

OPINION and ANALYSIS

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local and international writings on the Middle East

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Israel should thank Egypt for opening Gaza crossing

By Shlomo Avineri, Haaretz, 30 May, 2011

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/israel-should-thank-egypt-for-opening-gaza-crossing-1.364881>

Without a doubt, Egypt's decision to open the Rafah crossing point is good for the inhabitants of the Gaza Strip and for the Hamas government. The question of whether it is good for Egypt remains open. As for Israel, even though at first glance it might not look that way, it is also good.

The fact that Gaza will now be directly connected to the Arab world might make it easier for Israel to untangle itself from a number of knots and a thoughtful and wise response to the new reality could make it easier to deal with the next flotilla.

Though Israel evacuated the Jewish settlements from the Gaza Strip and withdrew the Israel Defense Forces from the territory, it kept its hold on the supervision of entry and departure there by land, sea and air. After the Hamas takeover of Gaza, this external control became a blockade - which hadn't initially been included in the idea of the disengagement.

The aims of the of the blockade emerged gradually: Legitimate intentions like preventing provision of armaments to Hamas mingled here with more complex aims like a desire to topple the Hamas regime and bring about the release of Gilad Shalit.

None of these aims have been achieved and the blockade's diplomatic repercussions on Israel's international standing have never been publicly discussed. Instead of reaping the diplomatic rewards of the disengagement, Israel has been perceived as oppressing a million and a half civilians.

An absurdity has developed: Even though Israel is no longer controlling the Gaza Strip, it is viewed as responsible for the distress prevailing there. We have also reached an embarrassing situation in which a special unit has formulated a list of allowed foods for the inhabitants of Gaza - as though it were a collective prison under our control.

Thus we fell into the trap set by the organizers of the flotilla from Turkey and came across as violent occupiers, who are not only oppressing a civilian population but also killing people who try to bring them humanitarian aid.

However - and it is hard to admit this - what brought about the near-total cessation of Qassam-fire out of the Gaza Strip was Hamas' fear of another brutal Israeli military operation.

The fact that the Gaza Strip has another border - with Egypt - was forgotten and that country's cooperation with Israel in also closing its own border with the Gaza Strip did not attract attention. Israel alone was perceived as responsible for their distress.

Now, upon the opening of the Egyptian border, the time has come to complete the disengagement from the Gaza Strip. Israel must lift the naval and air blockades and at the same time shut down entirely the land crossing points from Israel to Gaza. The Gaza Strip is enemy territory and from the moment it is open to the wider world through the Rafah crossing, all the remnants of the Israeli occupation as manifested in the naval and air blockade should be eliminated, thereby removing from us the responsibility for provisioning the Gaza Strip.

The border between Israel and Gaza should be like the border between Israel and Lebanon, and just as Israel is not imposing a naval blockade on Lebanon it should not be imposing one on Gaza.

If this policy is implemented, transferring provisions and humanitarian aid to the Gaza Strip will be done through Egypt - or directly to Gaza. If the organizers of the flotilla to Gaza want to reach Gaza - you are welcome: This is none of our business. There is no Israeli blockade, and so-called human rights activists - whose only aim is to embarrass Israel - aren't bringing weapons there anyway.

Anyone who wants to bring weapons has been doing it for years via the tunnels and we haven't been able to stop that. A total disengagement could also decrease the motivation of some of the flotilla participants.

Gaza is a foreign country. It is hard to digest this, but this is the logic of the disengagement, which must now be completed. Thanks are due to Egypt for having made this possible.

Israel as Middle Eastern hegemon

By Spengler, Asia Times Online, 24 May 2011

http://www.atimes.com/atimes/Middle_East/ME24Ak01.html

Like the vanishing point in a perspective painting, long-term projections help us order our perceptions of what we see in front of us today. Here's one to think about, fresh from the just-released update of the United Nations' population forecasts: At constant fertility, Israel will have more young people by the end of this century than either Turkey or Iran, and more than German, Italy or Spain.

Population aged 15 to 24 years, Israel vs selected countries

With a total fertility rate of three children per woman, Israel's total population will rise to 24 million by the end of the present century. Iran's fertility is around 1.7 and falling, while the fertility for ethnic Turks is only 1.5 (the Kurdish minority has a fertility rate of around 4.5).

