

# Israel's Insane War on Iran Must Be Prevented

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*Israel's attack on a humanitarian aid ship headed for Gaza may prove to be the greatest strategic error the government has ever made. Like the Soweto riots in South Africa in 1976, or Bloody Sunday - the American civil rights march on March 7, 1965, in Selma, Alabama, where police opened fire and killed civilians - the Mavi Marmora affair crossed a red line. It has triggered an international wave of condemnation, expressing a shift in attitude toward Israel. The hope is that this international outrage, flanked by growing anti-government dissent inside the country, will provoke an identity crisis among the elite and people of Israel, shake up the political kaleidoscope and allow for a viable pro-peace force to emerge. Unless this occurs, new Israeli aggression, including against Iran, will remain high on their immediate agenda.*

The details of the May 31 events are well known, documented by passengers on the Mavi Marmora headed for Gaza. Among the most dramatic was the eye-witness account of Ken O'Keefe on *BBC's Hard Talk* show, who effectively dismantled attempts by his interviewer to legitimize the Israeli position (that the passengers were armed terrorists etc.), and established that the Israeli military opened fire immediately after boarding the ship, killing 9 in cold blood.(1) German doctor Matthias Jochheim, a member of the IPPNW on board, has delivered his own low-key, sober version, confirming the same facts.(2)

Israel's violent action was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back; even the wobbly-kneed German Foreign Minister Guido Westerwelle had to denounce it and lend his voice to an international chorus demanding that the illegal three-year Gaza blockade be lifted. Those actions which did follow, like Egypt's reopening the Rafah border crossing and Israel's cosmetic redefinition of what could or could not enter Gaza, led to at least a formal, partial relaxation of the blockade, albeit at the cost of nine innocent lives.

Israel's immediate reactions are most clinically interesting. First, the Mossad sent films around the world via Internet purportedly showing passengers assaulting those Israeli troops who had descended onto the ship in international waters (to conduct a passport check, perhaps?). Then came the announcement that the list of permitted goods into Gaza would be replaced by a list of forbidden items. (President Shimon Peres was quick to add cement to the ban.) No sooner had the Israeli government committed a diplomatic *faux pas* by refusing entry into Gaza to German Development Aid Minister Dirk Niebel than Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman magnanimously invited several European colleagues to visit the Strip.(3) After rejecting numerous calls for an independent international investigation, Israel declared it would set up its own probe, but then Yaakov Tirkel, appointed head of the inquiry, threatened to resign unless he were granted more powers to subpoena witnesses. This gesture may very well have been a piece of cheap theatre; but, no matter: the point is that the Israeli leadership stood exposed as confused, stumbling, and in total disarray, one

day engaging in clinical denial, and the next, tossing tidbits of concessions in hopes of placating its critics.

With its deadly act of piracy, Israel lost the mandate from heaven that its establishment, and many international actors, formerly believed it to hold. Although Israeli troops were not shooting their own people, the act was comparable to Soweto and Bloody Sunday for its political impact. The Israeli elite miscalculated utterly, and no mad scramble to control the damage will undo the deed or erase its consequences. Like the South African apartheid regime of the time, and segregation in the U.S., Israel's 60-plus-year-old policy of discrimination, oppression, and ethnic cleansing of Palestinians is finally being acknowledged worldwide as a moral obscenity that can no longer be tolerated. Israel's Ambassador to the U.N., Gabriela Shalev lamented the fact that her country's standing in the world has sunk to new depths. "Our situation in recent months," she told Army Radio on July 11, "can be compared to the 1970s, when Zionism was being called racism." (4) Indeed.

#### Bull's-Eye: Iran

Contrary to the mantra repeated in the international press, Israel's assault on the Mavi Marmora was *not* aimed against Hamas. Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu admitted as much himself, when he declared he would "not allow the establishment of an Iranian port in Gaza."

This is nothing new. Whenever Israel has moved militarily against Lebanon, as in 2006, or Gaza, as at the end of 2008, it was neither Hezbollah nor Hamas who were the actual targets. In both cases, Israel was mounting preparations for a strike against Iran's nuclear facilities, and proceeded to knock out — or at least attempt to knock out — those forces who could be counted on to lead a political and military retaliatory response. (5) Here, too, the Mavi Marmora massacre had less to do with any Palestinian radicals in Gaza or Shi'ites in Lebanon, than with Tehran. And it is *not* out of a desire to "stem Iran's growing influence" that Israel went into action, but because of *its strategic commitment to eliminate the Islamic Republic as a regional power*.

One should never forget what sort of political animal Netanyahu is. He first came to power in 1996 with a political platform known as "Clean Break," a program to break with the Oslo Accords, and revert to a policy of confrontation, settlement expansion, land annexation, and continuing ethnic cleansing of the Palestinian population. (6) This scenario, articulated in detail in Netanyahu's Clean Break policy, was to unfold against a backdrop of systematic regime changes in the region. All those governments perceived to be hostile to Israel were slated for replacement. In point of fact, since then we have had the second Iraq war, and the changes in Lebanon and Syria pursuant to the 2005 Hariri assassination. What remains on the original hit list is Iran.

