

1. *Caroline Glick* Ending Israel's losing streak

Israel is the target of a massive information war, unprecedented in scale and scope. This war is being waged primarily by a massive consortium of the international Left and the Arab and Islamic worlds.

2. *Editorial* The Idiocy of Global Public Opinion

When one hears "we are the world," the unifying emblem is now a burning Israeli flag.

3. *Marty Peretz* In The Great Flotilla Debate, the facts are on Israel's side

Who is behind this overhyped mission of mercy? And who is its beneficiary? It is none other than Hamas, the Gazan outpost of the global jihad, cousin of the Taliban, second cousin once-removed of Hezbollah.

4. *Yair Lapid* Our PR amateurs

People in charge of Israel's public relations are obviously clueless

5. *Thabo Leshilo* Beware taking sides in Mid-East

The least the media can do is to see and acknowledge the complexity in the Middle East

Our World: Ending Israel's losing streak

By Caroline B. Glick, The Jerusalem Post, 1 June 2010

www.jpost.com/Opinion/Columnists/Article.aspx?id=177082

A straight line runs from the anti-Israel UN resolution passed last Friday (28 May) and the Hamas flotilla.

These words are being written before the dust has settled on Monday morning's naval commando raid on the Gaza-bound Turkish flotilla of terror supporters.

The raid's full range of operational failures still cannot be known.

Obviously the fact that the mission ended with at least six soldiers wounded and at least 10 Hamas supporters dead makes clear that there were significant failures in both the IDF's training for and execution of the mission.

The navy and other relevant bodies will no doubt study these failures. But they point to a larger strategic failure that has crippled the country's capacity to contend with the information war being waged against it. Until this failure is remedied, no after-action investigation, no enhanced training, no new electronic warfare doodad will make a significant impact on Israel's ability to contend with the next Hamas flotilla.

In the space of four days, the country has suffered two massive defeats. A straight line runs between the anti-Israel resolution passed last Friday at the UN's Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty Review Conference and the Hamas flotilla. And in both cases, officials voiced "surprise" at these defeats.

Given the months-long build-up to the NPT review conference, and the weeks-long build-up to the Turkish-Hamas flotilla, that surprise cannot be attributed to a lack of information. What it points to, rather, is a cognitive failure of our leaders to understand the nature of the war being waged against us. And it is this fundamental failure of cognition that has landed six soldiers in the hospital, the nation's international reputation in tatters and its spokesmen searching for a way to describe a reality they do not understand.

The reality is simple and stark. Israel is the target of a massive information war, unprecedented in scale and scope. This war is being waged primarily by a massive consortium of the international Left and the Arab and Islamic worlds. The staggering scale of the forces aligned against us is demonstrated by two things.

The Hamas abetting Free Gaza Web site published a list of some 222 organizations that endorsed the terror-supporting flotilla. The listed organizations from the four corners of the earth include Jewish anti-Israel groups as well as Christian, Islamic and nonreligious anti-Israel groups. It is hard to think of any cause other than Israel-bashing that could unite such disparate forces.

The second indicator of the scope of the war is far more devastating than the list of groups that endorsed the pro-Hamas flotilla. That indicator is the fact that at the UN on Friday, 189 governments came together as one to savage Israel. There is no other issue that commands such unanimity. The NPT review conference demonstrated that the only way the international community will agree on anything is if its members are agreeing that Israel has no right to

defend itself. The conference's campaign against Israel shows that the 222 organizations supporting Hamas are a reflection of the will of the majority of the nations of the world.

This war is nothing new. It has been going on since the dawn of modern Zionism 150 years ago. In many ways, it is just the current iteration of the eternal war against the Jewish people.

The red-green alliance's aims are twofold. It seeks to delegitimize Israel's right to exist and it seeks to make it impossible for Israel to defend itself. If these aims are met, Israel's destruction will become an inevitability.

