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IN PART B6

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CONFIDENTIAL

June 4, 2010

For: Hillary
From: Sid
Re: Israel crisis

Some articles you may not have seen: 1. Anthony H. Cordesman's analysis, posted at CSIS, "Israel as a Strategic Liability?" is being widely discussed and circulated; 2. Max Blumenthal, who is now reporting from Israel, writing a book on the crisis of democracy there, details from the Israeli press how the raid was long planned and who approved it, how the Netanyahu government is stirring up support, and the internal consequences (see the detail on the Facebook page urging the assassination of an Israeli-Arab member of the Knesset, and the actions of Bibi's allies); 3. David Ignatius's column today in the Washington Post, with detail on how Turkey thought it was encouraged by Obama in its initiative with Brazil on Iran and then felt the limb was cut off, among other things. I myself picked this up earlier from chatter among diplomats from Arab countries in DC. True or not, distorted or accurate, it is what the Arabs believe. Their view is that Obama will be reelected and there will be no progress at all in the Middle East for six years and they are planning accordingly—US influence at ebb tide. Did any boys at the NSC encourage the Turks as reported? Better? Worse? It's around and accepted as truth to the point that Ignatius reports it. 4. Leon Wieseltier, literary editor at The New Republic, bellwether of the higher center-slightly right Zionist opinion, on the self-undermining Israeli approach; and 5. Letter to the NY Times by Dan Kurzman, biographer of Rabin and Ben Gurion.

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Israel as a Strategic Liability?

Anthony H. Cordesman

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America's ties to Israel are not based primarily on U.S. strategic interests. At the best of times, an Israeli government that pursues the path to peace provides some intelligence, some minor advances in military technology, and a potential source of stabilizing military power that could help Arab states like Jordan. Even then, however, any actual Israeli military intervention in an Arab state could prove as destabilizing as beneficial. The fact is that the real motives behind America's commitment to Israel are moral and ethical. They are a reaction to the horrors of the Holocaust, to the entire history of Western anti-Semitism, and to the United States' failure to help German and European Jews during the period before it entered World War II. They are a product of the fact that Israel is a democracy that shares virtually all of the same values as the United States. The U.S. commitment to Israel is not one that will be abandoned. The United States has made this repeatedly clear since it first recognized Israel as a state, and it has steadily strengthened the scale of its commitments since 1967. The United States has provided Israel with massive amounts of economic aid and still provides enough military assistance to preserve Israel's military superiority over its neighbors. The United States has made it clear that any U.S. support for Arab-Israeli peace efforts must be based on options that preserve Israel's security, and its recent announcements that it will consider "extended regional deterrence" are code words for a U.S. commitment that could guard Israel, as well as its neighbors, against an Iranian nuclear threat.

At the same time, the depth of America's moral commitment does not justify or excuse actions by an Israeli government that unnecessarily make Israel a strategic liability when it should remain an asset. It does not mean that the United States should extend support to an Israeli government when that government fails to credibly pursue peace with its neighbors. It does not mean that the United States has the slightest interest in supporting Israeli settlements in the West Bank, or that the United States should take a hard-line position on Jerusalem that would effectively make it a Jewish rather than a mixed city. It does not mean that the United States should be passive when Israel makes a series of major strategic blunders--such as persisting in the strategic bombing of Lebanon during the Israeli-Hezbollah conflict, escalating its attack on Gaza long after it had achieved its key objectives, embarrassing the U.S. president by announcing the expansion of Israeli building programs in east Jerusalem at a critical moment in U.S. efforts to put Israeli-Palestinian peace talks back on track, or sending commandos to seize a Turkish ship in a horribly mismanaged effort to halt the "peace flotilla" going to Gaza. It is time Israel realized that it has obligations to the United States, as well as the United States to Israel, and that it become far more careful about the extent to which it test the limits of U.S. patience and exploits the support of American Jews. This does not mean taking a single action that undercuts Israeli security, but it does mean realizing that Israel should show enough discretion to reflect the fact that it is a tertiary U.S. strategic interest in a complex and demanding world.