Thus, it is not coincidental that the Mavi Marmora affair erupted smack in the middle of renewed international "debate" on Iran's nuclear program. Israel's contribution to the debate has come in the form of outright threats of military aggression and offers to the White House it could not refuse: either you stop Iran or we will. At the end of April, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, in the U.S. for talks, warned against giving Iran too much time, because if it were to acquire a nuclear weapons capability that would "change the landscape" of the region and the world (7). Arguing that Iran has not complied with U.N. dictates (to suspend its uranium production, for example), the U.N. Security Council voted up sanctions on June 9, followed on June 17 by the European Union. The U.S. hastened to up

the ante with its own unilateral sanctions on July 2.

Whether or not the new round of punitive sanctions will undermine Iran's economy and social stability, they will decidedly *not* lead to a voluntary relinquishment of the nuclear program, as President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, among others, has declared.(8) The more interesting question is another: do those who are imposing sanctions actually believe that they will produce the desired effect? CIA Director Leon Panetta, when discussing the new American measures, stated, "Will it deter them from their ambitions with regards to nuclear capability? Probably not."(9) Well, then, does the sanctions lobby perhaps understand the measures as a means to keep the "mad god" Israel at bay, i.e., are they punishing Iran in hopes of convincing Israel that it should renounce its intended military attack, while paying lip service to military action as a fallback option? That might cohere with what reportedly transpired in the July 6 meeting between Prime Minister Netanyahu and Barack Obama at the White House. Bibi told *Fox News* following the talks that he had thanked the President for the new sanctions. He then quickly added that only the U.S. commitment to "keep the military option on the table" would get the Iranians' attention. In tandem, U.S. Senators Joseph Lieberman and John McCain assured their Israeli audience in Jerusalem that that option was prominently placed at the center of the table. Lieberman was quoted by *JTA Jewish & Israeli News* on July 8, saying, "We will use every means that we have to stop Iran from becoming a nuclear power, through economic and diplomatic sanctions if we possibly can and through military action if we must." Former Senator Charles Robb and former general Charles Wald co-authored an OpEd on July 9, "Sanctions alone won't work on Iran," explicitly threatening "an effective, targeted [U.S.] strike on Tehran's nuclear and supporting military facilities."(10)

Now comes the most relevant sequitur: Are the sanctions, then, merely the non-belligere means to further weaken Iran, economically, politically, and militarily, as a preparation for a major operation? The example of the prelude to two wars against Iraq is germane. None of the sanctions that crippled Iraq's economy aimed at forcing a policy change. They served only to set up Iraq for the kill.

### The Fraud of the Nuclear Debate

That there is *no* serious interest on the part of the Western members of the Permanent 5 (France, Britain, U.S., Russia, and China) in solving the nuclear issue diplomatically is evident in their response to the brilliant initiative signed by Brazil, Turkey, and Iran on May 17 in Tehran, and delivered to the U.N., IAEA, et al. The proposal is simple and eminently workable. It asserts the right to peaceful nuclear energy under NPT rules, then moves to the issue of nuclear fuel exchange. Iran agrees to send 1200 kg of LEU to Turkey, under IAEA observers, and to notify the IAEA. Once the IAEA, Russia, France, and the U.S. respond positively, a detailed written agreement will be drafted for the 120 kg of fuel to be delivered to Tehran. Iran would deliver its uranium within one month and expect delivery of fuel within one year. Finally, Turkey and Brazil welcome Iran's readiness to pursue talks with the 5+1 anywhere, including on their soil.

Before they could possibly have had the time to study the proposal, consult others, and weigh its merits, France and Russia responded with skepticism, while Secretary of State Hillary Clinton just said no. Asserting it was no "accident" that the declaration came "as we were preparing to move [for sanctions] in New York" and that "we had Russia on board, we had China on board," Clinton stated she was "seriously concerned" by omissions in the document. The main omission was reference to Iran's continued enrichment program.

Another concern was “the amorphous timeline” for Iran’s delivery of its uranium – although the document is precise on this.(11) The series of sanctions followed shortly thereafter. Significantly, both Turkey and Brazil opposed them at the U.N., an act which certainly earned the two governments further contempt. (Some have pointed to the fact that of all the ships in the Gaza flotilla, it was the Turkish one that came under attack. Could this have something to do with the Turkish-Brazilian initiative?)

### Build-Up for War

Most ominous in the broader picture are military activities in the region that would cohere with preparations for aggression against Iran. Egypt reportedly allowed one Israeli and eleven U.S. ships to pass through the Suez Canal on their way to the Red Sea, an apparent signal to Iran. The ships, together with a German vessel, moved into the Arabian Sea after “conducting secret exercises off the shore of south-western Israel,” according to the June 26 *Jordan Times*. Citing an Israeli report, the paper said the exercises included “interception of incoming Iranian, Syrian and Hizbollah missiles and rockets against USA and Israeli targets in the Middle East.” The exercises featured fighter bombers carrying out simulated bombing missions, and Israeli and U.S. fighter jets practicing long-range bombing missions. Some facts of the naval deployment appeared also in *Global Research*.(12) The same *Jordan Times* cited a *Jerusalem Post* article week earlier about Israeli military plans for a new assault on Gaza preparatory to a military campaign against Iran’s nuclear facilities.

