

# Mocking the Gaza Flotilla

A small flotilla carrying human rights and peace activists to Israel-blockaded Gaza was itself blockaded in Greece after intense diplomatic pressure from Washington and Tel Aviv. But the Israeli news media continues to heap ridicule on the passengers. Two of them, retired U.S. Army Col. Ann Wright and Israeli-born Hagit Borer, respond.

By Ann Wright and Hagit Borer

Being, so to speak, of the “flotilla folk” ourselves, we read with some interest Roz Rothstein and Roberta Seid’s idle speculations in the Jerusalem Post on who our shipmates might have been, for idle speculations they certainly are, the writers having never contacted any of us.

In fact, at least when it comes to the American-flagged boat, *The Audacity of Hope*, we are not nearly as much of a mystery as one might imagine. Our biographies are all publicly posted at [www.ustogaza.org](http://www.ustogaza.org).

A perusal of our stories would reveal, among other things, that 58 percent of us are women and that our median age is 60.

Similar demographic patterns existed on other boats as well. Many are retired people; most with modest means. We are people willing to spend our savings to fly to Athens and stay there for weeks, doubled or tripled up in hotel rooms, waiting to sail to Gaza.

We are people who felt, who still feel, that we must make the time and find the means because struggling for justice is the moral thing to do. Because we have all come to believe, in the words of Howard Zinn, that “You Can’t Be Neutral on a Moving Train” all notions, one feels, that Rothstein and Seid view with a mixture of scorn and incredulity.

As Americans, many of us also feel our primary duty is to speak truth to precisely that power that purports to speak on our behalf a notion that is, likewise, rather alien to most Israeli-Jewish society, although by no means to Jews elsewhere.

A third of us, passengers and organizers of *The Audacity of Hope*, are Jews, representing a long and valiant tradition of Jewish progressive activism in the U.S., Europe, South America, South Africa and elsewhere.

What Rothstein and Seid have neglected to note (carried away as they were by their enthusiastic description of our Israel-Hating Syndrome) is that many

passengers on *The Audacity of Hope* have a long and distinguished record of anti-war activism.

They have been outspoken opponents of the American war in Vietnam; they have spoken against American involvement in Central America, and in the past decade, against wars the U.S. has waged on Iraq and Afghanistan.

Many have traveled numerous times to war-ravaged Baghdad and Afghanistan. Kathy Kelly, one of our passengers, traveled to Iraq 26 times!

No, we are definitely not like other folks, if by "other folks" Rothstein and Seid refer to themselves. Unlike Rothstein and Seid, we insist on remembering not only the 23 people killed by rockets from Gaza, but also the over 1,000 Palestinian civilians killed by Israel in Gaza in Operation Cast Lead. And the scores killed in Jenin, and those shot routinely in demonstrations in the West Bank.

Unlike folks such as Rothstein and Seid, we refuse to forget that 1.6 million people in Gaza have been living in an open-air prison for five years now, or that 2.6 million in the West Bank have been under military occupation for 44 years the longest military occupation in modern history, and a situation with absolutely no current parallels!

That we have turned our attention to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict in general and to the occupation and oppression of the Palestinians in particular derives directly from the understanding that these could not have survived without U.S. government support.

It is the U.S. government that has directly abetted Israel in its continuing dispossession of the Palestinians, and that has supported and protected Israel through its decades of refusal to enter meaningful negotiations.

Insofar as we are Americans, and insofar as our action is fundamentally political, it is intended to raise the awareness of our own people and to pressure our own government to change its course.

And yes, horrendous things are happening elsewhere in the world. Some on the flotilla have been very concerned about that. The IHH that organization which *The Jerusalem Post* links to jihadist groups has, in fact, interceded to support the Syrian refugees in Turkey, and delivered medicine and medical equipment to hospitals in al-Bayda and Benghazi in Libya.

How inconvenient for your case! But not to worry. One would be hard-pressed to find any trace of these facts in the mainstream Western or Israeli press.

Reading your derisive comments all intended to belittle the flotilla and its passengers it strikes us that the main question is not the one you pose, namely, who we are. Rather, a very different question comes to mind. Here we are, by your description a bunch of pathetic losers, misguided vacationers, professional activists and idealists who ran out of causes.

A grand total of 1,500 an overestimation to begin with and in actuality a lot less once the *Mavi Marmara* withdrew.

