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On Monday 31 May 2010 the State of Israel committed a most heinous act of piracy and murder in international waters. This was a brazen, violent assault on the *Mavi Marmara*, one of the flotilla taking much needed humanitarian assistance to the besieged Gaza population.



The humanitarian aid, support and solidarity with the people of Gaza was essentially organised by the International Gaza Movement and the Turkish Human Rights and Freedom Group (IHH). In Turkey financial and material resources were raised at numerous events. The Free Gaza Movement, launched two years ago, has tried on at least seven occasions to breach the illegal blockade of Gaza.

The unprovoked, unjustifiable act of violence led to the deaths of nine innocent solidarity activists. These included a 19-year-old Turkish-American, a journalist and a 54-year-old taekwondo champion.

Israel has undertaken a number of aggressive operations to protect and defend its colonial type occupation of Palestinian lands. In recent times this has included the disastrous war in Lebanon in 2000 and the war on Gaza city and its citizens. Israel does not shy away from the disproportionate and illegal use of violence against those it perceives as enemies. Some months ago Israeli killer agents used false British, French, German, Australian and Irish passports to gain entry into Dubai and assassinate a senior Hamas leader... and now, their armed forces attack the flotilla.

Prior to the assault on the *Mavi Marmara* two of the flotilla carrying material aid broke down on the way to Gaza. It can reasonably be assumed that the highly secretive Israeli military and security forces had carried out their earlier threats to sabotage the aid flotilla. As Robert Booth and Ian Black point out: "There is one

known precedent for naval sabotage by the Israelis. Flotilla B, the elite naval commando unit that carried out Monday's raid, reportedly blew up a ship named *al-Awda* (The Return) which was chartered by the Palestine Liberation Organisation in 1988 to dramatise the plight of Palestinian refugees. It sank in Limassol" (*Mail and Guardian*, 4 June 2010).

The dastardly act of May 2010 evoked the wrath of the international community. It also put into danger relations with Turkey, other Middle East countries and South Africa. But Israel seems oblivious to the negative fall-out. This once more demonstrates its contempt for international opinion, UN resolutions and humane norms of international behaviour. Israeli spin doctors, ably supported by the vast network of influential Zionist

lobby groups, were immediately active on the air-waves and in the print media seeking to justify the murder of nine innocent solidarity activists. After seizing and tampering with all the films, video recordings and cameras from the activists on the ship, they released a highly doctored version of the tragic drama on the *Mavi Marmara*.

Murder most foul was presented as a response to possible "terrorist attacks," "arming of Gaza militants," "defence of Israel's security" and allegations were made that the flotilla was carrying weapons of war. A telling commentary on what transpired was written by Patrick Seale, a highly respected analyst and writer on the Middle East. He wrote: "Israel's deadly commando assault on Monday on the Free Gaza flotilla has been denounced around the



The Israeli Navy intercepts peace boats in the Mediterranean sea heading for Gaza (31 May 2010).

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world as state terrorism, piracy, a war crime and the latest example of Israel's arrogant contempt for international law and its criminal indifference to non-Jewish life. In view of the enormity of the act – and the toll of dead and wounded among unarmed activists seeking to break the three year Gaza siege – these charges appear justified.”

“Ever since the 1967 war,” Searle continues. “Jewish settlement in

in relations between the US and the Muslim world.

Central to this was his rejection of continued Israeli settlements on Palestinian soil and a serious commitment to negotiations leading to an independent Palestinian State alongside Israel living in secure, properly defined borders. But it is not to be. The US, treading ever so cautiously, could not even agree to the

1.5 million Palestinians living in that sliver of land should no longer merely survive under intolerable conditions. There is extreme poverty, mass unemployment, factories and other businesses are closing down and there is an acute shortage of food, water, and medical supplies. In addition, the cement and other building materials required to rebuild those parts of Gaza reduced to rubble by the invasion two years ago

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the occupied Palestinian territories has proceeded apace under Israeli governments of all political colourings. The longing for a greater Israel extending from the Red Sea to the Jordan River is not confined to messianic zealots and far-right nationalists... The attack on the flotilla off the Gaza coast must be seen as Israel's latest attempt to radicalise the Palestinians and hence torpedo, even before they have properly started, the so-called proximity talks which George Mitchell, US President Barack Obama's Middle East envoy, has laboriously set up. Mahmoud Abbas will now be under great pressure to withdraw from the talks and risk being denounced as a traitor by inflamed Palestinian and Arab opinion. No doubt the Israeli calculation is that the storm will blow over and time will have been gained for further expansion.” (*City Press*, 6 June 2010)

For how long will the Israeli propaganda machine and their many fellow travellers get away with lies, lies and more damned lies? Their bluff must be called. A critical reason why Israel acts with arrogance and impunity is its confidence that it retains the support, succour, comfort and aid of the US government. Successive US administrations have used the veto, or the threat thereof, to prevent the UN Security Council from taking meaningful measures against Israel. With the election of Obama as President, and following his seminal speech a year ago in Cairo, many people held out the hope that it was possible to conceive of, to use Obama's words, “a new beginning”

setting up of a genuinely independent international enquiry! They are in support of an Israeli enquiry with some foreign involvement to probe the events of 31 May. Israel has set up a committee of inquiry including two foreign observers. One of these is Lord Trimble, a conservative, former First Minister of Northern Ireland. Can he be impartial? Only last month he was one of the founders of the pro-Israeli lobby group, the “Friends of Israel initiative.” The other observer is Ken Watkin, a former Judge Advocate General of the Canadian army. It is very doubtful that this committee can conduct an impartial, fair and just enquiry into that murder on the high seas.

There is an immediate and urgent need to intensify the campaign to lift the siege and blockade of Gaza. Hilary Clinton, US Secretary of State, characterised the Gaza blockade as “unsustainable and unacceptable.” Immense pressure should now be put on the US administration to match their deeds with their words. Moreover, the Obama administration must take firm action against the continued Israeli colonisation of the West Bank, its occupation of East Jerusalem and – that affront to human sensitivities – the Apartheid wall. Let us recall that it was the US government, media, political parties and influential anti-communist lobby groups that conducted a sustained and ferocious campaign against the Berlin Wall. How then can they justify such a deafening silence with regard to Israel's Apartheid wall?

The siege and blockade of Gaza must be lifted with immediate effect. The

are not available. Egypt, which only opened its borders with Gaza for a few days every three weeks, has now been compelled to open the crossing at Rafah. Egypt must now be pressured to open the border indefinitely with due care and attention to its own security.

Turkey and South Africa have denounced the attack in very strong terms and recalled their ambassadors for what is euphemistically termed “consultations.” The international Palestinian solidarity movement should utilise the above moves to intensify its campaign in support of this just and worthy cause. Steps should be taken to request the International Court of Justice to probe the recent piracy and murders in international waters as well as the invasion, siege and blockade of Gaza. If Israel continues on its present course the demands for the isolation of Israel will become irresistible.

The Arab world has a particularly important role to play in growing the scope and breadth of the international solidarity movement. Why is Qatar still hosting the biggest US military base in that region? Surely this is a powerful bargaining chip that should be utilised?

We in South Africa can, and do, appreciate the importance of international solidarity. It was one of the main pillars of our own revolutionary struggle. Our people, government, political parties, trade unions and civil society organisations should play their full part in helping to build a powerful Palestinian solidarity movement. This needs to be as far-reaching, effective and influential as the Anti-Apartheid Movement. ■