Israel's government should act on the understanding that the long-term nature of the U.S.-Israel strategic relationship will depend on Israel clearly and actively seeking peace with the Palestinians—the kind of peace that is in Israel's own strategic interests. Israelis should understand that the United States opposes expansion and retention of its settlements and its efforts to push Palestinians out of greater Jerusalem. Israeli governments should plan Israeli military actions that make it clear that Israel will use force only to the level actually required, that carefully consider humanitarian issues from the start, and that have a clear post-combat plan of action to limit the political and strategic impact of its use of force. And Israel should not conduct a high-risk attack on Iran in the face of the clear U.S. "red light" from both the Bush and Obama administrations. Israel should be sensitive to the fact that its actions directly affect U.S. strategic interests in the Arab and Muslim worlds, and it must be as sensitive to U.S. strategic concerns as the United States is to those of Israel.

The United States does not need unnecessary problems in one of the most troubled parts of the world, particularly when Israeli actions take a form that does not serve Israel's own strategic interests. This Israeli government in particular needs to realize that as strong as U.S.-Israel ties may be, it is time to return to the kind of strategic realism exemplified by leaders like Yitzhak Rabin. No aspect of what happened this week off the coast of Gaza can be blamed on Israeli commandos or the Israel Defense Forces. Israel's prime minister and defense minister had full warning about the situation, and they knew the flotilla was deliberately designed as a political provocation to capture the attention of the world's media in the most negative way possible. They

personally are responsible for what happened, and they need to show far more care and pragmatism in the future.

Anthony H. Cordesman holds the Arleigh A. Burke Chair in Strategy at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

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CSIS Center for Strategic and International Studies

1800 K Street, NW

Washington, DC 20006

Tel: 202-887-0200 begin_of_the_skype_highlighting 202-887-

end_of_the_skype_highlighting 0200 Fax: 202-775-3199

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The Flotilla Raid Was Not "Bungled." The IDF Detailed Its Violent Strategy In Advance.

On 06.03.10, By Max Blumenthal

Tel Aviv-Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and his senior ministers have attempted to blame army commanders for "the bungled raid on a Gaza-bound flotilla," according to the UK's Daily Telegraph. The AP reported that "Israel's bloody, bungled takeover of a Gaza-bound Turkish aid vessel is complicating US-led Mideast peace efforts." And according to Reuters, "Israeli military admits errors in bungled boarding."

But was the raid really bungled? Did the Israeli military command and Netanyahu government have no clear strategy going in? Or was the violence they meted out against the flotilla activists deliberate and methodically planned?

Statements by senior Israeli military commanders made in the Hebrew media days before the massacre revealed that the raid was planned over a week in advance by the Israeli military and was personally approved by Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Minister of Defense Ehud Barak. The elite Israeli commando unit known as Unit 13 was tasked with carrying out the mission and its role was known by the Israeli public well before the raid took place. Details of the plan show that the use of deadly force was authorized and calculated. The massacre of activists should not have been unexpected.

On May 28, three days before the raid, top Israeli military officials revealed details of their strategy to Maariv, Israel's most widely circulated paper. The caption of the Maariv article reflected the military command's plan to use force: "On the way to violence; one of the boats is on its way."

Here is a translation of relevant portions of the article:

Maariv, 5/28/10 P. 4

Title: Head to Head in the Heart of the Sea

Caption: On the way to violence; one of the boats is on its way."

Subhead: The sea encounter that will occur at the end of the weekend is already planned detail by detail. From the moment that the ships will pass the "red line" on their way to Gaza, the fighters of Unit 13 will take control and transfer 800 passengers from their boats back to where they came from. And special arrest units were set up.

From the body of article: This operation was approved by Prime Minister Netanyahu and Defense Minister Barak and will be led by the commander of the Navy, Lieutenant Colonel Eliezer Maron, who is nicknamed "Cheney." **If the people aboard the boats will not agree to turn around, the operation will transfer to the stage of force.** "We are afraid that there will be a terror attack by the boats," said a high ranking officer. "If terrorists have gotten on the boats or if there is an

intention to use hot weapons against our forces, we will use full seriousness and caution. We want to avoid using force but as soon as there will be danger to the life of our forces **we will be forced to use live fire as a last resort.**

[...]

After our fighters take over the boats, OKETZ unit dogs and forces of the IHLM unit corps of engineers will inspect them looking for sabotage materials and fighting tools.

A Maariv article from 5/28/10, page 4, reveals the Israeli military command's **flotilla raid plan**

So the Israeli military broadcast its plan for violence, inciting the Israeli public and the soldiers of Unit 13 with fevered visions of a kill-or-be-killed encounter with a group of Arab "terrorists." The stated conditions for using live fire were arbitrary and poorly defined, giving the commandos little direction and lots of leeway to kill — at the very least the plan demanded force in some form.

