

ALERT

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Congressional Statements on Flotilla Incident

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Vice President Joe Biden

June 2, 2010

Charlie Rose: Prime Minister Netanyahu was scheduled to come to Washington. He did not. He went back to Israel. There is a blockade. Should they end the blockade in lieu of what's happened here?

Joe Biden: I think Israel has an absolute right to deal with its security interest. I put all this back on two things: one, Hamas, and, two, Israel's need to be more generous relative to the Palestinian people who are in trouble in Gaza. Let me explain that very briefly. Sometimes, because we deal so much at least which you know so much about, we have to remember how we got here. Remember, it was Ehud Barak who decided to pull all Iraqi troops -- I mean, excuse me, all Iraqi -- all Israeli troops out of Gaza. He did that back in '06. Then there was an election, an election for their parliament with a president named Mahmoud Abbas who in fact was the successor of Arafat in the Fatah. That produced a majority of members of the parliament, which was the West

Bank and Gaza, of Hamas. The international community, the so-called Quartet; the United States, Europe, Russia, and the U.N., said, "Look, in order for you to be part of that government, you have to agree to four conditions. One, you'll abide by previous agreements that have been made by the government of -- by the Palestinians. Two, you are going to renounce terror. Three, you're going to recognize Israel, and basically that you have to accept" -- and here's what happened. They then got in a fight among themselves. They physically took over by force of arms, killed members of the existing government, exile them, took over and started firing rockets into Israel. Over 3,000 went in last year. And as we put pressure, and the world put pressure on Israel to let material go into Gaza to help those people who are suffering, the ordinary Palestinians there, what happened? Hamas would confiscate it, put it in a warehouse, sell it, they were -- so the problem is this would end tomorrow if Hamas agreed to form a government with the Palestinian Authority on the conditions the international community has set up. And so I mean again, look, you can argue whether Israel should have dropped people onto that ship or not and the -- but the truth of the matter is, Israel has a right to know -- they're at war with Hamas -- has a right to know whether or not arms are being smuggled in. And up to now, Charlie, what's happened? They've said, "Here you go. You're in the Mediterranean. This ship -- if you divert slightly north you can unload it and we'll get the stuff into Gaza." So what's the big deal here? What's the big deal of insisting it go straight to Gaza? Well, it's legitimate for Israel to say, "I don't know what's on that ship. These guys are dropping eight -- 3,000 rockets on my people." Now, the one thing we have to do is not forget the plight of these Palestinians there, not Hamas, the -- they're in bad shape. So we have put as much pressure and as much cajoling on Israel as we can to allow them to get building materials in, glass --

Charlie Rose: That's what they're trying to bring in, building materials.

Joe Biden: Yes, we know that, but they could have easily brought it in here and we'd get it through. And so now the question is what do we do? Well, we had made it clear, the President of the United States has spoken three times, yesterday with Bibi, or the day before yesterday, he's spoken once yesterday with a guy that I have spent a fair amount of time with, with Prime Minister Erdogan in Turkey; the Turks, we passed a resolution in the U.N. saying we need a transparent and open investigation of what happened. It looks like things are --

Charlie Rose: International investigation --

Joe Biden: Well, an investigation run by the Israelis, but we're open to international participation, just like the investigation run on the sunken sub in -- off the coast of Korea. That was run by South Korea, but the international community joined in that investigation. And so that is very possible here as well. I might add by the way for all those who say the Israelis, you know, you know, you can't trust them, the Israeli Supreme Court ruled today that every one of the people on those ships had to be released immediately, immediately.

Charlie Rose: So what's the --

Joe Biden: It's a rule of law. It works.

Charlie Rose: I said it was my last question, so I'll make it my last question then. So are you saying that the relationship between Israel and the United States is okay, that there are --

Joe Biden: It's more than okay. Look, we always have had disagreements tactically with the Israeli government, but when I was in Israel, Bibi Netanyahu and I held a press conference before all the flap about a new settlement, etc, and --

Charlie Rose: Right, yeah, yeah. Exactly, oh, the President got very upset about that because of what he did while you were in the country. I mean, that was the --

Joe Biden: That's true but here's the point. We stood there at that press conference I'm making a major speech at the University of Tel Aviv, major meaning laying out U.S. policy, and Bibi pointed out that no administration in history has been as up-front and supportive of Israel's security as this administration. We've done everything from provide missile defense. We've made sure they've maintained their qualitative edge. There's a new program they call Iron Dome that we're helping fund for them to be able to protect themselves. We have joint maneuvers. They've never been closer on the strategic side with Israel than today.

Charlie Rose: Ehud Barak said that to me on a program.

Joe Biden: And that's literally true. Now, do we have disagreements on the tactical way in which this government acts and some of the comments that some of the ministers of this government, the things that they say and make that we think are counter-productive, yeah, but we always have. I go all the way back to Golda Meir -- oh, God, I'm getting old -- but literally, in '73 I met with Golda Meir. We've always had some tactical problems.

Charlie Rose: I have to leave with this story -- I could do this for a long time -- which you tell better than I do. Golda Meir says we have something; we have something that they don't have, which was...?

Joe Biden: I just spent a long time with Golda Meir and just after the Six-Day War and before the Yom Kippur War, just days before. And she was flipping maps on her desk there and, you know, showing me this and that and we're surrounded by and everything and I was getting very depressed. And there was a guy sitting next to me who was her aide and his name was Rabin, a future prime minister. He was then a general. And all of a sudden she said, "Would you like a photo opportunity?" And I thought, I'm 30 years old, "Yes, ma'am." And those double doors open and we walk out and are standing there and they're clicking pictures and I guess I must have looked really worried because of the picture she painted. She looked at me, she said, while looking at the camera, you know, we're doing this photo shot, she said, "Senator, why do you look so worried?" I said, "My God, Madame Prime Minister, I mean, the picture you drew." She said, "Oh," she said, "Don't worry, Senator. We have a secret weapon in our conflict with the Arabs." And I said, I turned like she was going to tell me some secret, I looked at her and said, "Madame Prime Minister, what's that?" She said, "We have nowhere else to go." (*Interview with Charlie Rose*)

Rep. Gary Ackerman (D-NY)

June 1, 2010

I strongly support Israel's right to defend itself, and the right of Israel's naval commandos, who were executing a legal mission, to defend themselves by using force when they were brutally attacked. I strongly condemn the action of those who assaulted the Israeli troops and made the use of violence by Israeli troops necessary in self-defense. The loss of life is regrettable, but wholly the fault and responsibility of the organizers of the effort to break through Israel and Egypt's legitimate closure of terrorist-controlled Gaza.

If the true intent of the people on the boat was humanitarian, their goods could easily and readily have been delivered to Gaza through the Israeli port of Ashdod, as has been the result of other ships intercepted while trying to break the blockade. Clearly, their intent was cynical, and political; to provoke a confrontation with Israel for the benefit of Hamas and as part of the international effort to delegitimize Israel's existence.

Israel is confronted in Gaza by a de facto authority, Hamas, a violent, terroristic and extermination-minded enemy. The naval blockade and the closure of access points into Israel from Gaza are entirely justified, legal, and necessary to preserve Israeli lives and to minimize the smuggling of more and more powerful arms into Gaza to be used against Israeli civilians.

Instead of spastically and outrageously attacking Israel, the international community should be focused on the true villain in this drama, Hamas, which if it cared about the people of Gaza in even the slightest measure, could end the blockade and closure within hours. How?

Very simply, by publicly and emphatically accepting the conditions established by the United Nations, the Russian Federation, the European Union and the United States ("The Quartet") which calls on Hamas to accept Israel's right to exist; to reject the use of violence against Israel; and to adhere to all the prior political commitments made by the PLO and the Palestinian Authority.

The fact of the matter is this: the tragic events that occurred over the weekend are the responsibility of Hamas, not Israel. Failure to recognize the moral responsibility of Hamas for these events is possible only by confusing cause with effect, or by holding Israel to an unacceptable double standard. *(Press Release)*

Rep. John Adler (D-NJ)

June 2, 2010

The recent loss of life off the coast of Gaza is troubling, but it is critical that we gain a comprehensive understanding of the events before jumping to conclusions

The bond between the United States and Israel remains unshakable. For sixty-two years, our two nations have shared a deep commitment to democracy and lasting peace in the Mid-East. In a part of the world recognized for its conflict, Israel should retain its right to protect itself. The threats of a nuclear Iran and terrorism should remain a main focus of U.S. diplomatic efforts.
(Press Release)

Rep. Joe Barton (R-TX)

June 1, 2010

Israel is a unique outpost for democracy in the Middle East and a longtime, valuable friend to the United States. Reports indicate that the ship involved in this incident was intent on provoking a confrontation and disregarded numerous requests to stop. I fully support the Israeli people's right to maintain secure borders on land and a legal blockade at sea so that terrorists in Gaza are denied the weapons they will use to kill and wound innocent Israelis. Until a viable, peaceful Palestinian state comes into being and its people are capable of living side by side with Israel as good neighbors, the U.S. should back Israel's right to defend its people using this blockade.
(Press Release)

Rep. Shelley Berkley (D-NV)

June 2, 2010

I am deeply concerned about the recent incident involving attempts by a flotilla to break an Israeli blockade of Gaza and I regret the tragic loss of life that followed this provocation.

Unfortunately, efforts are now underway to unfairly paint Israel as the aggressor in this incident. These assertions come even as mounting evidence points to passengers on the vessel, not Israeli forces, as the instigators of violence.

Israel's blockade of Gaza is legal under international law. This policy is in place to ensure that weaponry and rockets do not reach Hamas, a risk to Israeli families that our democratic ally cannot -- and will not -- allow.

Israel acted to avoid violence by intercepting these boats at sea and offered to bring all aid to Israeli ports for inspection and delivery to Gaza. This offer was flatly rejected, as was a similar invitation to deliver aid made by Egypt that was also refused.

The government of Israel repeatedly warned flotilla organizers that the boats would be intercepted before reaching Gaza. On five of the six boats, the Israelis were met peacefully and calmly by the passengers, without incident. This demonstrates Israeli personnel had no intention to use force and only did so in self-defense.

But these activists attempting to illegally break the blockade were not solely intent on delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza. They made it clear before their operation ever began that they were seeking conflict with Israel and to break the blockade. Mounting evidence now points to the presence of passengers linked to Hamas on the sixth boat, who attacked Israeli soldiers without provocation.

In the aftermath of this incident, I call on the world community to stand with Israel against further illegal provocation aimed at Israeli forces pledged to defend innocent lives against terrorist threats. *(Press Release)*

Republican Leader John Boehner (R-OH)

June 3, 2010

“... Israel has every right to defend itself against terrorists which threaten its very survival. The United States has no closer friend than Israel, and the American people stand shoulder-to-shoulder with the Israelis. Unfortunately, while the international community has spent the past week condemning the Israelis, Iran has moved one step closer to building a nuclear bomb. The Obama Administration owes the American people and our allies around the world a comprehensive strategy designed to stop Iran from developing a nuclear capability, not to simply contain Iran once it already has one.” *(Blog Post)*

Rep. John Boozman (R-AR)

June 2, 2010

I am deeply saddened by the loss of life and injury that has resulted from this attempted running of Israel's legitimate blockade on Gaza. Israel has the right to defend itself against attacks by terrorist organizations by any means necessary in order to protect its citizens.

