



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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Gaza siege chokes Israel diplomatically

Zvi Bar'el , Haaretz, 7 September 2011

<http://www.haaretz.com/print-edition/opinion/gaza-siege-chokes-israel-diplomatically-1.382984>

"Gaza envelope" is not just a geographic term or an imaginary border line delimiting the threat zone around a group of communities in the south. It is a political situation in which, for the sake of accuracy, "Israel" should replace "Gaza." It is the Gaza Strip that envelopes Israel, and not the other way around. If a closure or blockade is the index of a smothering "envelope," then it is Israel that is being smothered, largely on its own account and in no small measure on account of Gaza.

The crisis with Turkey is just the latest example of Gaza's ability to cause Israel enormous diplomatic damage from within the fence surrounding the Strip. While Israel's alliance with Egypt is not like the one it had with Turkey, Egyptians are calling for a reappraisal of the Camp David Accords in light of last month's terror attack near Eilat, in which Gaza had a hand. To its east Israel is trapped within a new diplomatic front; in less than two weeks the United Nations will recognize an independent Palestinian state that will of course include Gaza as well.

It's true that unlike Gaza's inhabitants Israelis are still free to leave the state, to import and export goods and even to go abroad to study. But the siege is setting in. It isn't just the boycott on goods from the territories, the withdrawal of invitations to Israeli professors or directives to avoid speaking Hebrew in certain countries. It is the sense that Israel is increasingly isolating itself within its righteousness, magnifying the genuine and the imaginary threats, once again using the military language that speaks of the "high" or "low" probability of war, no longer confident of the U.S. position toward it and seeing most European states as political rivals.

A large majority of UN member states will support recognition of a Palestinian state. Many of them will say "yes" not because they care about the Palestinians' political rights - some of these countries oppress their own citizens - but because of Israel's opposition. Some will support a Palestinian state because they are fed up with Israeli policy, with the occupation and with Israel's arrogance. Others will vote in favor because they want to poke Washington in the eye with a sharp stick for pampering Israel for so long. It would not be going too far to suggest that the UN vote will be mainly a protest vote against Israel, a part of the undeclared siege.

Israel has never given the UN its due. The organization's failures, and its anti-Israel tendencies, are no secret. No one knows better than Israel that its resolutions are mainly ink on paper. But the UN is a dangerous arena, incapable perhaps of solving conflicts but good at defining goals, building international coalitions and imposing sanctions. It's an arena in which Israel's status is slipping away, and where even its closest friends labor to understand what state exactly they are supposed to be protecting.

This is part of the same siege, that can be likened to icebergs surrounding a straying ship whose captains are confident of their ability to thread their way through, until it can no longer move. It is natural to develop a siege mentality, a solidarity of the besieged, under such conditions. It's not the captain who ran the ship into the icebergs who is to blame, it's the terrible weather. It's not the closure of the Gaza Strip that's to blame for destroying relations, it's the Turks, the Islamists, the pro-Iranians. The Egyptians are also at fault, for revealing their true faces. And, of course, it's not the occupation that is at fault, it's the Palestinians who resist living under it.

And so, what is the only possible response when the entire world rises up against you; when Gaza, in any of its various names, is closing in on you? That's the time to hold onto the government's hand, to embrace the army, to consecrate the settlements and begin a new siege-mentality conversation. A conversation

that will convince the besieged that the only way is that of the government, a conversation of prestige and condescension, of "We survived Pharaoh, we'll survive this, too," of "us against the world."

These are precisely the symptoms of the siege. They are the same words used by the leaders of countries under international sanctions. The terrible thing is that one can get used to a siege, at least for long enough to forget what it's like not to be under siege. But there is nothing like a siege to fortify esprit de corps - look at Gaza, for example. There's also nothing like a siege to cure a people that has begun to challenge the decisions of its government, to demonstrate or to ask superfluous questions. The siege is good for us.

From Turkey to Rothschild

Donniel Hartman, Ynet News, 5 September 2011

<http://www.ynetnews.com/articles/0,7340,L-4118185,00.html>

The Turkish government is angry at Israel's government. Israeli citizens are angry at Israel's government. Together they pose significant policy challenges. Here, their similarity comes to an end.

The Turkish government is angry, an anger which, despite claims to the contrary, is not the result of moral indignation at the naval blockade of Gaza. No, the Turkish government is really angry at what it sees as an affront to it, to its sovereignty, national dignity, and rightful role as leader in the Muslim world. That someone dare harm their citizens, almost regardless of the circumstances, is an affront which needs not mere rectification but an apology and restitution, thus reaffirming Turkey's standing, primacy, and self-perception.

The Turks, however, seem to forget that we are a sovereign nation, too. One of the great gifts of sovereignty is the ability to protect oneself, to stand up for one's citizens, and more importantly, those whom we send to defend us. No one in Israel believes that our army is above criticism and our soldiers incapable of moral failure. While we do not know the exact details of the events that transpired on the Mavi Marmara, we do know the soldiers who were there. We are their character witnesses, and we know that they would shift from paintball fire to live fire only if their or their fellow soldiers' lives were in danger.

I would certainly and readily express regret at the loss of life which ensued and even be willing to pay reparations, for I believe that the senior officers who planned the takeover should have better prepared for the possibility and subsequent actuality of deadly violence, captured on video for the world to see, which our soldiers confronted.