Until US President Barack Obama took office, Israel's one steady asset in this war was the US. Until last year, the US consistently refused to join the red-green alliance because its leaders recognized that the alliance's campaign was part and parcel of its campaign against US superpower status.

Indeed, some US leaders recognized that the alliance's animus toward Israel stemmed from the same source as its rejection of American exceptionalism.

Dismally, what the US's vote in favor of the NPT review conference's final anti-Israel (and by default pro-Iranian) resolution makes clear is that under Obama, the US is no longer Israel's reliable ally. Indeed, what the US's vote shows is that the Obama administration's ideological preferences place it on the side of the red-green alliance. No amount of backpedalling by the Obama administration can make up the damage caused by its act of belligerence.

If Israel's leaders were better informed, they would have recognized a number of things in the lead-up to the conference. They would have realized that Obama's anti-nuclear conference in April, his commitment to a nuclear-free world, as well as his general ambivalence – at best – to US global leadership rendered it all but inevitable that he would turn on Israel. The truth is that Egypt's call for the denuclearization of Israel jibes with Obama's own repeatedly stated views both regarding Israel and the US's own nuclear arsenal. Armed with this basic understanding of Obama's inclinations, Israel should have taken for granted that the NPT conference would target it. Consequently, in months preceding the conference, it should have stated loudly and consistently that as currently constituted, the NPT serves as the chief enabler of nuclear proliferation rather than the central instrument for preventing nuclear proliferation. North Korea exploited its status as an NPT signatory to develop its nuclear arsenal. Today Iran exploits its status as an NPT signatory to develop nuclear weapons. Unless the NPT is fundamentally revised, it will continue to serve as the primary instrument for nuclear proliferation.

Had this been Israel's position, it would have been able to undercut US arguments in favor of signing onto the final resolution. So too, such a position would have prepared Israel to cogently explain its rejection of the final resolution.

And that is the thing of it. The red-green alliance's aim at the NPT conference was to discredit Israel's deterrent capacity while delegitimizing its right to take preemptive action against Iran. Now, due to Israel's failure to make its case against the NPT in the months leading up to the conference, as our enemies use the US-supported final resolution to claim that our opposition to Iran's nuclear weapons program is hypocritical, we lack a cognitive framework for responding.

The fact that the government still doesn't get the point is made clear by its response to the decision. Its denunciation of the resolution makes no mention of the fact that the NPT regime itself has become the chief enabler of nuclear proliferation. So too, disastrously, in a clear bid to pretend away Obama's treachery, Israel actually applauded him for emptily criticizing the

resolution he voted for. This response compounds the damage and ensures that the assault will continue.

As to the flotilla, the challenge it presented was nothing new. Israel has been confronted by suicide protesters for a decade now. The fact that these pro-Hamas activists intended to commit suicide to discredit Israel on camera was made clear by the fact that the Turkish organizers named the lead ship Rachel Corrie.

So too, the fact that IDF forces boarding the ships would be met by trenchant, violent opposition was knowable simply by looking at Turkey's role in the operation. First of all, the Turkish government-supported NGO behind the operation is IHH. As the US government, the Turkish government in the 1990s, the Investigative Project on Terrorism and countless other sources have proven, IHH is a terrorist organization with direct links to al-Qaida and Hamas. Its members have been involved in terrorist warfare from Chechnya and Bosnia to Iraq and Israel. The notion that IHH organizers would behave like radical leftist anti-Israel demonstrators on university campuses is simply ridiculous.

Moreover, there is Turkey's behavior to consider. Since Obama took office, Turkey's gradual slide into the Iranian axis has sped up considerably.

Turkey's leading role in the flotilla, and the Erdogan government's ostentatious embrace of IHH – which just a decade ago Turkey banned from earthquake relief efforts in light of its violent, jihadist mission – made clear that the Erdogan regime would use any violence on board the ships as a way to strike a strategic blow at Israel's international standing.