It is important to note that this blockade does not prevent the flow of humanitarian aid into Gaza, but requires that it be channeled through the Israeli authorities. This provides Israel with the ability to ensure that no weapons or other material support for ongoing terrorist operations in Gaza are being smuggled in with aid.”

While this latest incident serves as a reminder that tensions are rising in the Middle East, in no way should it change the support we give to our longtime and critically strategic ally. We cannot let this tragic incident and the distortions from Israel's critics stand in the way of Israel's right to ensure the safety and security of its land and people. *(Press Release)*

Sen. Scott Brown (R-MA)

June 6, 2010

"I was disappointed that, after the unfortunate loss of life on the sea outside Gaza, many rushed to condemn Israel before the facts of this situation became clear. Many conveniently ignored the fact that Israel is at war. Each and every day thousands of its innocent men, women and children face the threat of lethal rocket attacks out of Gaza. Some of the usual critics of Israel have used recent events to question the strong relationship between our countries. They clearly do not understand what makes these two countries special and unique sources of hope to the world.

"I cannot emphasize this point enough: Israel is not a liability to the United States. Israel is unquestionably a strategic asset to America. Indeed, there is no greater U.S. ally in the critical area of the Middle East and perhaps no better strategic partnership in the world.

"Let's remember - Israel is our ally. Israel is a democracy. Hamas is a terrorist group with clear and genuine intentions of destroying Israel's way of life." ([Blog Post](#))

Rep. Vern Buchanan (R-FL)

June 4, 2010

"Israel's naval blockade and inspection of cargo ships is entirely appropriate to prevent munitions and missiles from being delivered to Hamas terrorists in Gaza and subsequently used against innocent Israeli civilians," the Congressman said.

Buchanan, who visited Israel in 2007, noted that Hamas has publicly called for the annihilation of Israel and continues to send rockets into Israeli territory.

Buchanan applauded Vice President Joe Biden for clearly stating that Israel has a legitimate right to inspect ships headed for Gaza.

"Hamas is a terrorist group in the eyes of the U.S. government," added Buchanan. "Israel has every reason to be concerned about unchecked cargo going into the Gaza strip. Any ship seeking to deliver goods to the Gaza Strip should be carefully screened. Unfortunately, the so-called Flotilla ignored established means and methods of delivering humanitarian aid in an apparent attempt to provoke a military confrontation. Israeli Navy personnel used force when their lives were threatened."

"I remain committed to supporting the only democracy in the Middle East, which is surrounded by nations and terrorist organizations that refuse to abide by previous agreements, publicly support Israel's extinction, and refuse to acknowledge that Israel has a legitimate right to take whatever action it deems necessary to protect itself and its people."

Republican Whip Eric Cantor (R-VA)

June 2, 2010

The irony is thick that again the likes of Saudi Arabia and Cuba come together under the UNHRC to lecture the United States and Israel about human rights. I commend the administration for its steadfast support of Israel in resisting another Goldstone-style U.N. investigation. These types of kangaroo courts have one goal, and that is to strip democratic nations of their rights to defend their citizens from terrorism. The United States must not lend its authority to any U.N. action to discredit our democratic ally and set back prospects for peace in the region, and I hope the Obama Administration remains committed to that principle.

As the facts trickle in and we learn more and more about the questionable nature of the crew aboard the Turkish-sponsored Marmara ship, it has become clear that it is false to characterize the nature of this mission as “humanitarian.” Rather, this was an attempt to provoke Israel, create international uproar and force an end to an Egypt-Israel blockade meant to stop Hamas from arming.

In keeping with its policy of delivering aid to the Palestinians, it is important to note that Israel is working to transfer the aid from the flotilla into Gaza. Yet the Hamas government, in the most cynical fashion, has blocked the aid from reaching their own people. Where is the international outrage? *(Press Release)*

June 1, 2010

The events of the last 48 hours are tragic and serve as the latest warning sign that all is not well in the Middle East. As information continues to filter in, I urge the President and his administration to continue to gather all the facts, and if necessary, to veto any biased U.N. resolutions reining in Israel’s right to defend itself.

Israel remains a critical strategic ally and the only democracy in the Middle East. The United States stands with Jerusalem in its effort to ensure the safety and security of its citizenry. We can’t forget why the blockade exists in the first place: to deny Hamas the weaponry and raw materials it needs to continue its rocket attacks in Israel, killing innocent people.

Before predictably rushing to level hyperbolic accusations at Israel, it’s important for the United Nations to consider all the facts surrounding this incident. The reality is that the so-called “humanitarian aid” flotilla steered into an internationally recognized Israeli-Egyptian military blockade of Gaza in an effort to provoke Israel. The flotilla’s own spokeswoman announced that her organization is not a humanitarian group, rather a mission intended to break the blockade of Gaza, and that’s exactly why the ships rejected Israel’s instructions to dock. The truth is that where humanitarian needs exist, the Israelis ensure that food and medicine are brought into Gaza.

There’s a reason why seven of the eight ships were boarded peacefully and without any injuries, while the Mavi Marmara ship descended into violence. The question that should be asked is, “what is that reason?” *(Press Release)*

Sen. Benjamin L. Cardin (D-MD)

June 2, 2010

We must withhold judgment while an investigation is ongoing and until the facts become clear, but it's important that we keep in mind that Israel has a right to ensure the security of its borders and protect its citizens from terror. I also want to express my deep sadness about the violence and loss of life. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Dennis Cardoza (D-CA)

June 4, 2010

Many of Israel's detractors have quickly jumped to conclusions about who is to blame in the tragedy that occurred along the Gaza Coast. We would all do well to wait until all the facts of the incident with the Gaza flotilla are known. In the meantime, we cannot ignore all that Israel has endured. During my travels there, I have seen firsthand the aftermath of the terrorist attacks against our friends in the Middle East. Israel has suffered indiscriminate rocket attacks that have impacted children going to school and shoppers going to the local market. For years suicide bombers terrorized the countryside and killed numerous Israelis, including women, children and the elderly. In an instance like this, it is important to know all of the facts before making a judgment. However, I firmly believe Israel has the right – and the absolute responsibility – to protect its citizens.

Rep. Bill Cassidy (R-LA)

June 4, 2010

"The loss of life is regrettable. It was preventable."

" Hamas' organizing principle is the destruction of Israel. In response, Israel inspects imports into Gaza to prevent entry of weapons. This is common knowledge. Bypassing this inspection was intentionally provocative. Intentional provocation can bring unintentional, even tragic consequences."

"When Hamas recognizes Israel's right to exist and renounces violence, blockades will end, provocation will be unnecessary, and unintentional consequences will not occur." *(Press Release)*

Rep. Mike Conaway (R-TX)

June 3, 2010

I am saddened by the deaths and injuries that occurred during the May 31st incident off the coast of Israel. The great tragedy is that this all could have been avoided.

At its most basic, this incident is about the right of a sovereign nation to defend its people from a terrorist threat. I stand squarely behind the people of Israel as they work to protect their fellow citizens from rocket attacks and to protect Gazans from the violence propagated by the well-armed thugs running Hamas.

The activists who planned this flotilla admitted that they were not concerned with delivering humanitarian supplies, but were actively seeking confrontation with the Israeli military. They was given ample opportunity to redirect their course or otherwise comply with Israel's security requirements, including an offer by Israel to deliver the humanitarian supplies over land, though long established procedures.

A massive amount of arms and munitions are smuggled into Gaza over land and sea for use by Hamas in terror attacks on Israeli civilians. These continual attacks have forced Israel to regulate trade with Gaza to protect the lives of innocent people on both sides. By willfully ignoring the security situation in Gaza and the directives of the Israeli military, the organizers of this flotilla unnecessarily put lives at risk. I am saddened that they chose to pursue actions that led to bloodshed. *(Press Release)*

Sen. John Cornyn (R-TX)

June 5, 2010

Well, they are a terrorist organization, no matter how they came to power. And so you can understand why an organization committed to the elimination of Israel, our only reliable ally in the Middle East, is a matter of some concern to them.

And they are entitled, as a matter of their self-defense, to look to see whether weapons or other items were being smuggled in. Egypt has the same sort of blockade, although there are numerous tunnels going beneath the border there between Egypt and Gaza.

So this was pretty clearly a premeditated provocation, and it's unfortunate that lives were lost. I think, you know, it should have been a situation like it had been before. If the people organizing this flotilla had been committed to a peaceful activity as opposed to provocation, this would not have occurred and Israel would have been able to examine the contents of the flotilla and they would have been delivered to the people in Gaza who needed help. *(ABC – This Week)*

Rep. Jim Costa (D-CA)

June 7, 2010

“Israel has every right to defend itself against radical activists. Our friend Israel also has a responsibility to prevent weapons and dangerous materials from being smuggled into Gaza. This is the purpose of the legal blockade, to prevent innocent civilian aid from being used as a façade for arms trafficking, and this is why Israeli forces intercepted the Mavi Marmara flotilla recently headed for Gaza. It is essential to remember that this blockade is in place because Hamas, the terrorist organization controlling Gaza, has long made violent threats against Israel.

“Once again, violent individuals have hid behind peace activists and humanitarian aid while threatening the safety and security of our ally Israel. Since Israel’s disengagement from Gaza in 2005, Hamas has fired over 10,000 rockets at its civilian population. These acts of violence are a direct assault on freedom and democracy in the region.

“The United States must stand with Israel as they’ve been placed in this unfortunate situation. Israel is one of our strongest allies and must remain a critical partner in combating terrorism and extremism around the globe.”

Rep. Joe Crowley (D-NY)

June 4, 2010

“I am saddened by the loss of life and injuries sustained by passengers and Israeli Defense Force members on the Mavi Marmara. Any loss of life, or injury, is regrettable and a tragedy.

“Israel is absolutely correct to be seriously concerned about the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. Hamas, a terrorist organization, controls Gaza and is committed to Israel’s destruction. This is not an imagined problem: thousands of rockets have been fired at Israel from Gaza in recent years.

“It is important to note that Israel offered to inspect and transfer goods from the Mavi Marmara into Gaza before the incident, an offer which was not accepted. This underscores the fact that the Mavi Marmara’s top priority was not getting humanitarian assistance to the people of Gaza. Rather, its focus was undermining Israel’s legitimate efforts to defend itself through enforcement of a war-time blockade, as well as provoking a confrontation with the IDF.

“There is a way to deliver humanitarian aid responsibly – and this was not it. Tons of humanitarian aid enters Gaza on a constant and legal basis, facilitated by Israel. Passengers who chose to beat soldiers were not “peaceful protestors”, they were active combatants.

“If Gaza wants the blockade lifted, its leaders know precisely what to do: immediately end its drive to destroy the state of Israel.”