After the initial violent stages, the plan called for the gathering of the activists' "fighting tools," an acknowledgment by the Israeli military that the activists might try to repel its commandos once they forced their way on the ships. The plan to search for "sabotage materials" also foreshadowed the IDF's post-raid propaganda campaign.

An alternative plan that would have been likely to avert violence could have been set into motion. The Israeli Navy could have done what it had in the past and hijacked the aid ships without boarding them, then towed them to shore. However, the Rambo-style plan concocted by Netanyahu, his top aides and the Naval commander with the unfortunate nickname of "Cheney" made the killing of activists likely, if not inevitable.

Why didn't Israel's leaders choose to deal with the flotilla in a more judicious fashion? Were they that stupid, or just crazy? From the details of the plan it appears that Netanyahu and his cohorts had envisioned Entebbe Part Deux, a daring anti-terror raid that would lift the sinking morale of the Israeli public while intimidating Iran and the Arab world. Though Israel may be more isolated than ever as a result of the massacre, the Netanyahu administration is reaping considerable political benefits at home.

The day after the massacre, spontaneous celebrations broke out in Ashdod, Tel Aviv, and throughout the country, bringing together right-wing elements with everyday Israelis. Over a thousand Israelis gathered tonight outside the Turkish embassy in Tel Aviv to rally against the Turkish government and express their support for the raid. Multiple demonstrators including one man who has lived in Israel for 60 years told me, "What Turkey [the sponsor of the Mavi Marmara boat] has done is great. I have never seen this country more united in my entire life. We are all standing together now." (Video coming soon).

Israeli newscasters are routinely using the term "mechabel," or terrorist, to refer to the flotilla activists, while the violence that broke out on the deck of the Mavi Marmara is called "the lynch." (Nevermind that zero commandos were hung and nine activists were killed, including an American citizen who was shot in the head four times.) No evidence is required to support claims in the Israeli media. The public desperately wants to believe that its government is right, so much so that Israel's media is not even making a token effort to challenge the increasingly hysterical press releases disseminated by the IDF press office every few hours.

Hanin Zoabi, a Palestinian-Israeli member of the Knesset who was on the Mavi Marmara, was physically accosted in the Knesset by fellow legislators for attempting to relate her experience aboard the flotilla. MK Miri Regev of Likud called her a "traitor," while Yoel Hasson of Kadima, a supposedly centrist party, denounced Zoabi as a "terrorist." An Israeli Facebook group devoted to inciting Zoabi's assassination has gathered 600 members in just a day and a half. In the meantime, Israel's Interior Minister Eli Yishai is "looking into" means of stripping Zoabi of her citizenship.

This Friday, anti-occupation activists expect to encounter intense violence from the Israeli Army and Border Police at the weekly demonstrations in Sheikh Jarrah and Nebi Salah. "In this atmosphere, you can expect with pretty reasonable certainty that the soldiers will go crazy," a veteran of the Sheikh Jarrah protest movement told me.

With two more ships on their way towards Gaza with aid for the besieged civilian population, the Israeli military and Netanyahu administration are not wasting time in hatching a new strategy to stop them. Once again, the plan calls for violence and possibly more death. "Next time we'll use more force," a top Naval commander told the Jerusalem Post. "We will have to come prepared in the future as if it was a war."

Washington Post

The U.S. needs to keep nudging Israel on a Gaza fix

By David Ignatius

Friday, June 4, 2010; A19

The Obama administration, caught between two allies during this week of crisis, has signaled Israel and Turkey that the blockade of Gaza should be loosened to allow more humanitarian aid to reach the Palestinian population there.

From the first news early Monday of the Israeli commando attack on a flotilla of Turkish relief ships, the White House has been trying to balance the interests of two prickly friends. The immediate aim, said a senior official, has been to "defuse the electricity of the moment" by freeing the ships' passengers and passing a U.N. resolution calling (in fuzzy language) for an investigation of the raid.

Beyond crisis management, administration officials have begun to urge Israel to use this incident to untangle the Gaza mess. U.S. officials hope Israel will take action on its own, before international condemnation grows any louder or another relief convoy tests the blockade. "The humanitarian aperture is not wide enough," argues the U.S. official. "We need to convince the Israelis that not everything can be made into a weapon."

The Obama team recognizes that Israel will act in its interests, but it wants Jerusalem to consider U.S. interests, as well. The administration has communicated at a senior level its fear that the Israelis sometimes "care about their equities, but not about ours."