In view of all of this, it is clear that the information strategy for contending with the flotilla was ill-conceived. Rather than attack Turkey for its facilitation of terrorism, and openly prepare charge sheets against the flotilla's organizers, crew and passengers for their facilitation of terrorism in breach of both domestic law and international law, the information efforts were largely concentrated on irrelevancies. Officials detailed all the humanitarian assistance Israel has provided Hamas-controlled Gaza. They spoke of the navy's commitment to use nonlethal force to take over the ships.

And now, in the aftermath of the lethal takeover of the flotilla, Israel's leaders stammer. Rather than demand an apology from the Turkish government for its support for these terrorists, Defense Minister Ehud Barak called his Turkish counterpart to talk over what happened. Rather than demand restitution for the terrorist assault against IDF troops, Israel has defended its troops' training in nonviolent crowd control.

These efforts are worse than worthless; they make Israel appear whiny rather than indignant. And more depressingly, they expose a dangerous lack of comprehension about what has just occurred, and a concomitant inability to prepare for what will most certainly follow.

Israel is the target of a massive information war. For it to win this war, it needs to counter its enemies' lies with the truth.

The NPT has been subverted by the very forces it was created to prevent from acquiring nuclear weapons.

Hamas is a genocidal terrorist organization ideologically indistinguishable from al-Qaida. International law requires all states and non-state actors to take active measures to defeat it.

Israel is the frontline of the free world. Its ability to defend itself and deter its foes is the single most important guarantee of international peace. A strong Israel is also the most potent and reliable guarantor of the US's continued ability to project its power in the Middle East.

This is the unvarnished truth. It is also the beginning of a successful campaign to defang the massive coalition of nuclear proliferation- and terrorism-abettors aligned against Israel. But until our leaders finally recognize the nature of the war being waged against our country, these basic facts will remain ignored as we move from one stunning defeat to the next.

The Idiocy of Global Public Opinion

Editorial, Investors Business Daily, 2 June 2010

<http://www.investors.com/NewsAndAnalysis/Article/536136/201006021859/The-Idiocy-Of-Global-Public-Opinion.aspx>

Globaloney: That creature known as "world opinion" is stirring again, roused for the first time since the campaign of Barack Obama or maybe the Iraq War. Now it's condemning Israel. And as usual, it's wrong.

But that hasn't ever stopped a good street demonstration. Monday's ship confrontation between terrorist-sponsored blockade runners and Israeli armed forces has drawn an avalanche of global condemnation against Israel, with loud street protests and condemnatory words from the leaders who either represent them or else fear them.

Demonstrations sprang up like mushrooms in such far-flung places as The Hague, Algiers, Kuala Lumpur, London, Prague, Lahore, Stockholm, Malmo, Gothenburg, New York, Sligo, Letterkenny, Copenhagen, Oxford, Brussels, Cairo, Frankfurt, Beirut, Sanaa in Yemen, Tampa, Montreal, Oslo, Burlington, Vt., and even in Jerusalem in the days since the confrontation.

So when one hears "we are the world," the unifying emblem now seems to be a burning Israeli flag.

Their leaders are just as bad, their knee-jerk condemnations employing neither statecraft nor strategic interests.

Tyrants and democratic leaders alike from Greece, South Africa, Brunei, Iran, India, Ireland, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Spain, New Zealand, Venezuela and Germany all issued condemnations to Israel alone for the Gaza incident.

Multilateral organizations like the European Union, the Arab League and the African Union also found common ground without awaiting facts, issuing their condemnations, too.

But let's be clear here — these demonstrators who get so much camera time don't represent responsible citizens. They condemn Israel with one set of rules and ignore provocations from

terrorists, falling right into the trap of useful idiocy. Then they imagine themselves on a higher moral plane, done cheap and easy by protesting.

Their hypocrisy is breathtaking. They say they abhor killing, but did nothing when North Korea torpedoed a South Korean ship last month, killing 46 sailors.