Not that the size of land armies matters much in an era of high-tech warfare, but if present trends continue, Israel will be able to field the largest land army in the Middle East. That startling data point, though, should alert analysts to a more relevant problem: among the military powers in the Middle East, Israel will be the only one with a viable population structure by the middle of this century.

That is why it is in America's interest to keep Israel as an ally. Israel is not only the strongest power in the region; in a generation or two it will be the only power in the region, the last man standing among ruined neighbours. The demographic time bomb in the region is not the Palestinian Arabs on the West Bank, as the Israeli peace party wrongly believed, but rather Israel itself.

The right way to read this projection is backwards: Israelis love children and have lots of them because they are happy, optimistic and prosperous. Most of Israel's population increase comes from so-called "secular" Israelis, who have 2.6 children on average, more than any other people in the industrial world. The ultra-Orthodox have seven or eight, bringing total fertility to three children.

Europeans, Turks and Iranians, by contrast, have very few children because they are grumpy, alienated and pessimistic. It's not so much the projection of the demographic future cranked out by the United Nations computers that counts, but rather the implicit vision of the future in the minds of today's prospective parents.

People who can't be bothered to have children presumably have a very dim view of days to come. Reams have been written, to be sure, about Europe's demographic tailspin. Less has been said about Persian pessimism and Anatolian anomie.

Paradoxically, this makes Israel's present position dangerous, for its enemies understand that they have a very brief window in which to encircle the Jewish superpower. The collapse of Egypt and possibly that of Syria shortens this window. Nothing short of American support for a unilateral declaration of a Palestinian state on the 1949 armistice lines followed by economic sanctions against Israel, though, is likely to make a difference, and this seems unlikely.

Israel already is a high-tech superpower. Israeli leads the Group of 7 industrial nations in patent applications. As Professor Reuven Brenner of McGill University wrote in the January 2010 issue of First Things:

"Today Israel's venture capital industry still raises more funds than any other venue except the United States. In 2006 alone, 402 Israeli hi-tech companies raised over \$1.62 billion - the highest amount in the past five years. That same year, Israel had 80 active venture capital funds and over \$10 billion under management, invested in over 1,000 Israeli start-ups."

Maintaining the stunning progress of the past decade will be a challenge, because Israel's high-tech sector received a one-time boost from Russian emigration. As Brenner observes:

“Of the million Russians who moved to Israel during the 1980s and 1990s, more than 55% had post-secondary education, and more than half held academic and managerial positions in their former country ... This made Israel the world leader in the scientist and engineer workforce, followed by the USA with 80 and Germany with 55 scientists and engineers per 10,000 members of its labour force.

Israel's prowess in the arts matches its accomplishments in technology and business. Israel has become something of a superpower in that most characteristically Western art form, classical music. In a July 21, 2010, survey of Israeli music for the webzine Tablet, I wrote, "Israelis take to classical music - the art form that most clearly creates a sense of the future - like no other people on earth, to the point that music has become part of Israel's character, an embodiment of the national genius for balancing hope and fear."

Israel has one the largest local audience for chamber music recitals of any country in the world, and its leading musicians occupy top slots around the world - for example Guy Braunstein, concertmaster (principal violin) of the Berlin Philharmonic.

This, I believe, explains the implacable hostility of Israel's neighbours, as well as the Europeans. It is the unquenchable envy of the dying towards the living. Having failed at Christianity, and afterward failed at neo-pagan nationalism, Europe has reconciled itself to a quiet passage into oblivion.

Israel's success is a horrible reminder of European failure; its bumptious nationalism grates against Europe's determination to forget its own ugly embrace of nationalism; and its implicitly religious *raison d'être* provokes post-Christian rage. Above all, it offends Europe that Israel brims with life. Some of Europe's great nations may not survive the present century. At constant fertility, Israel will have more citizens than any of the Eastern European countries where large numbers of Jews resided prior to the Holocaust.

Total population, Israel vs selected Eastern European countries (constant fertility scenario)

Source: United Nations Population Division

In the constant fertility scenario, Israel will end the century at a median age of 32, while Poland will have a median age of 57. That is an inherently impossible outcome, because in that case most of Poland's population would be elderly dependents. To support them, the remaining young people would have to emigrate and work overseas (perhaps in Israel).