Rep. Rosa DeLauro (D-CT)

June 2, 2010

"I regret that ten people lost their lives. While I want to see the restoration of commerce and supplies to Gaza, this flotilla was more about creating an incident than helping people. These events underscore the urgent need for lasting and comprehensive peace in the region, and I look forward to a thorough investigation into what transpired." *(Press Release)*

Rep. Charlie Dent (R-PA)

June 2, 2010

It is terribly disappointing this incident ended with the loss of human lives. However, I believe Israel has the right to protect its citizens from potential threats to their safety. We are fully aware the people of Israel face daily attacks from terrorist groups rooted in Gaza, including Hamas. Naturally, Israel must take tremendous precaution to ensure weapons and ammunition are not funneled to terrorist organizations from abroad. While I am eager to learn more about the events that lead to this violent confrontation, I believe Israel has the right to inspect ships bound for Gaza and enforce the existing multinational blockade, which was established to prevent Hamas from gaining the tools to launch future deadly attacks against the Israeli people. *(Office of Congressman Dent)*

Rep. Ted Deutch (D-FL)

June 1, 2010

I regret the loss of life suffered during Monday's incident, but I would ask those reflexively condemning Israel to refrain from making aggressive statements that will only inflame the situation. I must also point out a few facts to put this incident into context. The delivery of aid to Gaza by this flotilla convoy was a pretense arranged by the participants in order to launch an act of political provocation against Israel. If the delivery of aid was the true goal, not to break the blockade, there are alternative methods of delivery that are available. Had the flotilla heeded Israel's repeated warnings, the cargo would have been unloaded and safely delivered intact to Gaza by trucks, as is protocol. Nevertheless, the convoy participants ignored these options and chose to proceed toward the blockade in an attempt to create a political confrontation. Lastly, under international law, a maritime blockade is recognized as a legitimate tool to be used at a time of international conflict, and Israel has the same rights in this respect as every other nation on earth. Also, missing from much of the reporting thus far is the fact that the current government in Gaza is controlled by Hamas, a terrorist organization sworn to the destruction of Israel.

The worst result of this incident and the loss of life would be for the United Nations to shift

focus from Iran's accelerating effort toward gaining nuclear weapons, the greatest threat to global security. I urge the Security Council to quickly pass the toughest possible sanctions on Iran. *(Press Release)*

Reps. Lincoln and Mario Diaz-Balart (R-FL)

June 3, 2010

“Israel has the absolute right and duty to protect itself and its citizens from terrorist organizations; it's a matter of national security. This includes the right to board and inspect ships which are suspected of transporting weapons, possibly used to kill Israelis, and the right to confront terrorist organizations such as Hamas in Gaza.

It is well documented that terrorist organizations, such as Hamas and Hezbollah, and state-sponsors of terrorism, like the dictatorships in Iran and Syria, falsely use the cover of “humanitarian efforts” to shield their illicit efforts to transport weapons.

At this time it is vitally important that the United States stand with Israel's right to defend its civilians from national security threats and work to stop international efforts, such as in the UN, to use this incident to bash Israel. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Eliot Engel (D-NY)

June 2, 2010

Once again, the world has rushed to judgment in its condemnation of Israel for the crisis surrounding the boarding of ships headed for Gaza. As in the past, the critics of Israel don't ask the serious questions; they merely try Israel in the media and pronounce it guilty without considering all of the facts.

This flotilla was no mere humanitarian mission, it was really a Trojan Horse designed to attack the Israelis and force an international incident. My question to anyone condemning the Israeli Navy is 'what should they have done'?

While I regret any loss of life, I must ask why so-called peaceful protestors were beating Israel's boarding parties with clubs. The Israeli navy boarded the ship armed only with paintball guns – a “weapon” used for recreation and to control ordinary protest mobs – and were attacked with knives, bats and other weapons. Even after that, the Israeli Navy deployed stun grenades rather than deadly force. Instead the attacks increased, with even more people joining in. Finally, they did what any armed forces member of any nation would do, they defended themselves.

This was anything but a group of peace-minded civic demonstrators. Rather, this ship was filled with hate-filled provocateurs bent on violence. Their aim was not to distribute humanitarian supplies, but to violently force themselves through Israel's blockade of Gaza. If they truly

wanted to deliver food and medicine to the people in Gaza, they would have accepted Israel's offer to dock in the port of Ashdod and permit humanitarian organizations to distribute the aid after Israel inspected the cargo for weapons. The organizers of the flotilla have alleged links to Hamas and reportedly played a role in the attempted Millennium bombing in Los Angeles.

Hundreds of trucks filled with humanitarian supplies already enter Gaza every day. Israel's blockade of Gaza doesn't affect that. Yet, the Gaza blockade is a matter of life and death for Israelis. Israel seals off Gaza not because it wants to, but because it must. Lifting the blockade would mean shipments of missiles, rockets, and bombs reaching the Hamas terrorists who control Gaza.

Let's put the blame where it belongs. True humanitarians would not have responded with violence, and no one should ever confuse relief workers with violent instigators. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Barney Frank (D-MA)

June 2, 2010

We ought to be very clear that the blockade has not simply been an Israeli blockade. It's been an Israeli/Egyptian blockade. And I think that's very important, because I do think the Israelis have a legitimate concern about being unfairly blamed and double standards.

By the way, I don't remember quite so much worldwide outrage when the North Koreans sank a South Korean submarine and 46 people were killed. There are people now very upset about Israel on a much more ambiguous situation as to what could and should have happened....

Look, you have this fundamental problem with Israel, for them. They gave up Gaza voluntarily. I was one of those who for a long time was arguing they should. What happened was, Gaza was then occupied by a group of people who think Israel shouldn't exist and who are in fact on our terrorist list for good reason.

Now, what you then have is a blockade. And the argument is, well, there were no weapons in this shipment. But a blockade that allows some things in and not others has to maintain control over the ports of entry, so you can know what is in or not.

Given that, I think it was irresponsible of the pro-Hamas people who organized this set of ships to go in there to do that, and obviously understood the potential for violence. That does not mean that everything the Israelis did in this situation was right. When military people are in a situation where they have to use force, as they had to do here, not everything will be done well. Not everything will be done correctly. I do agree it would be in Israel's interest to have an independent inquiry, appointed by Israelis.

By the way, the Israeli government, the Israeli judiciary, has a very good record of holding the Israeli government to account. The Israeli Supreme Court has been much tougher on the Israeli

government on security matters than the U.S. Supreme Court has been on our government, or the French or the others have been....

The context is relevant, that Egypt and Israel both said, look, we have terrorists running a piece of territory here. We do not trust them to be peaceful. And we're going to monitor what goes in.

I agree things could be done better. But in this particular situation, I think it would be in everybody's interest for there to be an independent inquiry, which Israel has shown itself capable of having internally, to figure out who did what, when. But the basic concept -- I do believe -- put it this way, if Hamas were in Canada, America would have a tougher blockade than Israel has....

It's true, this is causing -- the blockade hurts people in Gaza. And by the way, again, it was an Egyptian/Israeli blockade. So let's be clear. The Egyptians, for their own reasons of self-preservation, were doing this. Blockades hurt people. The blockade of North Korea hurts North Koreans....

So again, if the blockade can be done better, I'm not an expert on that. Yes, humanitarian aid should get in. Food should get in. The Israelis say it has been. If there's a dispute there, let's work to make -- to increase it. And an inquiry -- look and say what we've done with the American military. You put military people in a position where they have to use force and it's not going to be done perfectly.

But on the fundamentals, on the right to a blockade, again, we have to go back to the fact this doesn't happen in the West Bank. It happens in Gaza because a terrorist group that's opposed to Israel's very existence took physical control from the elected government at the time, the president, who won the parliament and have used it as a base of attacks. *(Interview by Chris Matthews on MSNBC)*

The article in today's Boston Herald is inaccurate in saying that I "had harsh words yesterday for the Israeli Navy." The harsh words I spoke were specifically aimed at some non-governmental settlers in the West Bank who I believe have treated Arabs very badly, and, it should be noted, in contradiction to official Israeli government policy. But I had nothing critical to say about the Israeli Navy. Indeed, I noted that I was not familiar with the specifics of the incident, and I talked about the U.S. experience in Afghanistan as an example of the difficult problems that occur when military organizations are required to use force.

I did say that I thought it was important in the interest of Israel and others that there be a credible inquiry into this, but I believe this inquiry should be conducted by a credible group commissioned by the Israeli government. The record of the United Nations with regard to Israel is a badly biased one and clearly no inquiry chartered by the U.N. would have the credibility that it ought to have.

My reference to “innocent people” was a reference to the problems the American military has encountered in Afghanistan – and before that to a great extent Iraq. As to the situation involving the Israeli Navy and those who were seeking to land in Gaza to aid and support Hamas, I noted that I did not know the specifics. I do believe that the decision to seek to land that group of ships in the territory that is controlled by a terrorist group was a wholly irresponsible one, and created the situation in which violence occurred. I have since learned more about the incident and I note the Israeli report that violent force in fact initiated by those whose boat was boarded – entirely appropriately in my judgment – by the Israeli Navy. The Israeli government has committed itself to appointing a critical inquiry and I support that. While governments investigating themselves are always faced with some skepticism, I believe that the Israeli government has a better record of legitimate self-criticism than almost any other government in the world in this regard, and the Israeli Supreme Court in particular has shown independence unmatched by any other judiciary in dealing with security actions taken against hostile forces.

Further, I want to emphasize again that my reference to actions that I am ashamed of is a reference to non-official actions by some settlers who have acted inappropriately and sometimes violently against Arabs. I continue to believe that the Israeli government should be pushing harder to prevent any new settlements and to remove settlements as part of a genuine two state agreement from those areas of the West Bank not in and around Jerusalem. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Jim Gerlach (R-PA)

June 3, 2010

“Based on all the facts available, the sole purpose of the flotilla was to provoke Israel and those aboard the Turkish ship brutally attacked the Israeli Marines,” Gerlach said. “Given the circumstances, the Israeli Marines had every right to protect themselves and their fellow Marines.

“It is also important to remember that Hamas has terrorized Israelis and Palestinians living along the Gaza border by launching approximately 7,000 missile and rocket attacks since 2005 when Israel withdrew from Gaza. Considering the constant threat of attack, the inspection of all ships and cargo headed for Hamas territory is absolutely reasonable and the existing embargo is necessary. Until the leaders in Gaza end their persistent efforts to destroy Israel and terrorize innocent citizens, Israel has every right to protect itself under international law and enforce blockades in international waters.

“Even though Hamas continues to stoke violence and unrest in the region, Israel has made sure that those living in Gaza receive vast amounts of humanitarian aid and medical supplies. In fact, Israel is screening the items aboard the Turkish vessels intercepted earlier this week and is working to facilitate the distribution of any humanitarian items and medical supplies.” *(Press Release)*

Sen. Kirsten Gillibrand (D-NY)

May 31, 2010

I am greatly concerned by public statements earlier today from a UN official that displays an alarming rush to judgment against Israel before the facts have been gathered and ignores Israel's basic right to defend herself against terror.

As the United Nations Security Council convenes to discuss the Gaza-bound flotilla, it is deplorable for the UN Special Rapporteur for the Occupied Palestinian Territories, Richard Falk, to urge boycotts and sanctions against Israel. Not only is it irresponsible to issue such verdicts before all the facts are known, but these types of proposals only exacerbate the challenges in the Middle East.