This cautionary message -- that Israel must act as a more reliable and responsible partner -- may be the most important one conveyed this week.

One issue on which the administration believes Israel would benefit from a more farsighted view is the investigation of the incident. Israel has argued that this is a purely internal matter for the Israeli military, whose operations to enforce the Gaza blockade were lawful and appropriate.

But by defying calls for an international inquiry, the Israelis will compound their isolation. "They have an image problem, a perception problem," says the U.S. official. The White House hopes the Israelis will embrace some mechanism for an international probe -- perhaps a French proposal for an inquiry by the International Committee of the Red Cross. Such a move would be in Israel's interest, the administration believes.

The trickiest problem in the first hours of the crisis was dealing with Turkey, whose leaders treated the commando raid as a pirate attack on Turkish citizens. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Gen. Jim Jones, the national security adviser, met with Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu. Then came a lengthy phone call between President Obama and Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan.

Obama told Erdogan that "we need to find a solution" for the Gaza humanitarian problem, according to a U.S. official. Erdogan is said to have agreed with the president that a good relationship between Israel and Turkey was crucial for regional stability -- and that Turkey didn't want to see any further degradation.

The Obama administration deserves credit for its repair work in the first days after the Gaza attack. But this is another example where the administration has been reacting to events that it should have tried better to control. The Gaza confrontation has been developing for weeks; administration officials reportedly cautioned Israel about provocative moves, but not emphatically enough to make a difference. U.S. officials were blindsided about the commando operation partly because they don't spy on a key ally.

Similarly, the Obama White House has been too reactive in its relationship with Turkey. A glaring example of this diplomatic drift is the Turkish mediation effort with Iran to revive an October plan for enrichment of uranium abroad. Davutoglu thought he had Obama's blessing for his shuttle diplomacy, and the White House was given frequent updates. But when Turkey and Brazil announced they had clinched the deal, the administration did the diplomatic equivalent of shrugging its shoulders -- and went ahead with plans for U.N. sanctions.

One of the perverse secrets of Middle East diplomacy is the importance of riding several horses at once. In the heyday of Henry Kissinger's shuttle mediation, the Americans were the supreme masters of playing both sides of the street.

Obama has been talking about engagement and mediation but without much to show for it. Instead, the administration has been responding to events rather than driving them. That won't do. As former ambassador Chas. W. Freeman says in his collection of aphorisms, "The Diplomat's Dictionary": "If you're not at the table, you're on the menu."

Published on *The New Republic* (<http://www.tnr.com>)

Operation Make the World Hate Us

The assault on the 'Mavi Marmara' was wrong, and a gift to Israel's enemies.

- Leon Wieseltier
- June 3, 2010 |

Israel does not need enemies: it has itself. Or more precisely: it has its government. The Netanyahu-Barak government has somehow found a way to lose the moral high ground, the all-important war for symbols and meanings, to Hamas. That is quite an accomplishment. Operation Make the World Hate Us, it might have been called.

I leave it to others to make the operational criticisms of the Israeli action, and will say only that even my amateurish understanding of the tactical challenge posed by the interdiction of the boats suffices to suggest that there were other ways to do this. I also will not pretend to a perfect grasp of what happened on board the *Mavi Marmara*. I have pondered the videos that both sides have released, and concluded that the Israeli soldiers sliding down that rope had no intention of attacking the people on board and that the people on board had no way of being confident of this. I cannot expect Palestinians and their supporters to believe the best about the Israeli army. (This is what Israeli hardliners call “the restoration of deterrence.”) I do not doubt that some of the activists on the ship welcomed a confrontation with Israel, but the Israelis should not have obliged them. In any event, what took place on that deck looks to me like a tragic misunderstanding. Yet there was no reason to think that anything else would have transpired.

The important point is that the killing of civilians on the *Mavi Marmara*—I understand that they were “armed” with metal bars and a knife, but still they were civilians, and soldiers are trained to respond un lethally to the recklessness of a mob—cannot be extenuated by reference to “asymmetrical warfare” and Israel’s right to defend itself. This was not warfare, at least of the physical sort. Israel was not under attack. A headline in *The Washington Post* yesterday reported that “Israel says Free Gaza Movement poses threat to Jewish state.” Such a claim is absurd. It is true that the movement has grown in recent years, and is now troublesome to Israel’s policy in Gaza; and it is also true that the Turkish charity that sponsored the “Freedom Flotilla” has ties to Islamicist groups. But this is hardly what Israel likes to call, in the Iranian context, and there quite plausibly, an “existential threat.” The extension of the definition of a security threat to include hostile activities that have little or no bearing upon security is an ominous development.