Such reports should be taken deadly seriously. Again, the precedent of the military build-up prior to the Iraq wars is instructive. A further disturbing symptom is the behavior of two important Arab Gulf states. On June 12, regional press outlets reported that the Saudis had granted Israel the right to fly over its airspace, to which the Saudis immediately issued a perfunctory denial. But one should not forget the perfidious role played by the Saudis vis-à-vis Iraq. More alarming was the statement of the U.A.E. Ambassador to the U.S. on July 6 endorsing a military attack on Iran. Ambassador Yousef al-Otaiba was quoted by the *Washington Times*: “I think it’s a cost-benefit analysis,” referring to the benefits of war on Iran. “I think despite the large amount of trade we do with Iran, which is close to \$12 billion ... there will be consequences, there will be a backlash and there will be problems with people protesting and rioting and very unhappy that there is an outside force attacking a Muslim country; that is going to happen no matter what.” His conclusion: “If you are asking me, ‘Am I willing to live with that versus living with a nuclear Iran?’ my answer is still the same: ‘We cannot live with a nuclear Iran.’ I am willing to absorb what takes place at the expense of the security of the U.A.E.” He added that “talk of containment and deterrence really concerns me and makes me very nervous,” because he does not believe either would work.(13) Neocons attending the ambassador’s session with the *Atlantic* magazine, at Aspen, expressed surprise at hearing an Arab diplomat endorse military action publicly, although many in the region have uttered similar thoughts in private. It is no secret that most Arab Gulf states fear a nuclear Iran and would sit on the sidelines during US-Israeli aggression.

Clearly, Israel will not make good on its threats without a nod from Washington. And that is not there yet, at least not officially. After talks with Barak and Israel’s military chief of staff Gabi Ashkenazi in Jerusalem, Sen. McCain indicated the time had not yet come. “I don’t believe we are at the point of making that kind of decision, nor is the Israeli government,” he said, “given the state that Iran is in now as far as the development of their nuclear weapons is concerned.” When asked by *Fox News* whether he had discussed the military option with Obama, Netanyahu danced around the issue, but reiterated his conviction that

Iran must be made to fear such an option. And Obama? He coined a most curious formulation, Israel's "unique security requirements," and pledged "unwavering ... commitment to Israel's security." When interviewed July 8 for the first time on Israeli television, Obama indicated the two governments would consult with one another, not act unilaterally. "I think the relationship between Israel and the U.S.," he said, "is sufficiently strong that neither of us try to surprise each other."(14)

But, one could just as well read this statement as indicating Obama and Netanyahu *did* discuss the military option, and from an operational standpoint. A number of studies and articles support this hypothesis. First, back in December, the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution ran a simulated war game involving an Israeli hit on Iran. The study, written up in the *New York Times* on March 26, apparently caught the attention of institutions and officials in the U.S. and abroad. That scenario foresees an independent Israeli attack, which angers Washington. The U.S. tells Israel to desist, and deploys anti-missile batteries and cruisers, warning Iran against retaliation. Iran responds with missiles lobbed into Israel as well as Saudi Arabia, but avoids any direct attack on the U.S. Hamas and Hizbollah also fire rockets. The Israel population panics, and many flee, while the economy crashes. The U.S. finally okays an Israeli war against Hizbollah, whereupon Iran attacks Saudi oil installations and mines the Straits of Hormuz. The U.S. sends massive reinforcements into the region, and, 8 days following the first attack, the war game comes to an end.(15)

One need not wait for advice from an ageing revolutionary like Fidel Castro to realize that the report smacks of wishful thinking. Iran's top military and political elite have made no secret of their intention — and ability — to respond to *any* attack with total counterforce, and against *all* possible targets. But the war games story put the option back onto the front pages of major media.

Then, on July 19, Andrew Shapiro, Clinton's assistant secretary for political-military affairs, addressing the same Saban Center, boasted that the Obama administration had raised the level of military cooperation with Israel to its highest point ever. Shapiro toed the line that current U.S. policy preferred sanctions to war, but he refused to comment on whether or not there had been discussion of giving Israel a green light to go after Iran.

*The Wall Street Journal* followed up a day later with an article by Bret Stephens, "Why Hasn't Israel Bombed Iran (Yet)?" the gist of which is that, after the 2007 National Intelligence Estimate (NIE) report had placed the military option on the back burner, Obama's "engagement" policy, coupled with the post-electoral chaos in Iran, redefined options.(16) Four possible reasons offered for why Israel has not moved yet are: that they didn't think an attack would be successful; that they preferred to improve their own capabilities first; that some top Israeli political leaders would oppose it; and, that they feared a "Suez reaction" on the part of the U.S.