While I am deeply saddened by the loss of life, we must recognize that Israel has a right to defend herself and we have to withhold judgment until the facts are fully understood. (*Press Release*)

Rep. Jim Himes (D-CT)

June 2, 2010

Israel is our good friend and our only long term ally in a dangerous part of the world. As Americans we do not rush to judgment before we have the facts. As tragic as the situation in the Mediterranean is, I urge all parties involved to do all they can to reduce tension and to allow the facts to be examined. (*Press Release*)

Rep. Paul Hodes (D-NH)

June 3, 2010

"Without question, Israel has both the right to act in self-defense and the duty to protect its people from terror. That includes the right to stop Hamas, a terrorist organization, from acquiring the means to do harm to Israel. The ships which set out for Gaza were on clear notice of Israel's intent to protect itself and its citizens and the reasonable alternatives Israel had provided for delivering legitimate humanitarian aid to the Palestinian people in Gaza. I am deeply saddened by the loss of life in this incident and the harm to Israeli soldiers. The indication that some of the participants in the confrontation intentionally sought to do violence and to provoke violence is reprehensible.

The circumstances of the incident should be and are being investigated. While these investigations continue, supporters of Hamas and those who would seek to delegitimize Israel are already exploiting these sad events to further incite terrorism and hatred. As Americans, we must

not allow propaganda to displace facts. Israel, which withdrew unilaterally from Gaza, has faced a takeover by Hamas in Gaza, followed by a barrage of rockets and terror attacks.

One thing is clear: America's bond of friendship and support for Israel is unshakeable and will not be shaken. Not on my watch.

All of us agree that lost life is tragic. We should also agree that the current situation in which Israel's security is jeopardized and the Palestinian people are used as pawns by those who would harm Israel must change. I will continue to work with anyone who is willing to stand alongside me in order to ensure that throughout the Middle East a peaceful solution, in the best interest of both the Israeli and the Palestinian people, can be found. At the same time, we must continue to stand up to enemies like Iran who threaten us and our allies, and who are working to exploit this tragedy. *(Press Release)*

Majority Leader Steny Hoyer (D-MD)

June 2, 2010

As we wait for all the facts to emerge about Monday's events, several things are already clear. First, the loss of life was tragic. Second, Israel – rightfully so – invoked its right to self-defense on the Mavi Marmara. While the majority of ships in the flotilla – 5 out of 6 – reacted peacefully when approached by Israeli Defense Forces, activists on board the Mavi Marmara were clearly bent on a violent confrontation. They further chose this path despite two week's worth of repeated warnings from Israel that the ship would not be allowed to come ashore, and despite Israel's offer to instead receive the humanitarian goods at Ashdod, inspect them there for weapons, and ensure their distribution to Palestinians in Gaza. Finally, to the extent that this act was in protest of the Gaza blockade, let's be clear: Hamas could end the blockade at any time by recognizing Israel's right to exist, renouncing violence, and releasing Gilad Shalit.

The Administration and Congress are determined to prevent condemnation of Israel at the UN Security Council. In times of increased tension such as now, it is imperative that we not allow these events to distract from our main goals of achieving peace in the region and preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons. *(Press Release)*

Sen. Johnny Isakson (R-GA)

June 4, 2010

“While the loss of life aboard the Gaza-bound ship is tragic, Israel is well within its rights to defend itself against Hamas and any terrorist organizations that continue to support violence against its people. Like so many, I continue to hope that indirect peace negotiations between Israel and the Palestinian Authority will continue and that peace in the region will finally come to fruition.” *(Blog Post)*

Rep. Steve Israel (D-NY)

June 1, 2010

There is nothing humanitarian about lead pipes and knives. Israel unconditionally left Gaza and was rewarded with rocket fire. Israel established a blockade according to the rules of international law to protect itself from further rocket fire. A group of people chose to violate international law and Israel has the right to defend itself. *(Office of Congressman Steve Israel)*

Rep. Jesse Jackson, Jr. (D-IL)

June 4, 2010

"I deeply regret the fatalities and injuries that were suffered during the raid by Israeli commandos of six ships heading to the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip. I hope that a fair and credible Israeli-led investigation will get to the bottom of what happened and help prevent another such deadly incident from occurring again.

"However, there can be no doubt about this fact: Israel maintains the legitimate, fundamental right to defend and protect itself. The Israeli government has an obligation to prevent the flow of weapons and fighters into Gaza, sent there for one purpose only -- to kill Israelis.

"I hope that out of this unfortunate incident comes a new opportunity --- to find a way to allow more humanitarian aid into Gaza, without threatening Israel's security or benefiting its enemies. Now is the time to engage in the kind of intense negotiations and diplomacy that can lead to comprehensive and sustainable regional peace and security."

Rep. Lynn Jenkins (R-KS)

June 2, 2010

Israel has every right to defend itself, and it is important we not forget why the blockade exists in the first place: to deny Hamas terrorists weaponry to continue its rocket attacks in Israel, killing innocent Israelis. At this point, the true purpose behind the flotilla seems murky at best. As one of our nation's strongest and most stable allies, it is imperative that President Obama and his administration make it clear that the United States supports Israel and pledges to veto any biased, premature U.N. resolution condemning Israel's right to defend itself from Hamas terrorists who seek to harm innocent Israeli citizens. *(Press Release)*

Sen. Mike Johanns (R-NE)

June 3, 2010

The loss of life that occurred is tragic, but the worldwide rush to judgment is wrong and unfair. The evidence is now becoming clear that this was an intentional effort to provoke Israel and spur a harsh international reaction. The U.S. must not play into the hands and plans of terrorists.

Israel has offered to provide a secure means of transferring aid to Gaza, including a pathway for this shipment, yet this Turkish-sponsored ship instead attempted to break the blockage. As revealed on video, the ship's passengers attacked Israeli naval personnel. Recognizing that Israel has previously found massive quantities of weapons onboard ships bound for Gaza, there should be no question about its right to inspect incoming ships.

Israel is a good friend and democratic ally. The U.S. must stand behind Israel and its right to protect the Israeli people. *(Press Release)*

Sen. John Kerry (D-MA)

June 5, 2010

Israel has every right in the world to make certain that weapons are not being smuggled in after the thousands of rockets that have been fired on it from Gaza.

And Israel has every right in the world, as recognized by the international community -- because it is not just Israel conducting this blockade; it is Israel and Egypt. So you begin that Israel has this right to protect itself. *(ABC – This Week)*

Rep. Peter King (R-NY)

June 3, 2010

I strongly stand with Israel in the flotilla crisis.

It is regretful but not surprising that world opinion once again blames Israel for the flotilla incident that occurred over the weekend. Common sense tells us this was no humanitarian mission to Gaza. Humanitarians and peace activists do not arm themselves with knives, clubs, and other weapons. This was, without a doubt, a premeditated act with the intention of provoking the Israeli military into a confrontation (which it did) in the hopes of ending the naval blockade of Gaza. And even though Israel took every reasonable and legal step that was appropriate to prevent the ship from reaching Gaza, even offering to off-load the cargo and transfer it after being inspected for military contraband, it was rebuffed.

Israel must have the right to defend itself. The embargo is in place to prevent rockets, munitions, and other materials from getting into the hands of Hamas, a terrorist organization that calls for the destruction of Israel and just this week launched rockets at Israeli cities. Israel seeks only peace and security with its neighbors but unfortunately Hamas and its supporters do not have the same goals. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Ron Klein (D-FL)

June 1, 2010

Knowing of your concern about the importance of Israeli security, I wanted to make sure you saw my statements about recent events.

Israel has the right—indeed, the obligation—to defend itself. With a ship threatening to breach Israel's defenses of its coastal border, Israel was left with no choice but to ensure the safety of its people.

Those on board the ship were attempting to bolster the terrorist Hamas government in Gaza. Hamas, financed and trained by Iran and unacceptably excused by some members of the international community, poses a grave threat against the people of Israel.

Make no mistake: Israeli service members were beaten and stabbed while trying to peacefully escort the ship to an Israeli port where any legitimate humanitarian aid could be transferred to the people of Gaza.

The flotilla activists have committed great treason against the human rights movement. They have refused to recognize the unbearable suffering of the Israeli and Palestinian people at the hands of Hamas. Further, they have poisoned the reputation of legitimate human rights activists by using peace as a cover for provocation and violence.

As Israel continues to be unjustly challenged on the international stage, the United States must continue its efforts to stand up for Israel's self-defense.

I also urge the international community to recognize that this incident serves Iran's purposes by distracting the world from Iran's real threat against global security. The world cannot and should not fall into that trap." *(Press Release)*

Rep. Doug Lamborn (R-CO)

June 5, 2010

"The loss of life is regrettable. However, as the facts have unfolded in recent days, it appears those on board the Mavi Marmara may not have had peaceful intentions, as evidenced by the

violence directed toward the IDF soldiers. This incident was intended to provoke Israel and drive a wedge between Israel and her allies.

“Israel is under constant threat from terrorist groups and has the right to defend herself and protect her borders. As Israel continues to enforce her blockade around Gaza, we cannot forget that Hamas is a terrorist organization publicly committed to destroying Israel.

“The United States must continue to stand by our close friend and ally.” *(Press Release)*

Sen. Carl Levin (D-MI)

June 3, 2010

“Israel has the right under international law to set up a naval blockade to keep weapons from being sent to Hamas. Hamas is an organization that is listed by our State Department as a terrorist organization and that controls Gaza, indiscriminately attacks Israeli citizens and cities with rockets, and denies Israel’s very right to exist.

“While all the facts are not yet known, it seems clear that the organizers of the flotilla, particularly those on the Mavi Marmara, set out intentionally to use force to challenge the blockade. This confrontation and the tragic loss of life could have been avoided had the organizers of the flotilla agreed to Israel’s repeated offers to accept the humanitarian aid at an Israeli port and transfer it overland to Gaza under the supervision of those in the flotilla.

“An in-depth investigation is underway. But even as it is taking place, one thing is clear – the need to proceed, despite all the setbacks, with negotiations that can lead to a comprehensive agreement which has two states living side-by-side in peace.” *(Press Release)*

Sen. Joe Lieberman (I-CT)

June 3, 2010

We should be very clear about who is responsible for the unfortunate loss of life in the attempt to break the blockade in Gaza. Hamas and its allies are the responsible parties for the recent violence and the continued difficulties for the people of Gaza. Israel exercised her legitimate right of self defense.

The blockade exists because Hamas, which is increasingly acting as a proxy for the Iranian regime, has fired thousands of rockets upon Israel even after Israel withdrew from Gaza. The flotilla was a clear provocation and was not an effort to improve the lives of the people of Gaza but rather an attempt to score political propaganda points. The Palestinian people have legitimate rights to a state that is a peaceful neighbor of Israel, but those who assist Hamas only undermine that goal and a peaceful resolution. Support of Hamas and its aims is not the humanitarian path to peace, but rather enables continued violence and conflict.

