



OPINION and ANALYSIS

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**A selection of some of the more challenging and thought-provoking
local and international writings on the Middle East**

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A United Nations Miracle

Wall Street Journal, 6 September 2011

<http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424053111904716604576546643185160996.html>

Here's a story for the man-bites-dog folder: The United Nations has conducted another inquiry into an Israeli military operation--and produced a report that mainly vindicates the Jewish state. And here, alas, is a story for the dog-bites-man folder: The Turkish government has responded to the U.N. report by withdrawing its ambassador from Tel Aviv and expelling Israel's from Ankara.

The Palmer report--named for the inquiry's chairman, former New Zealand Prime Minister Geoffrey Palmer--was commissioned by the U.N.'s Secretary General to investigate the May 2010 "flotilla incident," when six ships sailing from Turkey to Gaza on an alleged humanitarian mission were boarded by Israeli commandos enforcing a naval blockade of Gaza. Nine passengers were killed (and several Israeli soldiers badly beaten) in the ensuing melee, sparking a crisis in Jerusalem's already frayed relations with Ankara.

Given the U.N.'s track record on Israel, one might have expected this latest report to be a reprise of Richard Goldstone's notorious report alleging Israeli war crimes during its 2009 war with Gaza (charges later retracted by Mr. Goldstone). Instead, the Palmer report offers a point-by-point rebuttal to some of the most preposterous accusations leveled against Israel.

One such accusation from the Turks is that Israel's naval blockade of Gaza is illegal because blockades can only be legally imposed on another state, and Israel has never recognized Palestine as a state. The Palmer report dismisses that legal legerdemain, noting that " Hamas is the de facto political and administrative authority in Gaza," that "it is Hamas that is firing projectiles into Israel or permitting others to do so," that "law does not operate in a political vacuum" and thus "Israel was entitled to take reasonable steps to prevent the influx of weapons into Gaza."

Then there is the fiction that the flotilla had embarked on a “humanitarian mission.” If that were true, its organizers would not have spurned Israel’s offer to off-load their supplies in the nearby Israeli port of Ashdod. As the report acidly observes, the flotilla’s largest ship and the site of the fighting--the Mavi Marmara--barely contained any humanitarian goods beyond “foodstuffs and toys carried in passengers’ personal baggage.”

The report also gives weight to the view that a “hardcore group of about 40 activists” from an Islamist NGO known as the IHH “had effective control over the vessel during the journey and were not subjected to security screening” when they boarded the ship in Istanbul. “It is clear to the Panel that preparations were made by some of the passengers on the Mavi Marmara well in advance to violently resist any boarding attempt.”

Simply put, the flotilla’s organizers were spoiling for the fight they later would claim as evidence of Israeli criminality. That’s a fight Israel went out of its way to avoid, both through high-level diplomatic representations to Ankara and repeated warnings to the flotilla to turn away from the blockade....

All of this might have provoked a bit of soul-searching within the Turkish government, just as its once-warm embrace of Syria’s Bashar Assad has. Instead, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has doubled down on his anti-Israel bets, insisting that Jerusalem apologize to Turkey, compensate the victims and lift its blockade of Gaza as the price for his forgiveness. The Palmer report is a fresh reminder--from the least likely of sources--of why Israel has no honorable choice but to spurn those demands. The Turks will learn in their own time that being Hamas’s patron is a loser’s game.

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