It is also the inevitable consequence of Benjamin Netanyahu’s cunning pronouncement last year that Israel is now endangered by “the Iran threat, the missile threat, and the threat I call the Goldstone threat.” The equivalence was morally misleading, and therefore dangerous. Ideological warfare is not military warfare. I have studied the entirety of the Goldstone Report, and whereas I do not doubt (and wrote in this magazine in the days before Goldstone) that Operation Cast Lead caused the unjustifiable death of non-combatants, I also do not doubt that the Goldstone Report, which was nastily indifferent to Israel’s security predicament and to the ethical challenges of Israeli self-defense, was an instrument in a broad campaign of delegitimation against Israel—and yet the threat of delegitimation is not like the threat of destruction. It is different in kind. A commando operation is not an appropriate response to an idea. “This was no Love Boat,” Netanyahu said yesterday. “It was a hate boat.” He is right, but so what? The threat of delegitimation is not a military problem and it does not have a military solution. And the attempt to give it a military solution has now had the awful consequence of making the threat still greater. The assault on the *Mavi Marmara* was a stupid gift to the delegitimizers.

You do not have to be a general to grasp these distinctions. In fact, judging by Israel’s recent history, it might help not to be one. But the militarization of the Israeli government’s understanding of Israel’s situation—this has been the most sterile period for diplomacy in all of Israel’s history—is not all that led to the debacle at sea. Rules of military engagement that allow soldiers to fire on political activists (I leave aside the question of their humanitarianism for a moment) may signify something still deeper and even more troubling. It is hard not to conclude from this Israeli action, and also from other Israeli actions in recent years, that the Israeli leadership simply does not care any longer about what anybody thinks. It does not seem to care about what even the United States—its only real friend, even in the choppy era of Obama—thinks. This is not defiance, it is despair. The Israeli leadership seems to have given up any expectation of fairness and sympathy from the world. It is behaving as if it believes, in the manner of the most perilous Jewish pessimism, that the whole world hates the Jews, and that is all there is to it. This is the very opposite of the measured and empirical attitude, the search for strategic opportunity, the enlistment of imagination in the service of ideals and interests, that is required for statecraft.

The complication—the one that deprives anybody who acknowledges it of membership in any of the gangs of commentary—is that there is a partial basis in the actually existing world for a degree of Israeli pessimism. There are leaders, states, organizations, and peoples whose hostility to the Jewish state is irrational and absolute and in some cases murderous. Things are said critically about Israel that wildly burst the bounds of thoughtful criticism. The language in which Israel is described by some governments and international organizations is lurid and grotesque and foul. Anti-Semitic tropes—the conspiracy theory about the Jews, most conspicuously—are regularly encountered in otherwise respectable places. The analysis of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that absolves the Palestinians of any significant role in it is widespread. I do not see how any of this can be denied, or shunted aside, or explained entirely in terms of Israeli behavior. But it is emphatically not the whole picture, except for those Israelis and Jews whose political interests and ideological inclinations prefer it to be the whole picture. For there are forces in Israel, and in its government, that have a use for Jewish hopelessness. There is a verse in Numbers that Jewish pessimists like to cite: “the people shall dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations.” It is Balaam’s divinely inspired description of the Israelites—Balaam, who came to curse and stayed to bless. But I have always regarded it as a curse, this promise of loneliness. I have heard it intoned lachrymously and proudly—in our time Jewish pride has a disturbingly parasitic relationship with Jewish lachrymosity—all my life. It chills me to the bone. It is a locution for prophets, not prime ministers. The Jews cannot dwell alone. In fact, their history shows that they never did dwell alone. It is not a tale of insularity and isolation. The apartness of the Jews was never a complete secession from their environment. The engagement of the Jews with the world was a matter not only of practical necessity, but also of theological conviction. And not even the darkest and most dire adversity succeeded in driving them entirely into themselves.

When, in the modern era, the Zionists concluded, quite correctly, that the Jews must extract themselves from anti-Semitic societies and establish a society of their own, a sovereign one, in the land of Israel, it was in part to “normalize” them by making them “reckoned among the nations,” and therefore like other nations. Zionism was a reversal of Balaam’s phony blessing. The state was not supposed to be a bunker, even if it had enemies. But Netanyahu is a creature of the bunker. He talks about peace, but not like a man who hungers for it. He takes no steps toward peace except as the consequence of a crisis—a crisis not with the Palestinians but with the Americans. He liturgically intones his warnings, some of them true, about the external dangers facing Israel, and mistakes brutishness for toughness, and offers nothing. He is a gray, muddling, reactive figure. His preferred strategy for his country is: one quiet week after another unto eternity. His problem is that there are not many quiet weeks.