A most telling leak came that same week in a *TIME* piece by Joe Klein, "An Attack on Iran: Back on the Table."(17) Citing Defense Secretary Robert Gates, who had ruled out any war in 2008 but was now telling *Fox News* that a nuclear Iran could not be "contained" (a formulation popping up all over the place), Klein writes that some U.S. military are claiming Iran left them little choice after rejecting a "generous" U.S. diplomatic option. Klein adds: "Other intelligence sources say that the U.S. Army's Central Command ... has made some real progress in planning targeted air strikes - aided, in large part, by the vastly improved



human-intelligence operations in the region.” An Israeli military source told him, “‘There really wasn’t a military option a year ago. But they’ve gotten serious about the planning, and the option is real now.’” Klein says that he has been told that “*Israel has been brought into the planning process ... because U.S. officials are frightened by the possibility that the right-wing Netanyahu government might go rogue and try to whack the Iranians on its own*” (emphasis added).

#### House Republicans Call For Israeli War

This makes all too much sense. Israel is on a war-footing and the U.S. is poised to at least let it happen. If the White House has not yet officially issued an okay, the House on July 23 introduced a resolution, signed by a third of the members, explicitly endorsing war. H. Res. 1553 begins, “Expressing support for the State of Israel’s right to defend Israeli sovereignty, to protect the lives and safety of the Israeli people, and to use all means necessary to confront and eliminate threats posed by the Islamic Republic of Iran, including the use of military force if no other peaceful solution can be found within reasonable time to protect against such an immediate and existential threat to the State of Israel....” Asserting categorically that “the national security of the United States, Israel, and allies in the Middle East face a clear and present danger from the Government of the Islamic Republic of Iran seeking nuclear weapons and the ballistic missile capability to deliver them,” and quoting Obama that a nuclear Iran is “unacceptable,” the Resolution proceeds to tick off statements attributed to Ahmadinejad and alleged Iranian violations of IAEA norms. It “condemns” Iran for its threats, pledges cooperation with Israel “to ensure” that it “continues to receive critical economic and military assistance, including missile defense capabilities, needed to address the threat of Iran,” and “expresses support for Israel’s right to use all means necessary confront and eliminate nuclear threats by Iran ... including the use of military force... etc.”

It would be foolhardy to think these are only a bunch of arch-conservative Republicans trying to boost re-election perspectives by courting the Zionist faction among U.S. voters. The resolution is a declaration of intent toward war. Neocon John Bolton had defined the role Congress could and should play in igniting conflict. In the July 13 *Wall Street Journal*, Bolton wrote that Congress must support Israeli “pre-emptive attacks” and justify them on grounds of self-defense. He explained that “having visible congressional support in place at the outset will reassure the Israeli government, which is legitimately concerned about Mr. Obama’s likely negative reaction to such an attack.”(18)

Is it possible to stop the rush towards war?

There are two powers that can stop it. One is the U.S. If, as his July 6 tete-a-tete with Bibi suggests, Obama has signed on to an Israeli “rogue” operation, containing the option of “plausible denial” after the fact, , then the sane elements in the U.S. military and intelligence establishment must move into high gear. The new NIE is long overdue, perhaps due to factional strife regarding its contents. If an intelligence assessment were to appear soon, reinforcing the findings of the 2007 NIE to the effect that Iran does not constitute a nuclear threat, that could defuse the arguments in favor of an attack. U.S. military professionals, who know better than to start a new war now, have plenty of ways of convincing a sitting President that such folly would lead to doom.

The other force that could prevent war is Israel itself. This entails nothing short of a revolution in thinking and/or a political coup. The war party must be disarmed and

discredited, allowing for a new combination of political factors to define an alternative policy.

## The Backlash

This is not unthinkable. Since the Gaza war launched in December 2008, world public opinion has turned against Israel. On March 25, the UN Human Rights Council, which had endorsed the Goldstone Report in October 2009 and forwarded it to the Security Council, voted up a resolution (29 to 6 with 11 abstentions) demanding Israel pay reparations to Palestinians for losses and damages in that war. Two months later the UNHRC voted for a committee to monitor investigations that the Palestinians and Israelis were ordered to undertake. On March 10, the European Parliament had voted (335-267-43) to endorse the report and call for its implementation. For the first time, it acknowledged Israeli violations of international law.

Although from the start Israel refused to cooperate with the commission of inquiry led by South African jurist Richard Goldstone, and rejected its findings out of hand as “biased,” the military’s own investigations confirmed parts of the U.N. report. On July 8, the *Los Angeles Times* reported that in seven cases, the Israeli military had established that a sniper “deliberately targeted” civilians; that Palestinians, including youth, were used as human shields; and “commanders authorized at least three separate bomb attacks that killed and injured several dozen civilians who were taking refuge in a family home, a U.N. compound and a mosque.”(19) Compared to the magnitude of the damage wrought in the Gaza campaign, such admissions are paltry, but the fact that Israel’s military had to impose token disciplinary actions on its own reflects the power of Goldstone’s findings.