And yet, the State of Israel sees fit to keep us in the headlines for months with threats of attack dogs, snipers and anticipated deaths. Israel pulls out all stops in putting pressure on Mediterranean countries in general, and on Greece in particular, to make sure we don't leave port.

The Israeli ambassador to the UN, Ron Prosor, on June 22, called on the international community "to do everything in their ability in order to prevent the flotilla and warn citizens of their countries of the risks of participating in this type of provocation."

But if we are deluded losers, what does that make the State of Israel and its hysterical response? If 16 passengers on a small yacht off the coast of Gaza are bored vacationers with a mental disorder, what does that make the four fully armed gunboats confronting them?

The fact of the matter is that Israel, without any aid from us, provided our otherwise symbolic and rather small-scale effort with the overwhelming amplification that made it headline news in the rest of the world, and most crucially, it would appear from your article, an ongoing Israeli obsession.

While we wanted the plight of the Palestinians to be noticed by the world, we did not set out to have the flotilla become a major world event. That it has become one, however, became patently clear to us once Secretary of State Hillary Clinton saw fit to travel to Greece to deliver her heartfelt thanks to Greek Prime Minister George Papandreou for services rendered the stopping of our flotilla.

Frankly, we are grateful.

**Ann Wright is a retired U.S. Army Reserve colonel and former U.S. diplomat. Hagit Borer is a professor of linguistics at the University of Southern California.**

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# Norway's 'Christian' Killer

Christian nationalists, like confessed Norway mass-murderer Anders Breivik, insist that a violent defense of Christendom is needed to shield Western Christianity and its culture from encroachments by Muslims. But Gary G. Kohls writes that such ugly intolerance is an affront to Jesus's teachings of peace and forgiveness.

By Gary G. Kohls

Newspaper reports have provided intensive coverage of the horrific details of the mass murderer in Norway, with pictures and multiple interviews of the survivors and witnesses of the massacre of 80 or more defenseless adolescents at a summer camp for left-wing Labor Party youth.

The reports indicated that scores of young people had been methodically stalked and shot to death by a 32-year old (politically and theologically) professed Conservative Christian named Anders Breivik – a nationalist, a racist and a pro-violence xenophobe.

Breivik was a loner whose diplomat father divorced his mother when he was an infant and had very little to do with him after that. Breivik became a baptized Christian when he was 15, completed his compulsory military service (where he learned to handle firearms), went to college, joined a gun club, obsessively played first-person shooter videogames such as World of Warcraft, became a Mason and then, up until the shootings, lived with his mother in a wealthy suburb of Oslo.

He had started a small farm but this was a front operation to justify the purchase of 6 tons of ammonium nitrate fertilizer that he used to make the bomb that he detonated at the federal building in Oslo.

Despite having a master's degree in business administration (MBA), Breivik apparently failed at every business enterprise he attempted.

The police reports coming out of Oslo on July 22 stated that the shooter was a right-wing Christian Fundamentalist. The confessed murderer's Facebook page listed "Christian" as his religion and "Conservative" as his politics.

Breivik had been an active member, both as a youth and as a young adult, of the far-right-wing Progress Party (a political party, interestingly enough, with a platform quite similar to America's Tea Party).

According to Wikipedia, Norway's Progress Party began as a conservative anti-tax party advocating tax cuts (even to the point of abolishing the income tax), cutting government spending and privatizing schools, teachers and government functions like the civil service.

The party was vehemently anti-immigration, against federal tax subsidies and called for the abolition of Norway's state-sponsored, commercial-free public radio and television networks. The party also espouses increases in police power, law and order, a strong national defense and free-market conservative principles. Sounds like a match to me.

Quoting from the UK's Telegraph.uk.com, Breivik at one time had *"called for the formation of a 'cultural Euro-Tea Party', referring to the grass-roots right-wing organisation in the US supported by Sarah Palin."*

Tea Party rallies in America are famous for the presence of angry white men carrying handguns accusing President Barack Obama of being a left-wing socialist or a right-wing fascist.

According to a video that Breivik released just before his murder rampage, the major issue for him was the multiculturalism and socialist leanings of the ruling Labor Party- what conservatives in Norway regard as a too-generous immigration policy, especially for Muslims.

The frightening video can be accessed at:

<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/norway/8657669/Norway-shootings-Anders-Behring-Breiviks-YouTube-video-posted-hours-before-killings.html>

One blogger commented about the story, *"A bitter, white, right-wing, fundamentalist Christian gun-nut who hates liberals and babbles about Islam and Marxists. Good thing we don't have anybody like that in our country."*

It should come as no surprise that many political observers have compared the Progress Party of Norway to the neo-fascist Freedom Party of Austria (FPÖ), the British Nationalist Party (BNP) and LaPen's National Front Party of France.

