for all our political and military institutions to prepare for the approach of the ships. The politician consulted. The soldiers trained. The diplomats

reported. The intelligence people did their job.

Nothing helped. All the decisions were wrong from the first moment to this moment. And it's not yet the end.

The idea of a flotilla as a means to break the blockade borders on genius. It placed the Israeli government on the horns of a dilemma – the choice between several alternatives, all of them bad. Every general hopes to get his opponent into such a situation.

The alternatives were:

- (a) To let the flotilla reach Gaza without hindrance. The cabinet secretary supported this option. That would have led to the end of the blockade, because after this flotilla more and larger ones would have come.
- (b) To stop the ships in territorial waters, inspect their cargo and make sure they were not carrying weapons or “terrorists”, then let them continue on their way. That would have aroused some vague protests in the world but upheld the principle of a blockade.
- (c) To capture them on the high seas and bring them to Ashdod, risking a face-to-face battle with activists on board.

As our governments have always done, when faced with the choice between several bad alternatives, the Netanyahu government chose the worst.

Anyone who followed the preparations as reported in the media could have foreseen that they would lead to people being killed and injured. One does not storm a Turkish ship and expect cute little girls to present one with flowers. The Turks are not known as people who give in easily.

The orders given to the forces and made public included the three fateful words: “at any cost”. Every soldier knows what these three terrible words mean. Moreover, on the list of objectives, the consideration for the passengers appeared only in third place, after safeguarding the safety of the soldiers and fulfilling the task.

If Binyamin Netanyahu, Ehud Barak, the Chief of Staff and the commander of the navy did not understand that this would lead to killing and wounding people, then it must be concluded - even by those who were reluctant to consider this until now – that they are grossly incompetent. They must be told, in the immortal words of Oliver Cromwell to Parliament: “You have sat too long for any good you have been doing lately... Depart, I say; and let us have done with you. In the name of God, go!”

THIS EVENT points again to one of the most serious aspects of the situation: we live in a bubble, in a kind of mental ghetto, which cuts us off and prevents us from seeing another

reality, the one perceived by the rest of the world. A psychiatrist might judge this to be the symptom of a severe mental problem.

The propaganda of the government and the army tells a simple story: our heroic soldiers, determined and sensitive, the elite of the elite, descended on the ship in order “to talk” and were attacked by a wild and violent crowd. Official spokesmen repeated again and again the word “lynching”.

On the first day, almost all the Israeli media accepted this. After all, it is clear that we, the Jews, are the victims. Always. That applies to Jewish soldiers, too. True, we storm a foreign ship at sea, but turn at once into victims who have no choice but to defend ourselves against violent and incited anti-Semites.

It is impossible not to be reminded of the classic Jewish joke about the Jewish mother in Russia taking leave of her son, who has been called up to serve the Czar in the war against Turkey. “Don’t overexert yourself” she implores him, “Kill a Turk and rest. Kill another Turk and rest again...”

“But mother,” the son interrupts, “What if the Turk kills me?”

“You?” exclaims the mother, “But why? What have you done to him?”

To any normal person, this may sound crazy. Heavily armed soldiers of an elite commando unit board a ship on the high seas in the middle of the night, from the sea and from the air – and they are the victims?

But there is a grain of truth there: they are the victims of arrogant and incompetent commanders, irresponsible politicians and the media fed by them. And, actually, of the Israeli public, since most of the people voted for this government or for the opposition, which is no different.

The “Exodus” affair was repeated, but with a change of roles. Now we are the British.

Somewhere, a new Leon Uris is planning to write his next book, “Exodus 2010”. A new Otto Preminger is planning a film that will become a blockbuster. A new Paul Newman will star in it – after all, there is no shortage of talented Turkish actors.

MORE THAN 200 years ago, Thomas Jefferson declared that every nation must act with a “decent respect to the opinions of mankind”. Israeli leaders have never accepted the wisdom of this maxim. They adhere to the dictum of David Ben-Gurion: “It is not important what the Gentiles say, it is important what the Jews do.” Perhaps he assumed that the Jews would not act foolishly.

Making enemies of the Turks is more than foolish. For decades, Turkey has been our closest ally in the region, much more close than is generally known. Turkey could play,

in the future, an important role as a mediator between Israel and the Arab-Muslim world, between Israel and Syria, and, yes, even between Israel and Iran. Perhaps we have succeeded now in uniting the Turkish people against us – and some say that this is the only matter on which the Turks are now united.

This is Chapter 2 of “Cast Lead”. Then we aroused most countries in the world against us, shocked our few friends and gladdened our enemies. Now we have done it again, and perhaps with even greater success. World public opinion is turning against us.