More cynical was the report posted on the Israeli Foreign Ministry’s website and delivered to U.N. Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon on July 19. It pledged that the Israel army, having duly conducted its assessment of the Gaza war, would reduce civilian casualties in future wars!(20) “The IDF (Israeli Defense Forces) has ... implemented operational changes in its orders and combat doctrine designed to further minimize civilian casualties and damage to civilian property in the future,” as *Reuters* reported. In addition to providing “protection of civilians,” it would restrict the use of white phosphorous bombs in urban settings.

Cynical? Outright grotesque? Yes, to be sure. But it is also clinically significant. None of this would have emerged without the Goldstone Report.(21)

## Turning Point: Flotilla Attack

The attack on the *Mavi Marmora* went too far. NATO Secretary General Rasmussen demanded an inquiry, as well as Israel’s release of the ship and its passengers. In a special session in Brussels on May 31 the 27 EU ambassadors called for an immediate, complete, and impartial investigation, access to the passengers, and the opening of border crossings to Gaza. Rage swept through the Arab world. Amr Musa, Secretary General of the Arab League, said the event proved one could not make peace with Israel, which he labeled a rogue state. Lebanese Prime Minister Hariri spoke of a “dangerous and insane step,” while citizens took to the streets in Beirut and Amman. Qatari Emir Sheikh Hamad bin Chalifa al Thani characterized it as piracy and demanded an end to the blockade.

Two weeks later, the International Committee of the Red Cross issued an unprecedented statement saying that the blockade per se violated international law. “The whole of Gaza’s

civilian population is being punished for acts for which they bear no responsibility,” it read. “The closure therefore constitutes a collective punishment imposed in clear violation of Israel’s obligations under international humanitarian law.” (22)

Just what stands behind Israel’s blockade policy was the subject of a laudable analysis published in *Le Monde diplomatique* on July 9. Authors Thomas Keenan and Eyal Weizman examine two new developments in the Israel-Palestine conflict: the increasing politicization of humanitarian aid and Israel’s “redefinition” of international law as a threat to its existence. The article cites Israeli officials on the aims of the blockade: Dov Weinglass, an advisor to Ehud Olmert, spoke in mid-2007 of putting the Palestinians on a “diet,” which, however strict, would not allow them to starve. Israel’s highest court ruled in early 2008 in favor of guaranteeing those in the “enemy area” a “humanitarian minimum standard,” and nothing more. Details of the “Red Lines” set for this diet appeared in *Haaretz*: according to a government document, caloric intake for the Gaza population was to be set at a level just above the hunger line defined by the UN food experts. If this is the policy behind the blockade, clearly any humanitarian aid effort aiming to provide food, etc. comes under the rubric of a “provocation,” as deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon put it, since there “is no humanitarian crisis” in Gaza. As a corollary, Israel has lifted tax exemptions for NGOs supported by outside forces, and banned all groups who call for putting Israeli leaders on trial.

The other development concerns Israel’s attempts to rewrite international law, construed as undermining its right to self-defense. This is the meaning, according to Keenan and Weizman, of Israel’s violent rejection of the Goldstone Report. Netanyahu delivered a speech in November 2009, in which he listed three threats to Israel: a nuclear Iran, rocket attacks by Hamas and Hizbollah, and the attempt to deny its right to self-defense. That, Bibi declared, was the “intention” of the Goldstone Report. He added that he hoped statesmen and jurists would answer Goldstone’s approach by redrafting the laws of warfare.

### The Coming Implosion in Israel

The same *Le Monde diplomatique* cites a statement by Gidi Grinstein of the Reut Institute, expressing alarm at the constraints placed on Israel in reaction to its anti-Palestinian policies. He wrote: “... our politicians and military personnel are threatened with lawsuits and arrests when they travel abroad, campaigns to boycott our products gain traction, and our very existence is challenged in academic institutions and intellectual circles. The country is increasingly isolated.” And, unfortunately, “Israel has failed to recognize these trends for the *strategically significant, potentially existential, threat they constitute*” (emphasis added). (23)

Grinstein’s commentary is entitled: “Israel delegitimizers threaten its existence: Israel’s enemies are scheming to bring about its implosion by turning it into a pariah state.” Granted, it is a hysterical outburst, but nonetheless it contains valuable insights if read from a clinical standpoint. The author laments Israel’s military failures in 2006 and 2008, and especially the “offensive on Israel’s legitimacy” following these wars. His view is that Israel’s enemies “would aim to bring about its implosion, as with South Africa or the Soviet Union, by attacking its political and economic values .... Turning Israel into a pariah state is central to its adversaries’ efforts,” he warns. “Israel is a geopolitical island. Its survival and prosperity depend on its relations with the world in trade, science, arts and culture – all of which rely on its legitimacy. When the latter is compromised, the former may be severed, with harsh political, social and economic consequences.”