They're the same crowd that protested President Bush over the U.S. war in Iraq. Their motivation: a perception of US weakness.

The Obama administration has signaled its decreased commitment to Israel, both in repeated public condemnations and in its abusive, uncivil treatment of its head of state at the White House.

This is fertile ground for terrorists and their allies, who know they can use the useful idiots of "global" opinion to do their work for them. In this case, the Obama administration's response to this has been to condemn Israel and give terrorists a pass.

So not only is this a mess, it's also emboldened the terrorists, who've dispatched a new provocation ship, the Irish-owned MV Rachel Corrie to head toward Gaza for a new confrontation.

There is one and only one way to stop this, and that's to show resolve. When President Ronald Reagan attempted to position defensive missiles in Western Europe in 1982, he drew massive protests on perceptions that he could be made to back off.

When Reagan refused, the protests disappeared.

That's the kind of resolve the Obama administration needs to be showing right now. But with a president who considers popularity with "the world" paramount and working with multilateral organizations a substitute for diplomacy, the odds are not good he'll show any real leadership. But if he doesn't, who will?

In The Great Flotilla Debate, the facts are on Israel's side

Marty Peretz, New Republic, 1 June 2010

Look, I wish the Israeli raid on the so-called "Freedom Flotilla" had ended differently. Why, I ask, didn't Israel's navy disable the engine of the Mavi Marmara and drag the ship into port? Who knows? The engines of the other boats *were* apparently disabled - or so reliable sources say.

But, frankly, when some 800 men and women, distributed over six boats after weeks and weeks of preparation, are headed towards Gaza on the wings of slogan and hysteria, you don't take that many chances. Somebody has trouble in mind.

The first five vessels were steered quietly to the Israeli port city of Ashdod, which means that neither their passengers nor the Israeli commandos were especially provocative. The sixth ship,

which had 600 activist Turkish voyeurs on board, is an entirely different story. Sponsored by an organization labeled the Humanitarian Relief Fund (I.H.H.), it is said to have ties to Al Qaeda. Which would be logical since Al Qaeda is an ally of Hamas. An intriguing tripartite liaison.

But I.H.H. is also a satrap of the ever-more-Islamist government in Istanbul, which seems, in turn, to have volunteered itself as a front for jihadism everywhere, most especially in dealing with Iran and its nuclear ambitions. There is hardly a Muslim cause that the Erdogan regime in Ankara has not taken to heart and under its belt. (Recall that Turkey kept U.S. forces from traversing Turkish soil in 2003.)

Turkey was also once an important ally of Israel, which protected it from Syrian ambitions and gave it a non-Arab friend in a sea of Arabism. Israeli commerce and Israeli military cooperation - that is, modernizing Turkish armaments and units - will not continue much longer with this still-backward country. The Israelis will be sad to lose this friend, but, in fact, they have lost it already. And this is a reciprocal loss.

It wasn't so long ago that Turkey - Erdogan's Turkey - aspired to membership in the European Union. They can kiss that goodbye. The Turks may now be heroes on the Arab street, but they certainly aren't heroes in Europe's chancelleries, which prefer controversies on paper. And, much as some E.U. states have huffed and puffed about Israel, the Union is not anxious to add nearly 80 million Muslims to what would no longer be Europe.

It rings symbolically true that the two European countries first in line to bash Israel were the continent's prime basket cases: Greece, whose fakeries and troubles have no end; and Spain, saddled with hundreds of thousands of non-working Muslim immigrants and two ongoing separatist movements, one of which (Catalonia) has much justice on its side. Both Greece and Spain are, of course, "progressive," which is to say socialist (and unbelievably corrupt).