The Muslim world, meanwhile, is turning grey at an unprecedented rate. Turkey's and Iran's median age will surpass the 40-year mark by mid-century, assuming constant fertility, while Israel's will stabilize in the mid-30s. Europe will become an impoverished geriatric ward.

Median age in years (constant fertility assumption)

Source: United Nations Population Division

The implications of these trends have not escaped the leaders of the affected countries. "If we continue the existing trend, 2038 will mark disaster for us," Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan warned in May 2010.

I do not know whether Erdogan chose the year 2038 by statistical projection, or whether he consulted the Muslim counterpart of Harold Camping, but it will do as well as any. Iran's President Mahmud Ahmadinejad, meanwhile, has warned repeatedly of "national extinction" if the country's low birth rate persists.

What happens to Egypt and Syria in this scenario is of small importance. Neither country will come out of the present crisis in any condition to fight, if they come out of it at all. Egypt's social structure - with two-fifths of the country immured in extreme rural poverty, and another quarter starving on thin subsidies in Cairo and Alexandria - simply is not viable.

It needed only one swift kick to shatter, and that came from the doubling of food prices. The

rebellion that deposed Hosni Mubarak made things much worse; the collapse of tourism and other sources of foreign exchange, the jump in import prices, and flight capital have left Egypt without the funds to cover half its annual import bill. The country will be broke by year-end, despite Obama's aid package.

Development economists have known for years that a disaster was in the works. A 2009 World Bank report on Arab food security warned, "Arab countries are very vulnerable to fluctuations in international commodity markets because they are heavily dependent on imported food. Arab countries are the largest importers of cereal in the world. Most import at least 50 percent of the food calories they consume." The trouble is that the Arab regimes made things worse rather than better.

Egypt's rulers of the past 60 years intentionally transformed what once was the breadbasket of the Mediterranean into a starvation trap. They did so through tragedy, not oversight. Keeping a large part of one's people illiterate on subsistence farms is the surest method of social control.

Crop yields in Egypt are a fifth of the best American levels, and by design, for no Egyptian government wished to add more displaced peasants to the 17 million people now crowded into Cairo. Syrian President Bashar al-Assad made a few tentative steps in this direction, and got a 100,000 landless farmers living in tent cities around Damascus.

Gamal Abdel Nasser, Anwar Sadat and Mubarak did not invent the system. Post-revolutionary Russia imprisoned its peasants on collective farms; as the Mexican historian Enrique Krauze showed (in his 1992 book *Textos Hereticos*), post-revolutionary Mexico emulated the Stalinist model of social control and imposed its own system of collective farms during the 1930s.

Mexico eventually dumped a fifth of its population on its northern neighbour, mainly rural people from the impoverished south. The remaining Mexican poor provided an inexhaustible source of foot-soldiers for the drug cartels with which the Mexican government is fighting a low-intensity civil war.

Egypt, the most populous Arab country, postponed these problems for three generations. It is governable only by military rule, *de facto* or *de jure*, because the military is the only institution that can take peasants straight from the farm and assimilate them into a disciplined social structure.

There is no civil society underneath the military. The collapse of Mubarak's military dictatorship came about when food price inflation revealed its incapacity to meet the population's basic needs. But the collapse of military rule and the flight of the army-linked oligarchy that milked the Egyptian economy for 60 years is a near-term disaster.

In place of the orderly corruption over which Mubarak presided, there is a scramble on the part of half-organized political groups to get control of the country's shrinking supply of basic goods. Civic violence likely will claim more lives than hunger.

Refugees from Libya and Tunisia have swamped the refugee camps on the closest Italian island, and hundreds have drowned in small boats attempting to cross the Mediterranean. By the end of this year, tourists on the Greek islands may see thousands of small boats carrying hungry

Egyptians seeking help. Europe's sympathy for the Arab side may vanish under an inundation of refugees.

Events are most likely to overtake diplomacy. The sort of economic and demographic imbalances implied by the projections shown above reflect back into the present. Chaos in Egypt, Syria and other Arab countries probably will pre-empt the present focus on Israel and the Palestinians. It would not be surprising if the Palestinians were to mount another Intifada, or Egypt and Syria were to initiate one last war against Israel. It might be their last opportunity.

But I rate the probability of another war at well under 50%. The internal problems of Egypt and Syria are more likely to make war too difficult to wage.