Grinstein's piece was published on January 1 of this year, long before the flotilla attack. Since then, the trends towards isolating Israel and awarding it pariah status have only multiplied. And, increasingly, it is Israelis and Jewish intellectuals who are fuelling the trend. Henry Siegman, a former director of the American Jewish Congress, published an article, "Israel's Greatest Loss: Its Moral Imagination," in *Haaretz* on June 11.(24) Right after the Mavi Marmora confrontation, Siegman phoned a friend in Israel, to hear what the mood was. He was shocked to hear his friend say that the worldwide censure of Israel reminded him of the Nazi era. Siegman's analysis is worth quoting at length: "When I managed to get over the shock of that exchange, it struck me that the invocation of the Hitler era was actually a frighteningly apt and searing analogy, although not the one my friend intended. A million and a half civilians have been forced to live in an open-air prison in inhuman conditions for over three years now, but unlike the Hitler years, they are not Jews but Palestinians. Their jailors, incredibly, are survivors of the holocaust, or their descendants. Of course, the inmates of Gaza are not destined for gas chambers, as the Jews were, but they have been reduced to a debased and hopeless existence."

Siegman backs up his assertions with facts about nutrition in Gaza and childhood morbidity, an "obscenity" which is "the consequence of a deliberate and carefully calculated Israeli policy aimed at de-developing Gaza by destroying not only its economy but its physical and social infrastructure while sealing it hermetically from the outside world." He notes that jokes about the Palestinian "diet" are also reminiscent of the Nazi period. Though rejecting any one-on-one comparison, Siegman recognizes that "the essential moral issues are the same."

His conclusions: "So, yes, there is reason for Israelis, and for Jews generally, to think long and hard about the dark Hitler era at this particular time. For the significance of the Gaza Flotilla incident lies not in the questions raised about violations of international law on the high seas, or even about 'who assaulted who' first on the Turkish ship, the Mavi Marmora, but in *the larger questions raised about our common human condition by Israel's occupation policies and its devastation of Gaza's civilian population*" (emphasis added).

"If a people who so recently experienced on its own flesh such unspeakable inhumanities cannot muster the moral imagination to understand the injustice and suffering its territorial ambitions—and even its legitimate security concerns—are inflicting on another people, what hope is there for the rest of us?"

Another authoritative Jewish intellectual warning of impending catastrophe for Israel is Daniel Barenboim, the Argentine-Israeli pianist and conductor, founder of the West-Eastern Divan Orchestra, which brings together young Israeli and Arab musicians. In a full-page interview in *Die Zeit* on June 10, Barenboim characterized the flotilla attack as "dumb." Echoing Siegman's idea of Israel's loss of "moral imagination," Barenboim raised the question, what has become of the famous "Jewish intelligence?" – a phrase, he explains, used by both anti-semites and philosemites. Among Israelis there are many intelligent people with whom one can rationally discuss Beethoven, Shakespeare, or Marx, "but when you come to the subject of Palestinians, they are totally blind. It is not explicable."

With respect to the political situation, Barenboim is categorical: the problem is the occupation and decades of injustice against the Palestinians, not the "widespread Israeli interpretation" that it all has to do with the Nazis and the Holocaust. "If a Palestinian, whose family has owned a house in Jaffa or Nazareth since the 11th century, now no longer has the right to reside there, and this man then hates the Israelis – that has nothing to do with Adolf

Hitler.” As for Hamas, Barenboim’s view is that “If one wants to make peace, one has to talk to all the factions of the enemy,” and adds: “What the world has forgotten by the way: Hamas was a creature of Israel, to weaken Arafat.” His conclusion is unambiguous: “If things continue as they are, Israel’s days are numbered. The demographic development shows us that the Jews will not remain in the majority. What is occurring is apartheid, which is untenable. And what really makes me angry is that many Israeli governments, not only the current one, are convinced that they have the right to kill people, because they do not acknowledge Israel’s right to exist. That cannot be.”

### Israel On The Couch

The sub-text running through the views expressed by Siegman, Levy, Barenboim, and other Jewish intellectuals is that there is something fundamentally wrong in Israel, — not merely that its policies are unjust and in violation of international law, but that there is something unhealthy, irrational in the Israeli mindset. A couple of articles circulated on the Internet in mid-June that made this point explicit. Signed by one Michael K. Smith, they “reported” on the suicides of two psychiatrists, one who had treated Netanyahu for nine years, and the other who had treated Barak (for “Security Addiction Disorder”-SAD). Both accounts, appearing on June 12 and 15, turned out to be spoofs, but they are symptomatic of the growing awareness that a clinical approach to the Israel problem makes sense.(25) Also, they remind us that humor is a powerful antidote in such cases.

Mosher Yatom, the fictional name given Netanyahu’s would-be psychiatrist, left a suicide note saying that he could no longer tolerate his patient’s contradictory behavior. “I can’t take it anymore. Robbery is redemption, apartheid is freedom, peace activists are terrorists, murder is self-defense, piracy is legality. Palestinians are Jordanians, annexation is liberation, there’s no end to his contradictions. Freud promised rationality would reign in the instinctual passions, but he never met Bibi Netanyahu. This guy would say Gandhi invented brass knuckles.” The psychiatrist reportedly suffered a series of strokes, each in reaction to outrageous statements by his patient, for example, that “Iran’s nuclear energy program was a ‘flying gas chamber.’” An expert in the field, Dr. Rafael Eilam, in commenting on “Massive Attack Disorder” (MAD), which is “rampant among Israeli leaders,” says this syndrome may account for the attacks on Lebanon and Gaza, “with both attacks having contributed substantially to Israel’s current pariah status.” The article ends with the news of a “Free Israel” initiative by psychiatrists worldwide, who want to send a flotilla with relief supplies for the Israeli doctors and their patients: “anti-depressants for the former and elephant tranquilizers for the latter.”