In Massachusetts, where I live, one young man - an Irish-American dual national who took part in the flotilla - has become a hero. His father is Joseph Bangert, a Cape Cod resident who ... is a retired Marine and Vietnam veteran. Under a photograph of his son, a strapping reddish-haired youth of 28, is the *Globe's* caption: Bangert "said he had not spoken with his son, Fiachra O'Luain, directly and has had to rely on news reports, information on Facebook, and a YouTube video."

What was his seed doing in the eastern Mediterranean? This was not, after all, the Easter Rebellion. He was either a fighter, in which case he might have anticipated getting hurt in the excitement. Or he was a voyeur - an *idealistic* voyeur, to be sure - in which case, whatever ...

The propaganda for the flotilla has been in the works for months. Most of it was simply false. The poverty in Gaza is not qualitatively greater than that of your average Arab city. (Take Cairo. Or Amman, for that matter.) The markets are full of fruit and vegetables ... and flowers. Persistent pockets of deprivation exist in the historic refugee concentrations, which the Palestinian political class maintains as evidence of the ancient wrong. And, no, nobody is building big houses ... except again the elites, to the extent that they can smuggle material through the hundreds of tunnels which are perhaps less corrupt than the ordinary channels of commerce.

Who is behind this overhyped mission of mercy? And who is its beneficiary? It is none other than Hamas, the Gazan outpost of the global jihad, cousin of the Taliban, second cousin once-removed of Hezbollah. Wishing Hamas well, laboring for its success, is actually a crime against

the Palestinians themselves. Of course, the new realists, so-called, will now beat the drums for a “pragmatic” opening to Hamas. It is an old trope for Robert Malley and his ilk. So, over the last two days, they have returned with the same message: Hamas is the future. Soon we will hear from James Baker, James Wolfensohn, even Paul Volcker, who knows a lot about some things but absolutely zero about the Middle East.

But Hamas is the past, the ugly past of ignorance. That does not mean it has no future. Hamas is the Palestinian counterpart of the movements of dread that now course throughout the world of Islam, and against which the West and moderate Muslims are struggling. The backward Muslims were *Lost in the Sacred*, as Dan Diner put it in his dazzling book-long essay, subtitled *Why the Muslim World Stood Still*. Pascal Bruckner depicts their Western sympathizers in *The Tyranny of Guilt: An Essay on Western Masochism*. Read these two books and you’ll understand the desperate and comradely pity educated men and women have for pitilessness.

Sympathy for Hamas is an odd reality in the Western world, and Israel needs to puzzle over how it has lost so much ground in its struggle against Arab and Muslim barbarism. I understand that the revival of a certain chic anti-Semitism has paved the way for the grosser anti-Semites and for the Muslim phantasts who deal in torment and salvation. Among these were the voyagers on the ship of fools who, a clip from Al Jazeera demonstrates, awaited the shores of Gaza ... or martyrdom.

The front page of the *Financial Times* read, “Israel faces global backlash.” Turkey, it says, “calls flotilla attack ‘inhuman.’” This is Turkey, mind you, which can’t admit to the Armenian genocide of nearly a century ago and won’t relent on the Kurds today. As it happens, the Security Council, meeting way into Tuesday morning, passed a balanced, even judicious, resolution that was, in true meaning, at least as much a rebuke to the Turks as it was a criticism of Israel. Neither Russia nor China stood in the way - at least not in the end - of fairness to Israel. And they did not try to exculpate Hamas or the macabre joy riders, including young Fiachra O’Luain.

And I must admit that this marks a turning point in the Obama administration’s attitude to Israel. Although it made some *de rigueur* criticisms, it was not about to make Jerusalem a sacrificial lamb for a faltering foreign policy. Susan Rice, with whom you know I have many problems, made all the appropriate visits and phone calls - bravely, conscientiously, and wisely. Maybe it was at least as much for the Palestinian Authority as it was for the Jewish state. Or for ultimate peace, unlikely as it is. But it *was*. Neither did anyone walk out of the “proximity talks,” non-talks as these are. And, for this, I assume the president is responsible. Mazel tov.