But about those activists: a great deal of bathetic rubbish has been written about them. Insofar as they were bringing food and medicine to Gaza, they were humanitarians; but insofar as they were striking a blow for the government of Gaza, they were anti-humanitarians. A real “Freedom Flotilla” would have sailed for Gaza to liberate it from its rulers. For Hamas stifles Gaza from within even as Israel stifles it from without. It oppresses the Palestinians who live under its sway and has brought them ruin. When did it become progressive to support a theocracy? Consider the case of Henning Mankell, the Swedish writer of thrillers (and the son-in-law of Ingmar Bergman) who was a passenger on one of the boats in the “Freedom Flotilla.” In his youth he took part in anti-Vietnam and anti-apartheid demonstrations, presumably in the spirit of secular reason. For a while he lived in Norway and participated in the activities of a radical Maoist party: let us call that secular unreason. Now he does the work of Hamas and its mullahs. Last year Mankell attended the Palestine Festival of Literature in east Jerusalem—or would have attended it, if the Israeli authorities had not idiotically closed it down. When he returned to Sweden, he wrote that “there is a straight line between Soweto, Sharpeville, and what recently happened [I presume he was referring to the war] in Gaza.” And: “Is it strange that some [Palestinians] in pure desperation, when they cannot see any other way out, decide to become suicide bombers? Not really. Maybe it is strange that there are not more of them.” And: “The state of Israel in its current form has no future. Moreover, those who advocate a two-state solution have not got it right. ... The question is whether it will be possible to talk sense into the Israelis in order for them to willingly accept the end of their own apartheid state.” This man has rights, at sea and on land, but he can hardly be lauded as a champion of peace and reconciliation. You are not for co-existence if you advocate the disappearance of one of the terms. (Consider, analogously, the recent adventures of Noam Chomsky in the region. It was widely noted that the Israelis, again idiotically, turned him away at the Allenby Bridge. It was less widely noted that a few days later a reporter for *The New York Times*

accidentally discovered him in Lebanon at the home of Nabil Qaouk, the deputy head of Hezbollah, which is not what Voltaire had in mind.)

And yet the screw must be turned again: the anti-Israeli virulence of Henning Mankell and his maritime comrades does not make Israel's assault on the *Mavi Marmara* more just or more wise. Now the Israeli government may find it impossible not to modify or even to lift the blockade of Gaza—an outcome that no decent person can decry, as long as Hamas does not exploit the respite to acquire weapons or what it needs to make them, and the past is not encouraging in this regard. Netanyahu will do what he can to get past the mess, hoping that the approach of the midterm elections in the United States will rescue him from the pressure, and the deadening hand of the status quo will be back. And Israel will be known to more and more people—in a wounding misrepresentation—mainly for cruelty.

Leon Wieseltier is the literary editor of The New Republic.

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To the Editor:

Nicholas D. Kristof's column could have been written by the peacemaking Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin or Israel's founder and first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, if they were alive today.

Mr. Rabin told me shortly before he was assassinated by a right-wing Israeli extremist that Israel, while pursuing peace, must never play into the hands of Palestinian terrorists, who would try to sabotage the talks with attacks intended to provoke disproportionate retaliation. Yes, Israel would fight the terrorists, but not the Palestinian people. And it would certainly not initiate bloody conflict.

Mr. Ben-Gurion told me that Israel would regret maintaining control of Arab-inhabited regions and another people after the 1967 Six-Day War. He said the war would never end as long as Israel occupied the area, an occupation he felt was both strategically and morally wrong.

And if succeeding right-wing governments had taken his advice, the war might well have been over years ago, preventing Hamas from ruling Gaza, giving Iran no excuse for threatening Israel with nuclear destruction, and making life much easier for the United States.

The Israeli assault on the pro-Palestinian flotilla is a symbolic result of the tragic survival-imperiling refutation by Israeli right-wingers of the visionary views of their country's two greatest leaders.

Dan Kurzman

North Bergen, N.J., June 3, 2010

The writer is the author of biographies of Yitzhak Rabin and David Ben-Gurion.