When the spoofs first appeared on the web, not a few readers took the opening paragraphs seriously, because there was such a ring of psychological truth to them.

Anyone who ignores the psychological factor in politics must have been in hibernation during the eight years of the Bush-Cheney pathology. When sane military professionals were testifying to the perils of new wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the neocon faction followed its insane instincts and the bombs began to fall. Dr. Justin A. Frank, an American psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, authored a brilliant study entitled *Bush on the Couch*.(25) Relying solely on published speeches, statements, and interviews, Frank diagnosed the president as seriously mentally ill, actually a sociopath. Were Dr. Frank to examine statements on the public record by Netanyahu, Barak, Peres, Lieberman, Tzipi Livni among others, he might come to a similar conclusion. When, at a recent public speaking event in Germany, I asked the IPPNW member aboard the Mavi Marmora, how he, as a practicing psychiatrist, would

evaluate the mental state of the Israeli leadership, he quipped that he was merely a psychotherapist, and did not deal with cases of grave psychosis.

The sooner the world – emphatically including Israel – recognizes that we are dealing not with politics as usual, but with clinically identifiable attitudes and policies, the better. The generation of “new historians” in Israel, researchers like Ilan Pappé, have done much to deconstruct the mythology of Israel’s founding, which is a precondition for defining a sane approach to overcoming the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

But this is not enough. The Israeli people and elite have to confront that past as well as the recent and current injustices inflicted on the Palestinians, and work through the psychological-moral implications. Continuing outside pressure in the form of U.N. or European investigative and disciplinary actions does have a palpable effect. Grinstein is correct in assessing the consequences of sanctions and boycotts, including those in intellectual circles, but he is wrong in thinking that this has come about because the “enemies” of Israel are “scheming to bring about its implosion by turning it into a pariah state.” It is Israel’s own anti-Palestinian policies which have isolated the country, making it, yes, a pariah. Grinstein’s reference to apartheid South Africa is also pertinent. What forced international firms to pull out of that country was the worldwide moral censure of apartheid. Not the economic impact of sanctions, but the moral thrust which occasioned them ultimately led to the downfall of the racist regime. Similarly, the civil rights movement in the U.S. was successful, not due to the economic damage done by its boycotts, but by virtue of the movement’s moral authority. The U.S., which was mired in an immoral war against Viet Nam while simultaneously depriving its own citizens of basic human rights, had become a pariah in the eyes of the world and its leadership had to willfully *change*.

These two cases demonstrate the potential for profound political upheaval when a people faces up to its moral responsibilities. They also pose the critical role of leadership. Does there exist in Israel today a leader with the pragmatic grasp of reality Lyndon B. Johnson had? Is there anyone comparable to Frederik de Klerk, capable of recognizing that a system founded on injustice could not morally survive? Yitzhak Rabin apparently reached that conclusion. Who is prepared to take up his legacy today?

#### Notes

1. <http://pulsemedia.org/2010/06/24/kenneth-okeefe-on-bbc-hardtalk>
2. <http://www.ksta.de/html/artikel/1273823369058.shtml>
3. Israel reportedly expressed surprise at criticism of its entry ban. “There is a clear policy,” a representative of the Foreign Ministry was quoted. “We have told the Europeans long ago that we do not allow high-level politicians to enter the Gaza Strip” (<http://www.zeit.de/politik/ausland/2010-06/niebel-gaza-israel?page=all&print=true>)
4. *Jerusalem Post*, July 12, 2010.
5. See Preparations for a Hit Against Iran: Stopping Israel’s Next War, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=18235>, Gaza One Year After: The World Has Changed, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=16722>, and The Target is Iran: Israel’s Latest Gamble May Backfire, <http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=11747>.

6. "A Clean Break: A New Strategy for Securing the Realm," <http://www.iasps.org/strat1.htm>. The document endorsed a "Change in the nature of its [Israel's] relations with the Palestinians, including upholding the right of hot pursuit for self-defense into all Palestinian areas and nurturing alternatives to Arafat's exclusive grip on Palestinian society." See also, Muriel Mirak-Weissbach, *Through the Wall of Fire: Armenia - Iraq - Palestine: From Wrath to Reconciliation*, edition fischer, 2009.

7. <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/04/27/AR20100427034..>)

8. <http://www.presstv.ir>

9. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704288204575362840121771862.html>)

10. (<http://washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/07/08/AR20100708050>).

11. Financial Times, May 18, [http://www.ft.com/cms/s/58caa4b4-62a4-11df-b1d1-00144feab49a,dwp\\_uuid=5aedc80](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/58caa4b4-62a4-11df-b1d1-00144feab49a,dwp_uuid=5aedc80).