In fact, many people are having second thoughts ... or are freeing their initial thoughts from the tiresome orthodoxies in smart parlors.

There were several smart pieces yesterday about the flotilla fallout. One was written by Michael Sean Winters in the lefty *National Catholic Reporter*. It is called “Judging Israel.” And it judges the Jewish state fairly. But perhaps the most important take on the episode appeared in *The Daily Beast*. The piece (“Israel was Right”) was written by Leslie H. Gelb, a senior ideas man in the American foreign policy establishment, a former *New York Times* columnist, and the longtime president (now president emeritus) of the Council on Foreign Relations. Writes Gelb:

Israel had every right under international law to stop and board ships bound for the Gaza war zone late Sunday. Only knee-jerk left-wingers and the usual legion of poseurs around the world would dispute this. And it is pretty clear that this “humanitarian” flotilla headed for Gaza aimed to provoke a confrontation with Israel. Various representatives of the Free Gaza Movement, one of

the main organizers of this deadly extravaganza, have let it slip throughout Monday that their intention was every bit as much "to break" Israel's blockade of Gaza as to deliver the relief goods.

[...]

Regarding international law, blockades are quite legal. The United States and Britain were at war with Germany and Japan and blockaded them. I can't remember international lawyers saying those blockades were illegal - even though they took place on the high seas in international waters.

On that note, here are the relevant passages from the Helsinki Principles on the Law of Maritime Neutrality:

5.1.2 (3) Merchant ships flying the flag of a neutral State may be attacked if they are believed on reasonable grounds to be carrying contraband or breaching a blockade, and after prior warning they intentionally and clearly refuse to stop, or intentionally and clearly resist visit, search, capture or diversion.

5.1.2 (4) Merchant ships flying the flag of a neutral State may be attacked if they (a) engage in belligerent acts on behalf of the enemy; (b) act as auxiliaries to the enemy's armed forces; (c) are incorporated into or assist the enemy's intelligence system; (d) sail under convoy of enemy warships or military aircraft; or (e) otherwise make an effective contribution to the enemy's military action, e.g., by carrying military materials, and it is not feasible for the attacking forces to first place passengers and crew in a place of safety. Unless circumstances do not permit, they are to be given a warning, so that they can re-route, off-load, or take other precautions.

5.2.1 As an exception to Principle 5.1.2. paragraph 1 and in accordance with Principle 1.3 (2nd sentence), belligerent warships have a right to visit and search vis-à-vis neutral commercial ships in order to ascertain the character and destination of their cargo. If a ship tries to evade this control or offers resistance, measures of coercion necessary to exercise this right are permissible. This includes the right to divert a ship where visit and search at the place where the ship is encountered are not practical.

5.2.10 Blockade, i.e. the interdiction of all or certain maritime traffic coming from or going to a port or coast of a belligerent, is a legitimate method of naval warfare. In order to be valid, the blockade must be declared, notified to belligerent and neutral States, effective and applied impartially to ships of all States. A blockade may not bar access to neutral ports or coasts. Neutral vessels believed on reasonable and probable grounds to be breaching a blockade may be stopped and captured. If they, after prior warning, clearly resist capture, they may be attacked.

The law is on Israel's side. Ethics and history are on Israel's side. Those who are on the side of Hamas are actually enemies of civilization.

Our PR Amateurs

Yair Lapid, Israel Opinion 4 June 2010

On Monday last week, when the scope of the PR disaster that took place at sea became known, I tried – just like many other journalists – to get in touch with Israel's Minister of Information Yuli Edelstein. At the time he was staying in Canada. Yet despite calling at a time when people in Canada are awake already, I got a voicemail demanding that I “key in the screening code, or press pound to leave a message.” The metallic voice spoke Hebrew, by the way, because Israel's information minister apparently did not think of the possibility that foreign journalists may wish to talk to him.