I appreciate the way in which the Obama Administration has refused to join the international herd that has rushed to convict Israel before the facts were known and has apparently forgotten that Israel is a democratic nation and Hamas is a terrorist group. At difficult moments like this, it is more important than ever for the U.S. to stand steadfastly with our democratic ally, Israel.
(Press Release)

Rep. Frank A. LoBiondo (R-NJ)

June 3, 2010

I strongly support Israel's right to defend itself, and stand side-by-side with Israel against those who condemn their justified defensive action. I strongly condemn the action of those who assaulted the Israeli troops which resulted in the loss of life, including that of an American teenager.

I believe the fault and ultimate responsibility lies with the organizers of the flotilla who attempted to break through Israel's legitimate defenses against terrorist-controlled Gaza. If the true intent was humanitarian, their goods could easily and readily have been delivered to Gaza through the Israeli port of Ashdod, as done previously with other vessels. It is clear the intent was not purely humanitarian but rather intended to provoke a confrontation with the Israeli Navy. Israel was right to defend itself against such provocation and aggression.

Daily, Israel and her people are confronted with rocket-fired grenades and arms fire from Hamas-controlled Gaza. I strongly believe and support the efforts of Israel to protect its people, including its naval blockade and closure of access points into Israel from Gaza. This week's efforts by Israel's Navy, though regrettable in terms of lives lost, were justified, legal, and necessary to protect Israel from such continuous threats. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Nita Lowey (D-NY)

June 1, 2010

Israel has the right to inspect and reject illicit material being shipped to Gaza, which is controlled by a terrorist organization intent on destroying Israel and harming its people. The loss of life and injuries to flotilla participants and Israeli soldiers is regrettable. The international community should wait until the facts are known – including the actions of flotilla organizers and participants – before rushing to assign blame for this incident.

This incident should not distract from the most pressing issues facing the international community – working cooperatively to prevent Iran from acquiring nuclear capabilities, and developing a lasting peace agreement between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Connie Mack (R-FL)

June 1, 2010

Since September 11th here in the United States, we have understood the necessity for increased surveillance of materials coming into our airports, seaports and borders. We recognize that screening for materials that can be used by terrorists to endanger our security must be a top priority.

The terrorist regime Hamas rules over Gaza through force and remains a constant military threat to the safety and security of Israel and her people. Just as it is wise for us in the United States to ensure that cargo coming into our country is safe, so is it prudent for Israel to do the same and ensure that only non-military supplies are going into Gaza.

However, yesterday's flotilla was designed to avoid scrutiny. They could have had their materials sent through approved channels like the United Nations or the Red Cross, but instead, they chose to avoid the blockade and ship their materials directly to the terrorist-run regime in Gaza.

Like the United States, Israel has every right to ensure its own safety and security. If those who sent the flotilla wanted these materials to go to Gaza for humanitarian aid, as they claimed, then they would have sent them through approved channels. It's clear that this was a publicity stunt geared to break legitimate port security laws.

"Israel acted courageously on its own behalf. The Obama Administration should stand with Israel and support their right to keep their nation safe and secure. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Carolyn B. Maloney (D-NY)

June 2, 2010

I truly sympathize with the families of those who were killed or injured on the Mavi Marmara, but the fault lies with those who incited violence, not with those who defended Israel's borders. Israel had offered to have the flotilla land at Ashdod and have the humanitarian aid trucked to Gaza after being searched. The organizers rejected the offer. The family of Gilad Shalit asked the flotilla to carry a letter to their son who has been kept hostage in the Gaza Strip. The organizers rejected the request. The Gaza flotilla was clearly intended to generate international pressure to force Israel to relax its blockade and forego inspections of cargo destined for the Gaza Strip. But, all too often 'humanitarian' efforts have given cover to weapons running and terrorism.

Videos of the incident support the fact that many of the activists on Mavi Marmara had planned a violent attack. The footage reveals that the Mavi Marmara carried dozens of wooden and metal batons, knives (and there is footage of one knife drenched in blood), flame throwers, infrared night vision goggles, slingshots and flares. These are strange implements for a non-violent expedition. The video shows Israeli soldiers being attacked with sticks, chairs, knives and other

implements. One soldier is thrown head first over the side of the deck. The people who attacked the soldiers were anything but non-violent, and they clearly intended to cause grievous bodily harm to the soldiers they were attacking.

Rep. Howard “Buck” McKeon (R-CA)

June 3, 2010

I do not believe the flotilla was serving the cause of peace. Rather than planning ways to embarrass Israel and provide support to a terrorist regime, I would hope peace activists would encourage all sides to come to the bargaining table to seek a lasting peace. *(Press Release)*

The United States and Israel enjoy a special relationship, and that bond will weather this storm. In order to respond to nearly constant attacks, Israel has a right to defend itself and impose a blockade to stop the flow of weapons to its enemies.

While I regret the loss of life in this incident, I am confident that the Israeli government will adequately review its policies and procedures to ensure an adequate balance between its own legitimate security concerns and its desire to respect human rights.

Finally, it’s alarming that the United Nations would move without delay to condemn these actions even before knowing the facts while remaining silent in the aftermath of North Korea’s blatant aggression that left 46 South Koreans dead. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Michael E. McMahon (D-NY)

June 2, 2010

Just as America protects its borders, Israel - and any other country - has the right to maintain and defend its own borders. Despite what Hamas supporters may be claiming now, Monday’s incident wasn’t about bringing in supplies. It was about provoking Israel, a country whose people have been subject to countless terrorist attacks from Hamas supporters in the Gaza Strip.

Since Israel instituted its Gaza blockade, these attacks have dramatically decreased, and it is not hard to see how the Israeli government would perceive the flotilla’s actions as a direct confrontation. I fully support a transparent investigation by the Israeli government as to why these deaths occurred.

Primarily, though, we need to remain focused on what really threatens the shared interests of all democratic countries – a nuclear armed Iran. This is why I believe it is in our country’s best interest to lower tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean and encourage diplomacy between Turkey and Israel. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Kendrick Meek (D-FL)

June 1, 2010

Israel has the right and duty to defend itself and protect its citizens against all threats. As a security precaution, Israel was well within its rights to search the cargo and passengers of a ship on the verge of breaching its sovereign borders, despite repeated requests from the Israeli government to stop.

The loss of life is always tragic, but we must not be fooled: the passengers aboard the ship have done great harm to the human rights movement by using the name of peace as a pretense for violence against Israeli soldiers. The ship's passengers could have allowed Israeli service members to escort their ship to a port peacefully to transfer aid to the people living in Hamas-controlled Gaza, but instead resorted to aggression and hostility.

Israeli soldiers cannot be blamed for defending themselves and their citizens. I will not allow Israel to be blamed unfairly for exercising its right to self-defense. *(Press Release)*

Sen. Barbara A. Mikulski (D-MD)

June 3, 2010

Israel's internal investigation will tell us the facts and circumstances that led to the tragic loss of life and injury off the coast of Gaza. But two things are clear. First, Israel, like all countries, has the right to self-defense. Second, Hamas has clearly stated its goal is the destruction of the State of Israel.

Uninspected ships can contain anything from missiles to dirty bombs. That's why Israel offered to inspect the ships and allow humanitarian aid to be delivered as they have so many times in the past. Yet those aboard the Mavi Marmara cared more about inciting a confrontation than they did about delivering aid. This is clearly a provocative act. Those concerned about the people of Gaza must press Hamas to recognize Israel's right to exist and renounce violence. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Patrick Murphy (D-PA)

June 2, 2010

"While we wait for all the facts about Monday's events, it's important to remember what we already know. First, Israel is America's greatest friend and ally in the Middle East, and our two countries have enjoyed a special relationship for the past six decades.

Further, while any loss of life is deeply regrettable, Israel has the right and responsibility to self-defense. They invoked this right on board the Mavi Marmara against activists who, unlike those

on the other 5 ships in the flotilla, clearly intended to have a violent confrontation despite repeated and prolonged warnings from Israel that they would not be permitted ashore. Underscoring the difficult balance Israel seeks, extremists in Gaza fired two rockets on Israeli civilians later that day.

The flotilla incident itself is an unfortunate distraction from the underlying challenges facing the region, primarily the need to achieve peace in the region and to prevent Iran from developing nuclear weapons.”

Rep. Jerry Moran (R-KS)

June 2, 2010

Israel has a right to defend itself, including by enforcing a legal blockade to prevent the smuggling of weapons that can be used by Hamas to kill Israeli civilians,” Moran said. “Israel offered the flotilla the opportunity to dock in Israel and have the aid delivered to Gaza. Unfortunately, the flotilla chose otherwise; the intent was to provoke a confrontation with Israel rather than deliver material to Gaza. President Obama should make it clear that the U.S. supports Israel’s right to defend itself against terrorists. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Jerrold Nadler (D-NY)

June 1, 2010

Monday's violence was a sad but predictable result of the deliberate provocation on the part of the ‘Freedom Flotilla’ organizers. Knowing full well that Israel could not permit the Gaza blockade to be forcefully defied, the Flotilla purposely initiated a violent confrontation. But Israel has the right to enforce a blockade in order to keep weapons from the Hamas terrorists in Gaza.

The Israelis made it clear that they would allow all the supplies on the Flotilla - except any weapons or military materials - into Gaza if the Flotilla first landed in Israel and permitted Israeli inspection. The Flotilla organizers refused, re-avowing that their real aim was to ‘break the blockade,’ not to deliver humanitarian supplies to Gaza.

While the deaths and injuries (including Israeli Defense Force members) were a tragic result, Israel first and foremost has a responsibility to protect her citizens. The international community is seeking to embarrass Israel and highlight the blockade for public relations purposes, but continues to ignore the root problem Israel faces - continued provocation and violence by Hamas in Gaza.

The U.S. must stand up for the right of Israel to defend herself against terrorism - which is what Israel did when she blocked the attempt by the Flotilla to forcefully breach the blockade that is preventing weapons and military materials from reaching Hamas. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Pete Olson (R-TX)

June 3, 2010

Unlike many of her international counterparts, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton was correct at the outset to urge caution, and not rush to judgment until we learned the facts. We now know the facts.

“The Israeli Naval blockade is executed in accordance with international law. The blockade is necessary to prevent the flow of weapons into Gaza to be used against Israelis. The phony “peace activists” aboard the Flotilla did not want to deliver humanitarian aid to Gaza, they wanted to break the blockade. The violence was instigated by the brutal terrorists aboard the ship, not the Israeli servicemen. The Israeli Naval Commandos rightly believed their lives to be in danger and responded appropriately.

“The international response is unfounded, misplaced, and outrageous. I join my colleagues in supporting Israel’s right to defend themselves and the right of the Israeli Navy to use force when attacked. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Frank Pallone Jr. (D-NJ)

June 2, 2010

Dear Mr. President:

I write to you concerning the recent effort by a Turkish flotilla to violate an Israeli blockade on Gaza. I believe it is vital that we support Israel’s right to defend its people and to exercise authority in ensuring dangerous resources do not reach the terrorist organization Hamas.

The loss of life and violence that unfolded is unfortunate. After repeated warnings the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH) continued to rebuff Israeli offers to deliver humanitarian aid through proper channels and challenged a standing Israeli blockade. Furthermore, it must be understood that Israeli naval personnel were attacked once boarding the ship with knives, clubs and other weapons and forced to respond.