12. "Showdown in the Red Sea: U.-S. Sends 11 Warships to Confront Iran," (<http://www.globalresearch.ca/index.php?context=va&aid=19825>).

13. "U.A.E.- diplomat mulls hit on Iran's nukes: Prefers strike to armed foe," by Eli Lake, <http://www3.washingtontimes.com/news/2010/jul/6/uae-ambassador-endorses-bombing...>

14. [http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2010/ss\\_israel0634\\_07\\_09.asp](http://www.worldtribune.com/worldtribune/WTARC/2010/ss_israel0634_07_09.asp)).

15. "Imagining an Israeli Strike on Iran," by David E. Sanger, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/03/28/weekinreview/28sangerintro.html>

16. <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748703720504575376742991948412.html>

17. <http://www.time.com/time/printout/0,8816,2003921,00.html> CHECK

18. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamal-abdi/resolution-green-lighting\\_b\\_657608.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/jamal-abdi/resolution-green-lighting_b_657608.html)?  
Ran the story of the Resolution and included the full text. For Bolton's article, "Beyond the Obama Nuke Policy," see <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052748704288204575362821477769674.html>

19. (<http://www.sfgate.com/cgi-bin/article.cgi?f=/c/a/2010/07/08/MNNS1EB17D.DTL&ty...>).

20. <http://www.alertnet.org/thenews/newsdesk/N20108548.htm>

21. If Israel's elite fears the loss of legitimacy in the eyes of the world as a consequence of the Gaza conflict, it is just as jittery about growing calls for the country's nuclear arsenal to be placed under international supervision. For the first time, as reported by *Haaretz* on May 8, the IAEA was asked to place the issue on its board meeting agenda on June 7. This came in response to a letter on April 23 by Arab member nations addressed to IAEA chief Yukiya Amano. Amano, in turn, reportedly asked for proposals from IAEA member states' foreign ministries, on how to urge Israel to sign the NPT.

When, on May 28, the 189 signatories to the NPT issued a document calling on Israel to join the NPT (and did not mention Iran), Netanyahu denounced it as “faulty” and “hypocritical.” In a statement, he regretted such pressure on the only democracy in the region (Israel), while the “terrorist regime in Iran” which allegedly wants to wipe Israel off the map, was not mentioned. Bibi’s response was not surprising; in an ABC interview April 19, when asked about joining the NPT, he had answered that was as unlikely as stopping settlement in East Jerusalem. “If the Middle East one day advances to a messianic age where the lion lies down with the lamb,” he said, “you can ask me that question again.” (<http://www.weekly.ahram.org.eg/print/2010/996/re1.htm>).

The U.S. Ambassador to the IAEA in Vienna, Glyn Davies, issued a statement during the Board of Governors meeting, regretting that the matter had come up. “Singling out Israel for censure is in our view both counterproductive and inappropriate,” it read. Though committed to the NPT and even a WMD-free Middle East, the U.S. view was that raising the issue further politicized the IAEA, and presented a “distraction from other pressing issues,” to wit, Iran. See <http://vienna.usmission.gov/100610israel.html>.

22. ([http://www.yahoo.com/s/nm/20100614/wl\\_nm/us\\_israel\\_blockade\\_icrc](http://www.yahoo.com/s/nm/20100614/wl_nm/us_israel_blockade_icrc)).

23. <http://www.haaretz.com/misc/article-print-page/comment-israel-delegitimizers-threate...>

24. Siegman is director of the U.S./Middle East Project, a visiting professor at the Sir Joseph Hotung Middle East Program, School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London. He was formerly Senior Fellow on the Middle East at the Council on Foreign Relations, and earlier head of the AJC. <http://www.haaretz.com/misc/article-print-page/israel-s-greatest-loss-its-moral-imagination>.

Siegman is not the first to explore ominous parallels with the Nazi era. *Haaretz* journalist Gideon Levy wrote of trends in Israel toward fascism, in an issue of *Der Semit* featuring “Jewish intellectuals against Israel.” His article is entitled, “Die Schnellbahn zu einem faschistischen Israel,” (Express Train to a Fascist Israel), *Der Semit: Unabhängige jüdische Zeitschrift*, 2. Jahrgang – Nr. 03 Mai/Juni 2010, pp. 34-35.

25. “Psychiatrist of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Commits Suicide: Anguished Suicide Note Cites ‘Deluge of Doublethink’ In Driving Kind-Hearted Shrink to Despair,” <http://www.rebelnews.org/opinion/middle-east/246653-psychiatrist-of-israeli-prime-minister-commits-suicide>, “Second Psychiatrist Suicide Rocks Israel: Defense Minister’s Analyst Overdoses on Valium – Wave of ‘Shrinkicide’ Feared,” <http://legalienate.blogspot.com/2010/06/second-psychiatrist-suicide-rocks.html>.

26. Justin A. Frank, M.D., *Bush on the Couch*, Regan Books, New York 2004.

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