While considering the fact that it's a little odd that a minister whose only job that day was to be accessible to the media has a “screening code” (when it comes to most ministers, their spokesperson answers,) I pressed pound and waited patiently. A few seconds later I again heard the electronic voice, informing me that “this number does not have voicemail,” before the call was hung up.

And still, Yuli Edelstein is not at fault. He is not at fault, because he is an amateur. Actually, I'm not sure he is even entitled to boast that title. Amateurs usually know something about the issue at hand; on the other hand, Yuli Edelstein has no idea whatsoever. There is nothing in his training or in his biography that prepared him for that moment. He knows nothing about media, nothing about PR, and nothing about the way the global press works. He knows nothing about activating public opinion, television, blogs, Internet, fast response, or the dynamics of media events.

He knows nothing about that, and his Foreign Minister, Avigdor Lieberman, knows even less. Deputy Foreign Minister Danny Ayalon, he of the stool incident, certainly knows nothing about those issues.

You want an example? Had they knew something about it, the dozens of TV crews who arrived at the Ashdod beach Monday would have encountered, arranged right on the sand, the hundreds of missiles and other weapons we seized in the previous ships that attempted to reach Gaza. And do you know what the foreign TV crews would have done? They would have photographed that! And those would have been the only images aired during the first hours by all global television channels. Why? Because they had nothing else to air and TV stations usually prefer to air an image – any kind of image – than not to air anything.

The flotilla spokespersons would of course get upset and claim these arms did not come from their ships, but nobody would have listened to them. The millions of viewers would have automatically assumed that the Gaza-bound flotilla carried weapons. Why? Because this is television, you bunch of amateurs, and television is not a medium one listens to, but rather, something one watches.

At 10:30 that morning, one of our senior ministers called the “National PR Center” at the Prime Minister's Office and said that he needs a message sheet because foreign networks keep asking him for interviews. He encountered a long silence on the other end of the line, and then he was embarrassingly told that there is no message sheet. None of the amateurs thought one had to be prepared, because amateurs don't know this is the most basic tool of any media campaign.

When Tzipi Livni and Dalia Itzik called the Prime Minister's Office and said that they wish to and said that they wish to volunteer to assist the PR effort, nobody even bothered to get back to them. When Tzipi Livni and Dalia Itzik called the Prime Minister's Office and said that they wish to volunteer to assist the PR effort, nobody even bothered to get back to them. Why? Because amateurs don't understand how important it is for the world to know that Israel's opposition also backs the IDF operation. And in that first press conference, we didn't need Danny Ayalon. All we needed was a Navy commando who speaks good English, and whose vest is still stained with the blood of his comrades.

And when the Turks announced that they support the IHH, which organized the flotilla, we could have mentioned that in a 2007 raid by the Turkish police on the organization's Istanbul offices, officials recovered weapons, explosives, and instructions on preparing explosive devices – all of these were proudly presented to the world by the Turks themselves! The images still exist. I found them after a three-minute online search. So why didn't we use them? Because amateurs don't even know how to properly utilize the archives.

And the phrase "lynching attempt" could have easily been inserted into the media lexicon right after the raid. However, amateurs don't know that any media event is always dominated by two or three phrases, which will be posted throughout the broadcast on the top left corner of the screen. Dominating these slogans, as any professional would tell you, affects the viewers more than 10 Lieberman speeches (which, we must admit, isn't overly difficult, because Lieberman's speeches have a negative PR value.)

We missed out the opportunity to explain our side of the story because amateurs don't understand that there's nothing more important on television than the timing, and in the first six hours (six hours! Good heavens!) no official State of Israel representative appeared on screen.