As details continue to unfold, I urge you to instruct your administration to work within the U.N. to ensure that Israel is treated in a fair and unbiased manner. As you are aware, on September 15, 2009 the U.N. Commission on Human Rights released the Report of the United Nations Fact Finding Mission on the Gaza Conflict, commonly known as the Goldstone Report. This report was one-sided and was based on a pre-judged outcome against Israel. The House of Representatives overwhelmingly supported and passed a resolution calling on you to unequivocally oppose any endorsement of the report.

The U.N. Security Council has now approved a resolution calling for an independent investigation into circumstances surrounding the incident aboard the Turkish flotilla. In the interest of fairness and to prevent another pre-judged report I urge your administration to oppose another investigation which would allow a biased outcome. Israel has offered non-provocative and non-confrontational mechanisms to ensure that aid is delivered to Gaza. In fact, the Israeli government had offered to bring the aid on the flotilla through the port of Ashdod, in accordance with established Israeli procedures.

In addition I urge you to condemn Turkey's support of IHH which has been known to maintain ties to terrorist organizations such as Hamas and Al Qaeda. I also ask that you condemn Turkey's reaction to the incident involving the flotilla. Rather than engaging in an open dialogue, Turkey has chosen to recall their ambassador from Israel and disrupt diplomatic relations. This is the same ploy that Turkey has used against the United States and other countries when there is disagreement. Turkey has chosen to ignore the facts and force its own view of events through threat. We can not allow these same old tactics to prevent us from taking the right position.

Thank you for your consideration of this letter. (*Letter to President Obama*)

Speaker of the House Nancy Pelosi (D-CA)

June 2, 2010

"I appreciate what you are saying, that people are suffering from different physical challenges because of the blockade," Pelosi said on a conference call Tuesday, in response to a question from blogger Mike Stark. "I know that blockades have consequences. And, again, we all saw this in real time because everyone has a camera and I think that people make a case on either side as to who was provocative and who was not. But the fact is, this is a terribly regrettable situation. I regret the loss of life first and foremost and again call for a credible and transparent investigation to find out how this came to be."

... "There is a very strong interest in getting the facts," said Pelosi. "A transparent and credible investigation is what people are calling for -- that's what the White House has mentioned and that's what I support as well. We have to have the facts on which to make a judgment about how to go forward."

"Israel is our friend... I think with Israel we have a very close friendship and to have a Democratic Jewish state in that region is something that has been a goal of our foreign policy. It is something that is based on our national security interest; it is about us as much -- even more -- than it is about them. We all -- many of us here -- are striving for a two-state solution... But it has to be a solution where there is security for both sides. And hopefully President Obama will be able to use his good offices to achieve such a goal that has been bipartisan in support in Congress. But again, I believe that the specialness of our relationship with Israel has as much to do with our own national security as it does with theirs." ([*The Huffington Post*](#))

June 1, 2010

“I regret the loss of life and look forward to learning the facts from a credible and transparent investigation. This event underscores the urgent need for negotiations designed to achieve an enduring and comprehensive regional peace.” *(Press Release)*

Rep. Mike Pence (R-IN)

June 2, 2010

The nation of Israel has a right and a duty to defend her people against the attacks of a terrorist group that has repeatedly targeted innocent victims. The blockade of Gaza bolsters peace in the region by keeping weapons from reaching Hamas terrorists. This blockade helps to prevent Hamas from firing rockets and obtaining other arms that will be used to kill innocent Israeli civilians.

Israel's blockade does not interfere with the flow of humanitarian aid. In fact, Israel transfers over 10,000 tons of humanitarian supplies a week into Gaza, including basic food, clothing, medicine and shelter supplies.

"The flotilla that was stopped by Israel's navy was intended to provoke a confrontation with Israel. Several leaders connected with the flotilla have said that it was their intention to break Israel's blockade.

The United States must stand with its cherished ally Israel and defend its right to a blockade that keeps Hamas from terrorizing the region. Any loss of life is a terrible tragedy, but the U.S. must not be dissuaded by the knee-jerk reaction of Israel's critics who are seeking to use recent events to hinder Israel's right to self-defense. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Gary Peters (D-MI)

June 1, 2010

I am saddened by the unfortunate loss of life and injuries that occurred during this incident. However, it seems that many would prefer to judge Israel rather than wait and judge the facts. I am puzzled that so many around the world are so quick to condemn Israel's acts of self-defense while they are slow to speak out on the dangerous nuclear ambitions of Iran—even as just yesterday news broke that Iran has the fuel for two nuclear weapons. I am incredulous that the U.N. Security Council can meet the same day in response to this unfortunate incident, but despite years of a growing nuclear threat from Iran the U.N. Security Council has yet to take necessary action. While Israelis live in fear of rocket attacks, and Gilad Shalit is still held hostage, there is not commensurate international outrage toward indiscriminate acts of terrorism by Hamas and Hezbollah. These issues, which threaten regional and global stability, call for much swifter and stronger action. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Tom Price (R-GA)

June 1, 2010

Israel has every right to defend herself and protect her people,” said Chairman Price.

The loss of life in this incident is tragic, but it should not diminish our support for Israel as it faces continued threats.

I call on the President and his administration to stand strong with the Israeli people and against any effort to mislead or distort the facts surrounding this incident in an effort to stoke animosity toward Israel.

There needs to be a full and balanced investigation into how this situation escalated.

Nevertheless, our allies and our enemies alike should know that America will not tolerate those who commit or support violent actions against a friend of the United States and that commitment is resolute. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Mike Quigley (D-IL)

June 2, 2010

In the media storm surrounding the recent Gaza flotilla incident we must not forget the larger picture. The loss of life that occurred on the flotilla was indeed tragic, but the responsibility lies with those who chose to run an internationally recognized blockade and attack uniformed personnel.

The flotilla turned down an Israeli offer to deliver the humanitarian goods through the port of Ashdod, and ignored repeated warnings that it would not be allowed to reach Gaza. Clearly the flotilla’s primary objective was not simply to deliver humanitarian aid.

Rather than offering peaceful resistance, the flotilla organizers beat, stabbed and even shot Israeli soldiers as they landed on the main ship. The reckless actions of the flotilla’s organizers do not promote peace or enhance the well being of the people of Gaza.

We must remember who rules Gaza – Hamas – a terrorist organization which has pledged to destroy Israel. The situation of Gaza’s residents would be far better served by these organizers calling on Hamas to meet the three minimal demands of the international community for normalization-recognition of Israel, renunciation of violence and terror, and acceptance of previous agreements. This would lead to a real improvement in the lives of ordinary Gazans.

Israel must be able to defend itself and keep weapons out of the hands of Hamas. And the U.S. must stand with Israel. *(Press Release)*

Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV)

June 4, 2010

Israel is one of our strongest and most important allies, and the United States stands firmly with Israel at this critical time.

I deeply regret the loss of life in the flotilla incident, including the death of an American citizen.

Israel has an obligation to protect its citizens and therefore has a clear right under international law to prevent weapons from getting in the hands of terrorists determined to target them. Israel indicated it was willing to put in place a process to ensure that legitimate humanitarian relief reached Gaza. Unfortunately this offer was rejected.

Israel has pledged to carry out a transparent and thorough investigation of this incident, and I look forward to its findings. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Peter Roskam (R-IL)

June 2, 2010

Our good friend and ally Israel lives under a constant threat from Hamas terrorists in Gaza. The anti-Israel factions of the U.N. have predictably and disappointingly reverted to their blame-Israel-first mantra when the video evidence is strikingly clear that the ‘humanitarians’ on the one flotilla ship did not set sail with intentions as pure as the wind driven snow. This was confrontational and provocative. The United States has no greater friend in the Middle East, and it is important that we stand with our strategic and democratic ally in the face of sanctimonious international pressure. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen (R-FL)

June 2, 2010

“The U.S. must unequivocally oppose this UN effort to produce another ‘Goldstone Report’ to demonize Israel and undermine the Jewish State’s sovereign right of self-defense.

“Israel is repeatedly targeted for destruction by violent extremists and their state-sponsors. Yet, the UN, time and again, ignores these threats while aligning itself with radical outlaws – whether they be firing rockets at Sderot or attacking Israeli soldiers seeking to inspect ship cargo.

“Rather than helping to promote peace, the UN’s biased actions encourage and validate the efforts of those threatening Israel’s sovereignty and security.

“However, these efforts do not stop at the UN. Those pushing for more Goldstone-type inquisitions are also looking to the unaccountable International Criminal Court to persecute free democratic nations for defending their citizens.

“The U.S. must stand up for our sovereignty, our citizens, and our democratic allies and refuse to participate in or legitimize the ICC.”

June 1, 2010

Israel has the right and the duty to defend itself and its citizens, including by seeking to inspect ships run by Islamist extremist groups. These extremists, suspected of financing jihadist groups, were seeking to enter Hamas-controlled Gaza despite repeated requests from the Israeli government not to do so.

Hamas, Hezbollah, and other Islamist militant groups have repeatedly used innocent civilians as human shields. They hide rockets and other weapons in homes, hospitals, and schools. With this in mind and given that the group running the ‘flotilla’ has ties to jihadist groups, Israel was compelled to search the cargo and passengers as a vital security measure.

Israeli soldiers had every right to defend their lives against a lynch mob attacking them with knives and clubs.

It is deeply troubling that the UN’s knee-jerk reaction was to immediately condemn and isolate Israel, particularly while still refusing to take concrete steps to stop Iran’s march toward a nuclear weapon.

The U.S. must stand with Israel against this diplomatic lynch mob and the threats posed to its security, and very existence, by Hezbollah, Hamas, Iran, and Syria. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA)

June 4, 2010

“I strongly support Israel’s right to defend herself against Hamas and other terrorist groups. Israel’s blockade of Gaza is a necessary measure to prevent Hamas from stockpiling weapons, including rockets that have been used to kill innocent Israeli civilians. Their blockade does not interfere with the flow of humanitarian aid. In fact, Israel transfers over 10,000 tons of humanitarian supplies a week into Gaza, including food, clothing, and medicine.”

“The purpose of these so-called ‘freedom flotillas’ is to provoke a confrontation with Israel. Unfortunately, that purpose was achieved with the first flotilla incident. News that a second flotilla is trying to break Israel’s blockade is disappointing. According to reports, Israel has

already offered to direct the ship to an Israeli port, where the supplies would be unloaded, inspected and transferred to Gaza by land, but those offers were rejected. The reason for the rejection is obvious: The flotillas are designed to violate Israel's sovereignty; not to provide aid to the needy. Israel has the right to board this ship and to maintain its blockade.”

Rep. Steve Rothman (D-NJ)

June 2, 2010

The U.S. stands shoulder to shoulder with Israel in our fight against violent extremism.

I am sincerely regretful for the loss of life that occurred during the incident in the Mediterranean Sea involving the Mavi Marmara ship and the Israeli Defense Forces (IDF). As we are learning more about the incident it is clear that, while there may have been peace activists on the ship, there were individuals on board who had violent intentions. As Israel's soldiers sought to reroute the ship to Ashdod – where humanitarian materials could be gathered, screened, and delivered to the people of Gaza – there was a pre-meditated, planned effort to injure and possibly kill IDF soldiers.