This is a slow process. It resembles the accumulation of water behind a dam. The water rises slowly, quietly, and the change is hardly noticeable. But when it reaches a critical level, the dam bursts and the disaster is upon us. We are steadily approaching this point.

“Kill a Turk and rest,” the mother says in the joke. Our government does not even rest. It seems that they will not stop until they have made enemies of the last of our friends.

*(Parts of this article were published in Ma'ariv, Israel's second largest newspaper.)*

## **The Second Gaza War: Israel lost at sea**

*We are no longer defending Israel. We are now defending the siege, which is itself becoming Israel's Vietnam.*

Bradley Burston, Haaretz May 31

A war tells a people terrible truths about itself. That is why it is so difficult to listen.

We were determined to avoid an honest look at the first Gaza war. Now, in international waters and having opened fire on an international group of humanitarian aid workers and activists, we are fighting and losing the second. For Israel, in the end, this Second Gaza War could be far more costly and painful than the first.

In going to war in Gaza in late 2008, Israeli military and political leaders hoped to teach Hamas a lesson. They succeeded. Hamas learned that the best way to fight Israel is to let Israel do what it has begun to do naturally: bluster, blunder, stonewall, and fume.

Hamas, and no less, Iran and Hezbollah, learned early on that Israel's own embargo against Hamas-ruled Gaza was the most sophisticated and powerful weapon they could have deployed against the Jewish state.

Here in Israel, we have still yet to learn the lesson: We are no longer defending Israel. We are now defending the siege. The siege itself is becoming Israel's Vietnam.

Of course, we knew this could happen. On Sunday, when the army spokesman began speaking of a Gaza-bound aid flotilla in terms of an attack on Israel, MK Nahman Shai,

the IDF chief spokesman during the 1991 Gulf war, spoke publicly of his worst nightmare, an operation in which Israeli troops, raiding the flotilla, might open fire on peace activists, aid workers and Nobel laureates.

Likud MK Miri Regev, who also once headed the IDF Spokesman's Office, said early Monday that the most important thing now was to deal with the negative media reports quickly, so they would go away.

But they are not going to go away. One of the ships is named for Rachel Corrie, killed while trying to bar the way of an IDF bulldozer in Gaza seven years ago. Her name, and her story, have since become a lightning rod for pro-Palestinian activism.

Perhaps most ominously, in a stepwise, lemming-like march of folly in our relations with Ankara, a regional power of crucial importance and one which, if heeded, could have helped head off the First Gaza War, we have come dangerously close to effectively declaring a state of war with Turkey.

"This is going to be a very large incident, certainly with the Turks," said Benjamin Ben-Eliezer, the cabinet minister with the most sensitive sense of Israel's ties with the Muslim world.

We explain, time and again, that we are not at war with the people of Gaza. We say it time and again because we ourselves need to believe it, and because, deep down, we do not.

There was a time, when it could be said that we knew ourselves only in wartime. No longer. Now we know nothing. Yet another problem with refraining from talks with Hamas and Iran: They know us so much better than we know ourselves.

They know, as the song about the Lebanon War suggested ("Lo Yachol La'atzor Et Zeh") that we, unable to see ourselves in any clarity, are no longer capable of stopping ourselves.

Hamas, as well as Iran, have come to know and benefit from the toxicity of Israeli domestic politics, which is all too ready to mortgage the future for the sake of a momentary apparent calm.

They know that in our desperation to protect our own image of ourselves, we will avoid modifying policies which have literally brought aid and comfort to our enemies, in particular Hamas, which the siege on Gaza has enriched through tunnel taxes and entrenched through anger toward Israel.

For many on the right, it must be said, there will be a quiet joy in all of what is about to hit the fan. "We told you so," the crowing will begin. "The world hates us, no matter what we do. So we may as well go on building [Read: 'Settling the West Bank and East Jerusalem'] and defending our borders [Read: 'Bolster Hamas and ultimately harm

ourselves by refusing to lift the Gaza embargo']".

Hamas, Iran and the Israeli and Diaspora hard right know, as one, that this is a test of enormous importance for Benjamin Netanyahu. Keen to have the world focus on Iran and the threat it poses to the people of Israel, Netanyahu must recognize that the world is now focused on Israel and the threat it poses to the people of Gaza

## **How to win friends (Israeli style)**

Crazy Country (Adam's blog), June 4

David Ben Gurion turns in his grave: he invested such great efforts in forming an alliance with Turkey, the non Arab among the Muslim countries, and therefore - so he thought - a natural ally to the Jewish state. It worked out well for more than fifty years. Not only was Turkey a strategic ally, for many Israelis it also was the first foreign country where they spent their holidays.