The Gaza Flotillas to Come: Some Ground Rules before Setting Out
Alan Baker, Jerusalem Issue Briefs Vol. 11, No. 3 - 5 June 2011

[http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=1&DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=442&PID=0&IID=7368&TTL=The Gaza Flotillas to Come: Some Ground Rules before Setting Out](http://www.jcpa.org/JCPA/Templates/ShowPage.asp?DRIT=1&DBID=1&LNGID=1&TMID=111&FID=442&PID=0&IID=7368&TTL=The+Gaza+Flotillas+to+Come:+Some+Ground+Rules+before+Setting+Out)

- An ostensibly civilian, humanitarian flotilla was employed in May 2010 to demonstratively breach the Israeli naval blockade of the Gaza coast. This flotilla was organized by the Turkish IHH, which has extensive links to extreme Islamic terror groups. Provoking a confrontation with Israel continues to be the primary aim.

- Since May 2010, the Israeli government has altered the manner in which it administers the limitations on the transfer of goods to Gaza. It now specifically prohibits only those materials that might be taken and directed by Hamas and other terror groups in furtherance of their hostile purposes.

- There is no humanitarian emergency among the civilian population in Gaza, and hence there can be no justification for conveying emergency shipments intended to alleviate an emergency that clearly does not exist. Any genuine wish to provide materials to the Gaza population can be directed through Israeli ports and the relevant authorities.

- Hamas routinely fires missiles randomly at Israeli civilian targets. Thus a situation of ongoing armed conflict exists between Hamas and Israel, which has the prerogative to institute a naval and land blockade to prevent the introduction of weapons and materials that could serve belligerent purposes.

Such a blockade is well established in international law and practice.

- It is internationally accepted that any attempt to breach such a blockade may be prevented by Israeli naval patrols. Such a process may take place outside the area of the blockade if the declared intention of the flotilla is to violate the blockade. Furthermore, any vessel refusing to respond to the demands of the naval forces may be stopped forcefully.

Aiming to Provoke a Confrontation

Since the May 2010 wave of "flotillas" organized by Turkish and other groups, ostensibly conveying cargoes of vital and indispensable aid intended to reach the population of Gaza, much has been written and televised as to the real intentions of the organizers. Additionally, several enquiries have been instituted in order to analyze the legal, military, and other aspects of the flotilla affair and the way it was handled.

What seems to have been made very clear by the groups that organized the flotilla, especially the Turkish-led IHH terror-related organization, is the fact that the use of an ostensibly civilian, humanitarian flotilla and a huge PR campaign in order to demonstratively breach the Israeli naval blockade of the Gaza coast and thereby challenge Israel's policy regarding the Gaza Strip and provoke a confrontation with Israel, was clearly and continues to be the primary aim.

Conveying humanitarian goods to what was represented as a distressed Gaza population was a minor, secondary, and perhaps even incidental aim, at least among the most vocal participants in the flotilla, although there were indeed some who participated out of a bona fide belief in the importance of identifying themselves with, and trying to alleviate what they genuinely thought to be, a humanitarian crisis among the residents of Gaza.

The regrettable outcome of the May 2010 flotilla and the extensive international echo that still reverberates throughout the international community have nevertheless brought about a series of changes in the "situation on the ground."

The logic and aim of Israel's blockade is to prevent the Hamas terror organization presently administering Gaza from acquiring arms, ammunition, and other supplies that could contribute to hostile activities against Israel. Since May 2010, the Israeli government has altered the manner in which it administers the limitations on the transfer of goods to Gaza. It now specifically prohibits only those materials that might be taken and directed by Hamas and other terror groups in furtherance of their hostile purposes.

Furthermore, since the May 2010 flotilla incident and in light of the considerable publicity that has been given to the daily flow of goods and supplies into the Gaza Strip, it has become very clear to all that there is no humanitarian crisis in Gaza and all essential and other provisions are available to all residents.

On the other hand, the practical military and tactical implications and lessons of the May 2010 flotilla have been learned by Israel's military forces and the appropriate conclusions as to how to handle future flotillas have been reached and put into place.

Some Basic Facts

In light of these significant changes in the situation on the ground, one may wonder on what basis could future planned flotillas be justified and, in a similar vein, what might be the real intentions and motives of the organizers who are busy preparing the next flotilla touted for June 2011.