Sovereignty also means responsibility, and we need not shirk that responsibility, nor let our pride get in the way when compromise can serve our long-term interests. That same responsibility, however, requires of us to stand right next to our soldiers who we sent unprepared into harm's way, and to reaffirm the truth of their experience and the responsibility of the haters of Israel, members of the IHH, who sought their harm. The gift of sovereignty is that we can fulfill this responsibility.

Voices of anger are real

The responsibility to our citizens, to stand with them when they are in harm's way, must not, however, stop at the decks of flotilla boats. The hundreds of thousands of citizens who marched and gave voice to a deep anger at the Israeli government must be listened to. That, too, is the gift of sovereignty, the gift not

to merely be able to protect oneself, but to build a society of the people, by the people, and, most importantly for the people.

Here, too, we must serve as each other's character witnesses. The voices of anger are real and reflect a deep-seated pain, a pain of not being heard. A pain from an economic policy that does not adequately reflect principles of justice, compassion, and a relative fair share in the goods distributed by society. Many have critiqued the demonstrations as being unfocused and without either a clear agenda or at least a clearly achievable one. In its weakness, however, lies its greatest strength. The task of the average citizen is not to determine the specifics of an economic policy, but rather, to determine the core values and priorities that must shape such a policy.

There is a general sense that under the umbrella of fiscal responsibility, which has led to much prosperity, there were too many paths not taken that could have ensured a fairer distribution of wealth and a more robust social safety net for the weakest members of society.

Israeli society will stand behind our government as it expresses the gift of sovereignty in the face of the anger of the Turkish government. Israeli society will stand with our government in the face of the anger of our citizens only to the extent that the government expresses its sovereign power to both listen and change some of the internal economic and moral policies of our country.

What is most difficult is that there is no litmus test that needs to be passed, no specific policy changed, which will count as "reparations" for past injustice. The government itself needs to change its culture from sectarian policies and coalition loyalties to being a government for the people. There must be a shift in attitude, language, communication, and compassion. There must be a sense of true listening, a listening that ultimately leads to action.

The gift of sovereignty is that we have the power to protect ourselves, stand up for our citizens, and shape the values and priorities which define our society. It is time for us fully to embrace all the gifts and responsibilities of sovereignty.

Secure borders matter for Israel

Steve Huntley, Chicago Sun-Times, 23 August 2011

<http://www.suntimes.com/news/huntley/7211501-452/secure-borders-matter-for-israel.html>

When President Barack Obama rolled out his 1967 borders speech last spring, the Israelis' concerns over secure borders came in for some abuse. Peace with their neighbors would make the most secure borders, the Israelis were lectured. Missiles had overturned conventional notions about secure borders, the Israelis were told. Well, all the finger-wagging at Israel is out the window now that terrorists have launched deadly attacks across a border supposedly secured by three decades of peace with Egypt.

Last week's attacks exposed Egypt's poor control of its Sinai border, set off fighting between Israel and terrorists in the Gaza Strip that threatened to erupt into war, and brought relations between Israel and Egypt, whose treaty has been the foundation of regional peace, to a precarious modern low.

Worry about "border security" is low when your longest border is with Canada. The term is freighted with political and law and order implications when a border is violated by illegal immigrants, human traffickers and drug smugglers, as happens on our frontier with Mexico.

But the phrase “secure borders” is burdened with existential implications when you have frontiers such as the ones Israel has. There’s the boundary with Lebanon, where the terrorist thugs of Hezbollah rule and command tens of thousands of rockets. There’s the unsettled Golan Heights line from the 1967 war with Syria, whose capital is the headquarters town for some of the worst terrorist organizations, whose ruler is murderously suppressing his own people, and whose regime once had a secret nuclear program.

Then there’s the just-violated border with Egypt. There’s the Jordan River frontier with Jordan, the only other Arab state with which Israel has a peace treaty but one with a huge hostile Palestinian population.

There’s the Gaza Strip, the Hamas-ruled terror entity from which attacks and rockets are regularly launched against Israel. And there’s the “borders” to which Obama referred, the still-to-be-determined ones along the West Bank governed by a Palestinian Authority that has never stopped hateful incitement against Israel and Jews, refuses to recognize Israel as a Jewish state and plans next month to seek U.N. declaration of a Palestinian state. The latter will not advance the cause of peace and may only further destabilize the situation and lead to new violence.

The breach of the Egyptian border raises worrying questions. There’s reasonable suspicion that the terrorist attack killing eight Israelis was fomented by Iran and Hamas to distract global attention from Syria’s crackdown on its citizens. The attacks appear to be the work of al-Qaida sympathizers, adding another dangerous ingredient into the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Some terrorists wore Egyptian uniforms, causing confusion that led to several Egyptian soldiers accidentally being killed in the crossfire. Egypt for a while threatened to recall its ambassador from Israel, which would have worsened the crisis, before calmer heads prevailed. Egyptian authorities, under international pressure, brokered a shaky Israeli-Hamas cease-fire.

Still, the anti-Israel rage that broke out in protests outside the Israeli embassy in Cairo reflect an ugly side of the Arab spring. Egyptians have been reported unhappy with the pace of reforms and the army’s suppression of new protests. The result: The tried-and-true tactic of Arab rulers to channel Arab street anger against Israel. It’s no coincidence the passions against Israel rose with the growing influence of Islamists in Egypt’s politics.

A new element of uncertainty is injected into the Middle East’s future with the imminent overthrow of Libya’s Moammar Gadhafi, as welcome as that will be. We don’t know a lot about the rebels and the extent of their Islamist sympathies.

Israel lives in a dangerous neighborhood, and wishful thinking won’t make for secure borders.

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