How did it all go wrong? It is hard to remember that less than two years ago Turkey's Erdogan was working hard to broker peace between Israel and Syria, and that his mediation was gratefully accepted by both of them. But just when a breakthrough seemed imminent, in December 2008, PM Olmert paid a cordial visit to Erdogan in Ankara, neglecting to tell his host about his intention to launch a devastating offensive against Gaza on the very same week.

Erdogan took it as a personal insult. The Turkish people were shocked by the daily footage of the Israeli bombings and the bleeding and burned Gazans. The cycle of Turkish accusations, angrily rebuffed in Israel, was launched, and under Netanyahu escalated out of anyone's control. A far from sophisticated thriller series on Turkish TV, depicting Israeli occupation soldiers as even uglier than they really behaved, enjoyed high ratings.

A wiser Israeli government would not have paid official attention and would have accepted such things as unavoidable in the aftermath of its having so forcibly "reinforced our deterrence". But, top diplomat Ayalon thought it was better to put en scene a calculated "humiliate the ambassador" play.

Later on, a wiser Israeli government would have felt very careful and cautious when dealing with a Gaza aid flotilla in which a Turkish organization, under the patronage of its country's government, was a major actor. A bit more diplomatic government might have understood what was at stake, and might have decided to allow the flotilla through to Gaza, for example with the condition that the Turkish authorities check the boats' cargo and guarantee there were no weapons aboard.

But the Netanyahu government is endowed with even less wisdom, or diplomacy than its predecessors. And an alliance which started to unravel over Turks outraged by the killing of Palestinians got its coup de grace with them even more outraged by the killing of fellow Turks...

And now, Ireland. Never a strategic ally, but a country which always had reasonably

good relations with Israel. (Not many countries in the world had a president of Irish origin, as Israel's Chaim Herzog was.) Today another Gaza-bound boat, the "Rachel Corrie" has reached the Mediterranean, having sailed all the way from Ireland, carrying Irish citizens on board and with her mission of breaking the siege of Gaza enjoying an overwhelming support in the Irish parliament and general public.

The government of Israel seems determined – as of this moment – to deploy its renowned naval commandos once again.

Who is next?

## **Godspeed to these ships on the water!\***

Crazy Country (Adam's blog), May 29

*The wind lashed the sea, and the sea lashed the ship;  
You steered through the tempest's commotion.  
We drink to you, Captain, and lift the glass high;  
We'll meet again on this ocean.  
No Lloyds would insure your small, secret craft  
Nor the perilous course it wages;  
But though in the Atlas no record be kept,  
We'll chart it in history's pages.  
This frail, hidden fleet, grey and silent, will be  
The subject of song and story;  
And many a captain who hears of the tale  
Will envy you, Captain, your glory.  
A toast to the darkness that swooped on the ship,  
And crouched on the long lights that sought her;  
Oh, Captain, Godspeed to the small wooden boats,  
Godspeed to these ships on the water!  
A toast to the lads that took up the fight  
And made it their people's Trafalgar;  
They turn each frail ship to a mailed man-of-war;  
The ship is of steel - it will conquer!  
Years to come - you'll be sipping a glass of mulled wine,  
Or quaffing a draught that is stronger;  
Then you'll smile, draw your pipe, and shake your grey head,*

*And think of the days you were younger.*

*You'll remember past deeds, and say to your friends:*

*"I've seen much, but Santa Maria,*

*I'll never forget the night of the chase*

*When we sped on towards Naharia."*

*Then you'll hear an answering message from us:*

*"The gates of the land are flung wide:*

*This was done by the lads who clambered aboard*

*In that storm, that terror, that tide"*

*Then you'll chuckle and whisper: "So nothing availed;*

*Nor radar, not giant lights beaming;*

*Not even the cruisers..." You'll finish your glass*

*And fall again to your dreaming.*

*That's how it will be; so comrades plunge bold*

*To the heart of the tempest's commotion*

*Oh, Captain, Godspeed to the small wooden boats*

*Godspeed to these ships on the ocean.*

This poem was written by Nathan Alterman 65 years ago, in honor of an Italian sea captain named Ansaldo.

In December 1945, Ansaldo undertook an illegal and dangerous voyage to the shores of this country, pitting a small, rickety, unarmed boat against the might of the British Navy. Ansaldo undertook this enterprise out of a feeling of deep sympathy and solidarity with a small people which had known a great deal of suffering and oppression. He had gone to help this people break open the locked gates of the sea, to achieve "*their right to be a small independent people at the shore of the great Mediterranean sea*" (Ansaldo quoted by CJC).

As these lines are written, today - Saturday, May 29, 2010 - the heirs of Ansaldo are sailing the very same sea, en route to the shores of Gaza.

\*Original text as published in the Canadian Jewish Chronicle - Aug 23, 1946