**The Flotilla Farce**

Whether they are from Turkey, Ireland or Cyprus, those that participate reek of hypocrisy.

By DANNY AYALON

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A couple of years ago, a Palestinian refugee camp was encircled and laid siege to by an army of tanks and Armored Personnel Carriers. Attacks initiated by Palestinian militants triggered an overwhelming response from the army that took the life of almost 500 people, including many civilians. International organizations struggled to send aid to the refugee camps, where the inhabitants were left without basic amenities like electricity and running water. During the conflict, six U.N. personnel were killed when their car was bombed.

Government ministers and spokesmen tried to explain to the international community that the Palestinian militants were backed by Syria and global jihadist elements. Al Qaeda condemned the government and the army, declaring that the attack was part of a "crusade" against their Palestinian brothers.

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A Palestinian refugee collects metal and plastic objects at a garbage dump in the Palestinian refugee camp of Beddawi near Tripoli.

While most will assume that the events described above took place in the West Bank or Gaza, they actually took place in Lebanon in the summer of 2007, when Palestinian terrorists attacked the Lebanese Army, which struck back with deadly force. The scene of most of the fighting was the Nahr al-Bared refugee camp in Northern Lebanon, which was home to the Islamist Fatah al-Islam, a group that has links with al Qaeda.

At the time, there was little international outcry. No world leader decried the "prison camps" in Lebanon. No demonstrations took place around the world; no U.N. investigation panels were created and little media attention was attracted. In fact, the plight of the Palestinians in Lebanon garners very little attention internationally.

Today, there are more than 400,000 Palestinians in Lebanon who are deprived of their most basic rights. The Lebanese government has a list of tens of professions that a Palestinian is forbidden from being engaged in, including professions such as medicine, law and engineering. Palestinians are forbidden from owning property and need a special permit to leave their towns. Unlike all other foreign nationals in Lebanon, they are denied access to the health-care system. According to Amnesty international, the Palestinians in Lebanon suffer from "discrimination and marginalization" and are treated like "second class citizens" and "denied their full range of human rights."

Amnesty also states that most Palestinian refugees in Lebanon have little choice but to live in overcrowded and deteriorating camps and informal gatherings that lack basic infrastructure.

In view of the worsening plight of the Palestinians in Lebanon, it is the height of irony that a Lebanese flotilla is organizing to leave the port of Tripoli in the next few days to bring aid to Palestinians in Gaza. According to one of the organizers, the participants are "united by a feeling of stark injustice."

This attitude exposes the dishonesty of the whole flotilla exercise. Whether it is from Turkey, Ireland or Cyprus, those that participate in these flotillas reek of hypocrisy. There are currently 100 armed conflicts and dozens of territorial disputes around the world. There have been millions of people killed and hundreds of millions live in abject poverty without access to basic staples. And yet hundreds of high-minded "humanitarian activists" are spending millions of dollars to reach Gaza and hand money to Hamas that will never reach the innocent civilians of Gaza.

This is the same Gaza that just opened a sparkling new shopping mall that would not look out of place in any capital in Europe. Gaza, where a new Olympic-sized swimming pool was recently inaugurated and five-star hotels and restaurants offer luxurious fare.

Markets brimming with all manner of foods dot the landscape of Gaza, where Lauren Booth, journalist and "human rights activist," was pictured buying chocolate and luxurious items from a well-stocked supermarket before stating with a straight face that the "situation in Gaza is a humanitarian crisis on the scale of Darfur."

No one claims that the situation in Gaza is perfect. Since the bloody coup and occupation by Hamas of Gaza in 2007, in which more than 100 Palestinians were killed, Israel has had no choice but to ensure that Hamas is not able to build up an Iranian port on the shores of the Mediterranean. Until Hamas meets the three standards laid out by the international community, namely renouncing violence, recognizing Israel's right to exist and abiding by previously signed agreements between Israel and the Palestinian Authority, Hamas will continue to be shunned by the international community.

While Israel's policy is to continue to see that all civilian needs are addressed, it can not allow Hamas to rearm and use Gaza as a base to attack Israel and beyond. For this reason, Israel initiated a blockade, fully legal under international law, to ensure that no items can be appropriated by Hamas to attack innocent civilians. Organizations that wish to join the U.N. and the Red Cross to deliver goods or aid to Gaza are welcome to do so through the Kerem Shalom crossing or even through Egyptian ports. Those that refuse and seek to break the legal blockade to boost Hamas are interested in provocation. If Israel allows these confrontational flotillas to successfully open up a shipping lane for arms smuggling for an Iranian proxy, then the region will suffer from continuous conflict. Actions that embolden the extremists will be at the cost of the moderates and this will pose a grave danger to moving the peace process forward.

The latest flotilla preparing to leave from Lebanon fully exposes not only the hypocrisy but the danger of these provocative vigilante flotillas. The Lebanese flotilla, whose organizers claim injustice while ignoring the dire human rights situation of the Palestinians in Lebanon, amply demonstrate that these flotillas have nothing to do with humanitarian concerns and everything to do with delegitimizing Israel.

*Mr. Ayalon is Israel's deputy minister of foreign affairs.*