Israel made every attempt to come to a peaceful resolution and avoid violence. However, after repeated warnings from the IDF, the Mavi Marmara ship refused to heed the internationally recognized blockade of Hamas's terrorist-controlled Gaza strip. It is extremely unfortunate that Hamas refuses to pursue peace with Israel and move toward a two-state solution. Hamas is a terrorist organization that regularly suppresses the rights of Gazans – from women and homosexuals to Christians and anyone who would speak out against their tyrannical rule – and is surely no friend of any reputable peace activist.

Israel continues to allow trucks loaded with humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza on a daily basis – amounting to more than 738,000 tons of food and supplies last year. Israel has made numerous efforts to help the people of Gaza and improve their quality of life. Yet, at every step of the way, Hamas refuses to put the well-being of Gazans and the pursuit of peace over their own terrorist ideology and desire to destroy the Jewish State of Israel.

It is long past time to realize a two-state solution, achieved through direct negotiations between the Palestinian Authority and Israel. I pray that this incident does not derail the peace process.
(Press Release)

Rep. Ed Royce (R-CA)

June 4, 2010

Martyrdom in the way of Allah is our inspiration.” That's from the creed of the Muslim Brotherhood. If it sounds like the charter of Hamas – the terrorist group that controls the Gaza Strip and the intended beneficiary of this week's “Freedom Flotilla” – it should.

You see, Hamas is an off-shoot of the Muslim Brotherhood, a movement born in 1920's Egypt that seeks an Islamic caliphate – stretching from Spain to Indonesia. The Brotherhood is thought to have inspired many Islamist terrorist groups, including al-Qaeda. Only by understanding these connections can this week's maritime clash between Israeli commandos and "peace" activists headed by Turkish Humanitarian Relief (IHH) be fully understood.

Like Hamas, the IHH has strong connections to the Brotherhood. Many flotilla participants, maybe 100, were MBers from across the Muslim world.

The IHH's terror links are surfacing. According to French intelligence, IHH's phone records in Istanbul showed repeated calls in 1996 to an Al-Qaeda guesthouse in Milan and Algerian terrorist operatives in Europe. French anti-terror magistrate Jean-Louis Brugiere, who two of my staff have interviewed, testified that IHH played an "important role" in the failed 1999 al Qaeda "millennium plot" to bomb LAX. And IHH's head showed-up in Gaza with the Hamas chief just this April.

IHH, the Muslim Brotherhood, Hamas. Let's face it. Peas of a pod.

Meanwhile, Turkey continues its sprint away from the West. Its Islamist government is fresh off its deal (Brazil helped too) with Iran to avoid sanctions. It's now holding a hero's welcome home for the flotilla. The troubling trends there I wrote about six months ago are only worse. A Wall Street Journal op-ed today said Turkey's political debate in recent years has been a "national decline into madness." Seriously, what does Turkey's NATO membership still really mean?

Israel's Prime Minister said yesterday, "This was not the Love Boat, it was the Hate Boat." Worried about American public opinion, so playing on the schmaltzy 1970's/80's American TV show, this was a good line, especially because it's true. He added, "The same countries that are criticizing us today should know that they will be targeted tomorrow." They already have. Our friends overseas better figure all this out real quick, especially those laying between Spain and Indonesia. ([Blog Posting](#))

Rep. John Sarbanes (D-MD)

June 4, 2010

As more facts emerge about the flotilla incident, it appears that delivering humanitarian aid to the residents of Gaza was not the primary objective of those piloting the Mavi Marmara vessel; if so, that could have been done by cooperating with Israeli officials in a process that would achieve delivery of the vessel's cargo after inspection for weapons. Instead, we are left to conclude that the persistence of the Mavi Marmara in seeking to breach the blockade was intended to provoke a clash with Israeli Defense Forces. That in fact occurred and things went terribly awry, resulting in the tragic loss of nine lives.

Some have expressed the view that Israel alone should account for this incident. That perspective neglects the role that Turkey played in staging the flotilla and Turkey's readiness to condone this kind of brinkmanship. Further inquiry will reveal to what extent activists on the Mavi Marmara were connected to extremist organizations that are implementing a broad strategy of confrontation with Israel.

One cannot overstate the tensions that surround Gaza: the humanitarian crisis, the continued stranglehold of Hamas over Gaza's residents, and Israel's legitimate fear that weapons will be smuggled into the area, by land or by sea, to attack Israeli citizens. Diffusing these tensions so that non-military goods may move more freely into and out of Gaza must be a top priority for all parties seeking peace and security for the region. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Aaron Schock (R-IL)

June 6, 2010

There are some vital points being overlooked in the international coverage of the Israeli response to the Gaza flotilla, and a mountain of hypocrisy that needs to be exposed. Egypt, the Palestinian Authority (PA) and every Arab foreign minister agreed that Hamas not be allowed to control the southern border crossing with Egypt after the terror group violently seized control of Gaza in 2007.

Yes, Egypt has blockaded Gaza under Hamas's control as much as the Israelis have – and with the widespread support of Arab governments and the PA. Where's the outrage?

Palestinians are supposedly experiencing a humanitarian crisis, and yet no Arab or Islamic government has demanded Egypt open its border with Gaza. Hello, Turkey?

When Israel pulled out completely from the Gaza Strip in 2005, it imposed no blockade. It was only after Hamas began a terror campaign with 10,000 rockets fired at Israeli civilians that Israel and Egypt imposed this blockade – with PA and Arab support. No Arab government wanted a terror-prone Hamas to flourish in Gaza, let alone spread.

ONE NEEDS to ask: If the Kurds or the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) across the Turkish border in Iraq rained 10,000 rockets on Turkish civilians, what would the Turks do? After all, the Kurds have legitimate disputes with the government of Turkey, and have been viciously repressed.

What if international NGOs decided to airlift humanitarian supplies to PKK refugees in Iraq, with those shipments containing civilian equipment that could easily be made into weapons?

Only Turkey recognizes a Turkish republic in Northern Cyprus. What would the Turkish military's response be if organizations from nations that do not recognize the Turkish occupation of Northern Cyprus decided to break that military occupation?

Again, regarding Turkish hypocrisy, the prime minister of Turkey, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, received the international pariah who leads Sudan – President Omar Bashir – a man who has committed genocide. The International Criminal Court has an arrest warrant out for him on charges of genocide, crimes against humanity and war crimes. Not only has the Darfur region of Sudan experienced genocide directed by Bashir and his government, but other regions of southern Sudan have as well. During the visit in mid-August of last year, Erdogan said he did not believe Bashir was guilty of the war crimes for which he was indicted.

And here is how the Turkish prime minister justified that widely disputed contention: “It is not possible for those who belong to the Muslim faith to carry out genocide,” said Erdogan. He deems Bashir innocent. End of story.

THE TURKISH foreign minister recently called the flotilla episode, “Turkey’s 9-11.” Shame on you sir. No American should ever forget such an insult.

This brings me to the reason for the blockade of Gaza, including the Israeli naval blockade. Some of the items on the ships were dual-use, with both civilian and military uses. For instance, there was rebar for a small amount of cement.

Heaven knows Gaza needs a lot of rebuilding. This tiny amount is insignificant for construction, however, although it’s a nice supply of iron to be converted into weapons.

If the Israeli naval blockade ends does anyone really think Hamas won’t be importing a wide array of weapons? If the ships don’t have to go through checkpoints, arms shipments would resume without a doubt – and so would the rocket attacks.

What nation would sit back and allow arms to pour into a neighboring territory that will certainly be used in more attacks on its people? If the blockade ends, arms shipments into Gaza will resume, and rocket firings into will Israel resume. It’s that simple.

None of the United Nations peacekeeping organizations and observers has kept out the sophisticated weapons imported by Hizbullah into southern Lebanon – despite absolute UN assurances to do so. No similar observers are capable of standing in the way of Iranian arms shipments to Hamas either. Only Israeli and Egyptian checkpoints can do that.

Again, I ask, would Turkey allow similar organizations to ship uninspected cargo to the suffering PKK Kurds in Turkey and Iraq? Hamas needs to negotiate with its estranged brothers in the Palestinian Authority in the West Bank, and commit themselves to peace and recognition of Israel. Then peace and prosperity will prevail.

Let’s get the facts straight and the hypocrisy exposed as this debate proceeds. (*Jerusalem Post*)

Sen. Charles Schumer (D-NY)

June 6, 2010

Today, U.S. Senator Charles E. Schumer, in a personal letter to Secretary Clinton, called for the State Department to immediately conduct an investigation to determine if the Turkish based non-governmental organization (NGO), İnsani Yardım Vakfı (IHH), otherwise known as the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, is currently - or has in the past - provided financial, logistical or material support to any terrorist organizations listed on the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO). According to a 2006 report, the group served as a front for funding terrorist organizations and sending rebels to fight in places such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya. Recently, France's former top anti-terrorism judge Jean-Louis Bruguiere stated that IHH was connected to the "millennium plot" to bomb the Los Angeles airport in late 1999. And it has been stated in recent media reports that major international Islamic charities such as IHH, while providing genuine humanitarian relief, are "charitable front groups that provide support to Al-Qaida."

"The United States must do everything in its power to combat support for terrorist organizations here and across the world," Schumer said. "We must target, investigate, and, if need be, punish those who offer logistical, financial and political support for terrorist groups. That is why today I am urging Secretary Clinton to take the necessary steps to immediately conduct an investigation to determine if IHH has ties to terror groups. If it is determined that this organization is providing support to terrorist organizations, then appropriate measures should be taken and that organization should be held accountable for its actions."

Evidence pointing to links between IHH and terrorist organizations has begun to pile up. Based on statements from U.S. State Department officials, IHH representatives have met with senior Hamas officials in Turkey, Syria, and Gaza over the past three years. International media reports have also referenced IHH's "clear, long-standing ties to terrorism and Jihad". Additionally, according to reports, Turkish security authorities began investigating IHH in December 1997, after having received intelligence that senior IHH figures had purchased automatic weapons from radical Islamic organizations. As a result, IHH facilities were raided and organization members were arrested. During the security raid the Turkish security forces found weapons, explosives, instructions for making IEDs and a flag with a jihad message. IHH, has also been recognized as a member of the "Union of Good" a Saudi-based umbrella organization known to finance global terrorism. On Nov. 12, 2008, the U.S. government announced the umbrella group's leaders as Specially Designated Global Terrorists. Schumer says that it is especially disturbing that an organization such as IHH, whose connections to terrorism lie under a cloud of uncertainty, has been afforded Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

Schumer says it is crucial that government officials use every resource available to determine which organizations are dedicated to providing humanitarian aid and which groups are providing support to terrorist organizations. The distinction should be clear and unambiguous and if there is any reason to believe that an NGO is providing support to terrorist organizations, then appropriate measures should be taken and that organization should be held accountable for its actions.

A copy of the letter can be found below.

Dear Secretary Clinton:

I write to ask that the State Department investigate whether the Turkish-based non-governmental organization (NGO) İnsani Yardım Vakfı (I.H.H), otherwise known as the Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, is providing financial, logistical or material support to any terrorist organizations listed on the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO).