In this context, it might be pertinent to review some of the basic ground rules surrounding the flotilla phenomenon:

- It is widely acknowledged that there is no humanitarian emergency among the civilian population in Gaza. Hence there can be no justification for conveying emergency shipments intended to alleviate an emergency that clearly does not exist. Most materials and foodstuffs are permitted to enter Gaza after examination by the Israeli authorities in order to prevent tactical materials from reaching Hamas and other terror groups. Any genuine wish to provide materials to the Gaza population can be directed through Israeli ports and the relevant authorities.

- It is widely acknowledged that Gaza is independently administered by an internationally regarded terror organization - Hamas - that is sponsored and supplied with arms by Iran and that maintains an ongoing and actively hostile attitude towards Israel. The territory also serves as host to other terror groups such as the Islamic Jihad. Practically speaking, this hostility takes the form of incitement to terror through all levels of the population by all means of publicity - in kindergartens, schools, colleges, on the radio and television, and through the web. It involves the smuggling into the area and stockpiling of missiles, guns, and ammunition for use against Israel and its civilian population and the routine firing of such missiles randomly at Israeli civilian targets.

- It is widely acknowledged that Israel does not hold the status of an "occupying power" in Gaza. In fact, Israel transferred its civilian powers and responsibilities over the Gaza Strip into the hands of the Palestinian Authority and withdrew its forces and civilians. The Palestinian Authority's control in Gaza was later usurped by Hamas, which turned the area into a base for mounting terror attacks against Israel.

- Since such a terror organization is in sole and effective control of Gaza and directs ongoing and active hostilities against Israel and its civilians, it is widely acknowledged that a situation of ongoing armed conflict exists between Hamas, its associates, and Israel. In such a situation of armed conflict, Israel has the prerogative to institute a naval and land blockade with a view to prevent the introduction of weapons and materials that could serve the belligerent purposes of Hamas. The institution of such a blockade is well established in international law and practice.

•It is internationally acknowledged that a naval blockade in such a situation, once instituted and maintained in accordance with the rules of international law with the appropriate public notification as to the area of sea that it covers, effective enforcement, impartiality and consideration of humanitarian needs of the population, is fully in accordance with accepted international law and practice.

•Similarly, it is internationally accepted that any attempt to breach such a blockade by civilian or other vessels may be prevented by Israeli naval patrols, and the vessels involved may be stopped, searched, and sent to an Israeli port in order to check their cargoes. Such a process may take place outside the area of the blockade if the declared intention of the flotilla is to violate the blockade. Furthermore, any vessel refusing to respond to the demands of the naval forces may be stopped forcefully.

In light of all the above, there is good reason to assume that the instigators of the planned flotilla intending to set sail for Gaza in June 2011 would be hard put to justify themselves other than by admitting their real character and motives as a provocative and political demonstration.

Sponsorship, organization, and presence on such flotillas by terror organizations or their activists disguised as humanitarian groups will no longer deceive an international community which witnessed the May 2010 flotilla, the premeditated violence of its organizers, and the regrettable and tragic outcome.

While such demonstrations may well take place if only for their PR value, they will have to abide by internationally accepted rules and prove their bona fide nature in order to be considered as genuine.

Bits and Pieces

Clips from various media in the Middle East and elsewhere

ICEJ, 2 June 2011: The IDF has deployed the Iron Dome air defence system to defend the battered Gaza border community of Sderote. Israel plans to build as many as 15 Iron Dome batteries to defend areas threatened by rockets from Iranian backed terror militias Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Hizbullah in Lebanon.

ICEJ, 2 June 2011: Israeli President Shimon Peres told *Israel Radio* that it is essential for the world to build missile defence systems to protect itself from threats by rogue countries, especially Iran which continues to build ballistic missiles while at the same time pursuing its renegade nuclear program.

ICEJ, 3 June 2011: The US Food and Drug Administration has given approval to Jerusalem based company Teva Pharmaceutical Industries Ltd. to provide a generic version of the highly effective Alzheimer's drug Aricept to patients in the US. This will make Alzheimer treatments significantly cheaper. Teva has led the effort to develop a generic substitute which will be just as effective at alleviating the symptoms of Alzheimers including memory problems, confusion and aggression.

NOTE: The views expressed in certain articles are not necessarily those of the SAZF

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