I encountered my friend Alon Pinkas, the former consul general in New York and possibly Israel's best English-language PR man, en route to Channel One's news show that evening. What are you doing in Jerusalem? I asked him. You should have been at CNN's studios as early as 8 this morning. I would do it happily, he replied, but nobody asked me to do it. I asked him which networks called him, and he could recall, while driving, only al-Arabiya, Sky News, and NBC, as well as German and Spanish television. So why didn't you go? I asked. To say what? He responded. Nobody briefed me on Israel's official response.

And why didn't they brief him? Because amateurs don't understand that on television, whoever is there first is the event, and everything that comes later is merely the response.

Because as always - just like after the Second Lebanon War, and after Operation Cast Lead, and after the Goldstone Report, and after the nuclear summit – we were caught by surprise again. Why? This is precisely the difference between professionals and amateurs. Professionals prepare in advance, while amateurs don't understand how it happened to them.

Beware taking sides in Mid-East

Thabo Leshilo, The Times, 4 June 2010

(Mr Leshilo accompanied the Israel Now Tour, together with 5 other journalists. In addition to seeing parts of Israel, the tour members also met with Palestinians and visited parts of the West Bank, which gave them a very balanced insight into the problems of the Middle East)

In times of trouble, journalists are called on to recognise that they have a calling higher than merely reporting the news.

I experienced it as a young reporter chronicling the last kicks of the dying apartheid horse in the 1990s.

Then, worried readers would urge the media to ignore stories they considered inimical to political negotiations. They feared these would derail the advent of democracy.

Similar murmurs can be heard that negative reporting about the World Cup might spoil the party, with dire economic consequences for South Africa.

I'm in Israel now, wrestling with something similar. Eliyahu McLean, a Jewish "peace pursuer", wants our help in "closing the gap between the Jerusalem of the Bible and today's Jerusalem".

McLean, who expects to be a rabbi in the near future, says the media can promote harmony and coexistence among Jews and Arabs, and among all the peoples of the world. McLean co-directs Jerusalem Peacemakers with Sheik Abdul Aziz Bukhari, a Muslim cleric. The odd pair promote harmony and coexistence among Arabs and Jews.

Several other people our delegation has met have made similar pleas. One such person is Felicia Yakoel, a tour guide at the Independence Hall Museum in Tel Aviv. She lamented the loss of life in the wake of Sunday's doomed attempt to break the siege of Gaza.

"My blood was frozen to my veins," she said. She was not surprised that Israel was getting bad press for having stormed the flotilla making its way to Gaza, which Israel has blockaded for security reasons.

Nevertheless, she believes the media have it in their power to make a difference. "You as journalists, you have the bucket of water. Help us throw the water on the fire," said Yakoel.

How should the media respond to the likes of McClean and Yakoel? The most cynical among us might argue that media are not the fire department of the world and would carry on as if what they publish has no consequences. But in the same vein it is not our job to fuel raging fires, albeit inadvertently.

We need to appreciate the complexity of the Middle East, where people define themselves in terms of their religious beliefs and where differences over interpretations of scriptures have led to deadly enmity.

We've been here for nine days trying to understand Israel itself and its relationship with its Arab neighbours. Each passing day has been as much an eye-opener as it has been a puzzle.

The truth remains as elusive as ever. I'm now even more wary of the dangers of oversimplifying complex issues. As Zel Lederman, our tour guide with an encyclopaedic knowledge, reminded us: this is a country about which Mark Twain remarked that every 2km travelled requires 200 pages of history to understand.

For me, the visit has brought home what journalist and multi-Pulitzer Prize-winning author Thomas Lauren Friedman said 20 years ago in his book, *From Beirut to Jerusalem* about there being no truth but only versions in the Middle East. Every side has its own narrative. The only thing common to the Israeli and Palestinian narratives we've heard so far is that the narrators are paragons of virtue and the opposing views are inherently evil and untrustworthy.

The least that touring journalists can do is to avoid having their naivete exploited in a way that they become tools in the perpetuation of either narrative or version. Pronouncing on who's right or wrong is better left to those able and willing to invest time, effort and money in the pursuit of truth.