There is reason for concern that this so-called charitable organization may have links to terror groups. A 2006 report by the Danish Institute for International Studies described the group as a front for funding terrorist organizations and sending Mujahidin to fight in places such as Afghanistan, Bosnia and Chechnya. Recently, France's former top anti-terrorism judge Jean-Louis Bruguiere, stated that IHH was connected to the "millennium plot" to bomb the Los Angeles airport in late 1999. And it has been stated in recent media reports, that major international Islamic charities such as IHH, while providing genuine humanitarian relief, are "charitable front groups that provide support to Al-Qaida".

Based on statements from U.S. State Department officials, we know that IHH representatives have met with senior Hamas officials in Turkey, Syria, and Gaza over the past three years and international media reports have also referenced IHH's "clear, long-standing ties to terrorism and Jihad". It is especially disturbing that an organization such as IHH, with possible connections to terrorism, has been afforded Special Consultative Status with the United Nations Economic and Social Council.

I believe it is crucial that the State Department attempt to determine which organizations are dedicated to providing humanitarian aid and which groups are providing support to terrorist organizations. The distinction should be clear and unambiguous and if there is any reason to believe that an NGO is providing support to terrorist organizations, then appropriate measures should be taken.

The U.S. government must do everything in its power to combat support for terrorist organizations. I urge you to take the necessary steps to determine if the IHH currently - or in the past - provided financial, logistical or material support to any terrorist organization listed on the State Department's list of Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTO).

Thank you for your consideration of this important request. Please do not hesitate to contact me if I can be of any assistance.

Sincerely,

Senator Charles E. Schumer (*Press Release*)

Rep. Pete Sessions (R-TX)

June 4, 2010

Earlier this week, Israel was forced to take an unfortunate but necessary defensive action to protect its citizens. Threatened with an incursion by so-called ‘humanitarian’ groups sympathetic to a regime recognized by the U.S. Department of State as a foreign terrorist organization, Israel prevented a flotilla of activists from breaking a blockade into Gaza. While I regret the loss of life associated with the ongoing turmoil, Israel simply cannot be expected to stand idly by while its security is challenged and internationally-recognized channels for aid delivery are ignored.

Israel’s need to protect its citizens from existential threats – especially from terrorist organizations committed to its destruction – is paramount. Hamas, Hezbollah, and Iran have time and again ignored Israeli peace overtures and continue to call for Israel’s destruction.

The United Nations’ immediate condemnation of Israel reveals the depth and intensity of an international double-standard that seeks to blame Israel first while ignoring Hamas’ and Hezbollah’s civilian targeting, as well as Iran’s obvious attempts to acquire nuclear weapons.

Unfortunately, this will likely not be the last time that terrorist organizations – under the guise of humanitarian aid – seek to provoke Israel. As much of the world turns the other way, my support for Israel remains steadfast in its struggle for security until a lasting peace is achieved in the Middle East. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Joe Sestak

June 4, 2010

The loss of civilian life in any case is tragic and I express my sincere condolences to the families of those killed and injured on both sides of this event.

Israel has a legitimate right to defend itself. In this case, it appears that the ship carrying humanitarian and construction supplies attempted to break a naval blockade of Gaza despite clear warnings that that they would be denied entry. While the Palestinians have a right to humanitarian assistance, we must not forget that there remain radicals, fueled by organizations like Hamas, who wish Israel’s destruction and have no intention of recognizing its right to exist. Israel must maintain its right to protect itself from them and thwart their attacks, including by preventing dangerous materials from getting into the wrong hands.

In the short-term, I support the recommendation of the United States for the Israeli government to quickly appoint an independent commission to review the circumstances that surrounded the event so that the latest round of peace talks toward a sustainable solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict can proceed without interruption, and not let this unfortunate incident delay such talks.

Above all, this incident highlights the fact that the status quo is unacceptable and that the United States must take a lead role in encouraging further dialogue. Active efforts can better ensure that this does not become an obstacle to further negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians, with the United States. Instead, talks must be able to persist with active demonstrations of a willingness to move toward a sustainable two-state solution that protects Israel's security for the long term.

In working with Israel to learn from this incident, we cannot lose our focus on protecting Israel's security.

Rep. Todd Tiahrt (R-KS)

June 2, 2010

Israel has every right to defend itself from terrorist threats," said Tiahrt. "While loss of life is always regrettable, much of the world has rushed to judgment without full knowledge of the facts or situation. Given the constant terrorist attacks waged by Hamas in Gaza against innocent Israeli civilians, Israel is absolutely right to have a blockade formed to ensure weapons do not find their way into Gaza and into the hands of terrorists. Humanitarian aid is delivered to Gaza routinely through a legal process. However, it is clear this flotilla was trying to send a political message rather than deliver humanitarian supplies.

I am deeply disappointed in the handling of this crisis by the Obama administration. By seemingly ignoring the facts, the administration appears more interested in appeasing liberal special interest groups than standing with one of our closest and most important allies. President Obama has said in the past that the White House has an 'unshakable commitment' to Israel's security— it's time the President live up to that promise. The Obama administration should support a fair inquiry of the Gaza incident—but be cautious about information coming from those who seek harm to Israel.

It is our moral and strategic obligation to stand strong with the Israeli people and support this beacon of democracy in the Middle East— and against anyone who seeks destruction. (*Press Release*)

Rep. Patrick J. Tiberi (R-OH)

June 3, 2010

I fully support Israel's right to defend itself and use the means necessary to ensure their nation's security. The deliberate attempt to break the blockade around Gaza is a reminder that Israelis live with the daily threats of rockets and terror attacks. While the loss of life and injuries suffered are tragic, Israel acted to keep its citizens safe. Israel and the United States share a strong and

enduring relationship. Israel should be able to count on the United States as it faces continued threats. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Chris Van Hollen (D-MD)

June 3, 2010

I deeply regret the loss of life off the coast of Gaza and offer my condolences to those who lost loved ones and my wishes for a speedy recovery to the injured. A fair and transparent investigation of this incident should begin immediately, and I look forward to the completion of this review in a timely manner. Ultimately, this incident reinforces the critical importance for meaningful negotiations to take place to ensure a permanent and secure peace for all of the people of this region. To secure that peace, the U.S. has made clear its unshakeable commitment to the security of the State of Israel. The U.S. must also continue to make sure humanitarian assistance is able to reach the people of Gaza. While ultimately the parties to this dispute must resolve their differences, the U.S. should play a constructive role in bringing the parties together. This tragic event reinforces the need for this to happen as soon as possible. *(Press Release)*

Sen. David Vitter (R-LA)

June 2, 2010

Israel had every right to defend itself against this attack, and I believe it is crucial for the U.S. to stand with its strongest ally during this time and not join the U.N.'s condemnation of this raid.

Despite repeated warnings from the Israeli government to avoid entering the Gaza strip, these ships, operated by alleged Islamist extremists, still entered the waters and prompted Israeli soldiers to search the cargo as a security measure. Israeli forces were then met with violent confrontation leading to the loss of life and severe injuries. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Debbie Wasserman Schultz (D-FL)

June 2, 2010

The loss of life that occurred off Israel's coast early Monday morning was tragic and regrettable. At this difficult time, it is vital that the international community not inflame the situation with condemnations and unjust criticism of Israel.

We must stand strong with Israel amidst the tragedy.

We must remember several elements of this conflict that place this tragedy in context. All but one of the flotilla's ships were able to safely and peacefully transfer humanitarian goods to Gaza,

via the Israeli port city of Ashdod. In this case, the aim of the passengers aboard the Mavi Marmara was not merely humanitarian aid, but to incite political confrontation and challenge Israel's legitimate maritime blockade. The delivery of aid to Gaza by this flotilla convoy was a pretense to rouse political provocation against Israel.

We must not forget that this blockade exists because Hamas, the ruling party of Gaza, is a terrorist organization with the sworn goal to destroy the Jewish State. Such a blockade by Israel and Egypt is a means to stop the smuggling of illegal materials and weapons to Hamas. Conversely, the Israeli Navy worked to plan a non-violent interception of the flotilla and only used force when soldiers' lives were at risk.

Tragically, members of the Israeli military were beaten and stabbed while trying to peacefully escort this ship to shore, where all donated goods could have been transferred to the people of Gaza.

As Israel continues to face unjust criticism on the world stage, the United States must continue to support our friend, ally, and partner. In the meantime, this incident should in no way take our focus off the impending threat of a nuclear Iran, which is the greatest threat to global security and peace in the Middle East. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Henry A. Waxman

June 3, 2010

What happened off the coast of Gaza is a tragedy because of the loss of life. While all of the facts are not yet known, it is clear that those aboard the Mavi Marmara never intended to carry out a peaceful humanitarian mission. No country, especially Israel, should permit a blockade to be pierced without a chance to see if weapons were included with other goods. Israel offered to allow humanitarian assistance to go to the people of Gaza, but for its own protection, had a right to search the cargo beforehand. It was only when faced with violence that the soldiers reacted in self-defense.

In the five years since Israel withdrew from Gaza, Hamas has sought time and again to provoke Israel with unrelenting rocket attacks, the kidnapping of Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, and the smuggling of weapons and bomb making materials by any means. It is no coincidence that these events have been orchestrated, often with the help of Tehran, at moments of increased international pressure on the Iranian regime to abandon its illegal nuclear activities. While Israel must do its best to resist such provocations, the automatic international rush to condemn Israel for defending citizens and soldiers under attack is a travesty.

All who empathize with the people of Gaza and seek to end the blockade on its shores should urge Hamas to abandon terrorism and embrace a stable and more prosperous future in which two states can live side by side in peace and security. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Anthony Weiner (D-NY)

June 1, 2010

While the demand for answers seems to echo in capitals around the world, the facts here are largely known.

We know this tragedy was instigated by Turkey. We know that Israel had not only warned that this boat was in violation of an entirely lawful blockade, but had offered safe harbor to the boat in Ashdod. We also know that a known terrorist group – Hamas – has put its hateful agenda over the well being of its people.

Any loss of life is tragic. This loss was the result of Turkish instigation and Hamas terror policies. Even if we are the only country on earth that sees the facts here, the United States should stand up for Israel. *(Press Release)*

Rep. Frank Wolf

June 4, 2010

“While details are still emerging following Monday’s events at sea, there are several things we know with certainty. First, the loss of life is tragic and regrettable. Second, Israel has a right and responsibility to defend itself and its people. There is mounting evidence that the activists aboard the Mavi Marmara had questionable aims at best. The flotilla’s spokeswoman herself announced that, ‘This mission is not about delivering humanitarian supplies, it’s about breaking Israel’s siege,’ which would explain why the ship rebuffed offers to deliver humanitarian supplies over land through established procedures. Further there are increasing reports that the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), involved in organizing the flotilla, has ties to terrorism networks. Our own State Department spokesman acknowledged this week that representatives of the organization have met with senior Hamas officials in Turkey, Syria and Gaza in recent years. Predictably, there has been a rush to blame Israel at the United Nations and elsewhere around the world. The United States, which has long enjoyed a unique history with Israel based on our mutual commitment to democracy and our shared values, must stand against such efforts and continue to work toward lasting peace in the region, while pressing forward in our efforts to deny the regime in Iran nuclear capabilities.” *(Press Release)*