

It's Time To End The Gaza Blockade

by Carl Osgood

June 17—If there is anything that demonstrates the absurdity and immorality of the Israeli policy towards the Palestinians, it is the May 31 pre-dawn assault on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla, during which Israeli commandos killed eight Turkish nationals and one American citizen of Turkish descent. The 1.5 million Palestinians who live in Gaza are not permitted normal lives, in any sense. They are not permitted normal intercourse with the rest of the world, nor are they permitted to govern themselves. And, the Israeli government of Benjamin Netanyahu proved, during those early morning hours of May 31, that they have no intention of ever allowing the Palestinians to govern themselves in any meaningful way.

An American contingent of five individuals was present on one of the boats in the Flotilla, including retired Ambassador Edward L. Peck. As Peck has recounted in various locations since he returned on June 1, he had been asked to participate by the Free Palestine Movement, based in San Francisco. Peck has impeccable credentials for taking part in such a mission. A career foreign service officer, he was chief of mission in Baghdad during the Carter Administration. He also served in the U.S. embassies in Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, and Egypt, and as Ambassador to Mauritania.

At the State Department, Peck served as deputy director of Covert Intelligence Programs, director of the Office of Egyptian Affairs, and as special assistant to the Undersecretary for Political Affairs. During the Reagan Administration, he served as deputy director of the White House Task Force on Terrorism. Today, at the age of 81, he remains active as an advocate for a sensible U.S. foreign policy towards the Middle East, and has expressed his deep disturbance about the treatment of the people of Gaza.

Peck was not aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, the Turkish-flagged vessel that was assaulted by the Israeli commandos, so he was not witness to those events. Nonetheless, the experience that Peck reported about the

events that took place on the ship that he was on, is indicative of Israeli methods.

According to Peck's account, the vessel was boarded by Israeli commandos, armed with machine guns, tasers, and stun grenades, at 4:00 a.m., and the encounter was over in an instant. What violence there was on board stemmed from the passive resistance of others among the 50 or so passengers aboard the vessel, who attempted to prevent the commandos from taking over the wheel house. A number of those people suffered injuries, including broken bones.

The Israelis took everyone onboard to the port of Ashdod where they were processed for deportation, but not before being required to sign a statement, in Hebrew, which few, if any of them, could read. They were told, after signing, that they had admitted to having violated an Israeli law; that they entered the country illegally. In fact, the flotilla was not headed for Israel, and no one aboard any of the ships wanted to go there! Those who refused to sign, including Paul Larudee, one of the leaders of the Free Palestine Movement, were kept in custody for an extra day, and severely beaten.

The Flotilla: An Effort To Break the Blockade

The Israeli attack on the flotilla points up the immorality of the blockade of Gaza, itself. The ostensible purpose of the blockade, says Peck, is to cause the Palestinians in Gaza to rise up against the Hamas government. But Hamas took power as the result of an election in 2006, an election that, by all accounts, was free and fair, exactly what the United States and other interested parties had been demanding. The U.S. and Israeli response to the outcome of the election was to impose on the 1.5 million people of Gaza a punishing blockade.

The purpose of the flotilla, therefore, was to break the blockade, and failing that, to call the attention of the world to its immorality. The flotilla was carrying 10,000 tons of humanitarian supplies, including 150 pre-fabricated houses, 126 electric wheel chairs, two water-purification plants in containers, medical supplies, and construction materials. The Israeli excuse for blocking the construction material is the claim that Hamas will use it to build military bunkers.

If the Israeli leaders were sensible, they'd realize that the only way they will ever live in peace and security, is to see to it that the Palestinians, and all of Israel's neighbors for that matter, are also able to live in peace and security. But, on the contrary, according to Peck, the Israelis believe that they must *over-react* to any per-



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UNRWA

The humanitarian aid flotilla that was attacked by the Israelis May 31 was carrying 10,000 tons of supplies, including two water-purification plants in containers, medical supplies, etc. Shown: Palestinian children on the way to the water-filling station in Gaza. Inset: Ambassador Edward L. Peck.

ceived offense against them, with massive force. So, when militants in Gaza lob a few rockets over the separation wall, most of which land in open desert, Israel responds with heavy artillery, bombings from from F-16s, and, as in December of 2008, a massive invasion that killed 1,400 Palestinians, in the mistaken belief, among some Israelis, that somehow, this will bring them peace and security.

But there is, in fact, no desire underlying Israeli actions, to live with the Palestinians in peace and security. Peck argues that the aim is to drive out the Palestinians altogether, by making life so miserable for them that they will leave. This is the Zionist thesis going back to Theodor Herzl, Peck says, and it is expounded today, in Israel, by those such as Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman, who insists that it is necessary to get rid of all of the Palestinians. The checkpoints and roadblocks in the West Bank are an example of this, because they don't actually provide any security for Israel, but are an effective form of harassment of Palestinians trying to get on with their daily lives.

All of this comes at tremendous cost to the United States, because of the aid that the U.S. provides Israel, and the support it gives Israel in the UN Security Council. Peck notes that the cluster bombs, the phosphorous bombs, that the Israelis rain down on Gaza, and the

weapons and boats used in the raid on the flotilla, were all provided by the U.S.A. Israel is perfectly entitled to do whatever it deems necessary, says Peck, but it should face the consequences. Instead, what happens is that the U.S. shields Israel from the consequences of its actions, and Americans pay the price.

Gen. David Petraeus, the commander of U.S. Central Command, caused a stir earlier this year when he said that the U.S. relationship with Israel costs the lives of American servicemen and women serving in that region of the world. In Peck's view, it certainly has cost the U.S. prestige, respect, credibility, honor, and dignity. In large part, this is because the U.S. makes exceptions

for Israel from principles, such as international law, that it demands every other nation in the world adhere to.

New Flotillas

There is talk of organizing new flotillas to challenge the blockade. The Europe-based Free Gaza Movement, which was one of the organizers of the flotilla Peck participated in, is talking about a new flotilla of 60 vessels and thousands of people. The Free Palestine Movement, on its website, talks of challenging the blockade by air.

But, what will it take to actually get the blockade lifted? Lyndon LaRouche observed, on June 1, that the Israelis have been playing these kinds of provocative games for decades, and they are no longer working. Israeli Prime Minister Netan-yahoo cannot accept that Israel's bargaining position is greatly diminished, and so, he is trying to create absolute Hell in the Middle East. He may succeed. What's more, the range of options available to the United States is greatly limited by Barack Obama's remaining President of the United States as a puppet of a foreign imperial power, the British Empire. Remove Obama from office and a world of further options opens up, options that can outflank and defeat the Yahoo-like behavior of the present Israeli leadership.