The extreme right-wing agendas are essentially the same and the parties enjoy substantial numbers of supporters.

Breivik's 1,500 page manifesto, which he titled "Knights Templar 2083," made frequent references to the Christian Crusades and the infamous Knights Templar, a Roman Catholic order of warrior monks, that, for 200 years (from 1119 CE to 1312 CE), was the most fierce military killing machine in Christendom.

The Knights Templar initially exerted their power against Muslims in the Middle

East following the First Crusade which began in 1099 CE.

The “holy warriors” of the First Crusade, incidentally, were the ones that drew first blood against Islam and started the centuries-long feud that is still ongoing today. The First Crusade ended with a wholesale massacre and torturing of tens of thousands of Muslims and Jewish “infidels,” both of whom had been co-existing nicely in Jerusalem.

The final act of the First Crusade was a literal bloodbath at Jerusalem’s Temple of Solomon. Witnesses described the blood from the victims of the slaughter being ankle deep.

When pilgrims to the Holy Land during later Crusades to retake Jerusalem needed armed protection from the Muslims who wanted revenge, the Vatican organized “the Poor Knights of Christ of the Temple of Solomon” (aka the Knights Templar) and the pope at the time gave buildings on the Temple Mount to the Templars.

Known for their white tunics bearing a red cross, the Knights Templar eventually acquired immense wealth and political power, becoming international bankers and allies of kings and popes. They are often regarded as the world’s first multinational corporation,

The Templars were also highly trained professional killers who lived by the sword and typically died by the sword. Eventually, rivals broke the organization up and its members were convicted of heresy, some burned at the stake. What happened to the legendary wealth of this secret group became the subject of much speculation.

At any rate, the story of the mass murderer Breivik, today’s self-styled Templar, will have much to teach us in the coming months. His politics of hate seems to be fairly well described, but his theology of hate still needs clarification.

Certainly this killer is a pseudo-Christian or at least not a follower of the teachings of Jesus in the gospels. But there are many professed Christians out there who espouse the same disdain for multiculturalism, tolerance, the Golden Rule and Jesus’s clear teachings about forgiveness, mercy, nonviolence and the unconditional love of friends and enemies.

So we need to be diligent. There may be more psychopathic, pro-violent types with pseudo-Christian beliefs out there than we care to acknowledge.

**Gary G. Kohls is a founding member of Every Church A Peace Church.**

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# Palestine's Bid for Recognition

With Israeli-Palestinian peace talks going nowhere and Israel still counting on the unqualified support of the United States a diplomatic clash is shaping up at the United Nations in September as Palestinians push for UN recognition of their own state. But Lawrence Davidson questions whether that is the right option.

By Lawrence Davidson

On July 26, Robert Serry, the United Nations Special Coordinator for the Middle East peace process, appeared before the UN Security Council. Mr. Serry, a career Dutch diplomat, had led the Middle Eastern Affairs Division of the Dutch Foreign Ministry. There is every reason to believe that he knows what he is talking about.

He told the Security Council that the "peace process," that is the political process allegedly seeking a negotiated settlement of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, had reached a stage of "profound and persistent deadlock." Attempts to resume negotiations are "extremely difficult," he said.

And, "in the absence of a framework for meaningful talks, and with Israeli settlement activity continuing, the Palestinians are actively exploring approaching the UN." That is, actively considering asking for UN recognition of Palestine as a sovereign state within pre-1967 borders.

Mr. Serry's description of the negotiations seems pretty straightforward. The two sides are stalemated.

And, as the Palestinian negotiator Saeb Erekat noted, this stalemate follows negotiations that have stretched out over at least 20 years. Indeed, we know that in the most recent phase of these marathon negotiations the Palestinian team had dropped just about all of their original demands.

Erekat told U.S. Middle East envoy George Mitchell that the Palestinian negotiators had done everything but "convert to Zionism." And yet, the Israelis scorned the Palestinian's offered compromises.

As Mr. Serry indicated, Israel's settlement of Palestinian land continues. In fact throughout this entire 20 year process, colonization has gone on unabated. And, of course, all of it is illegal under the Geneva Conventions.

One of the reasons that restarting any negotiations is so "extremely difficult" is that the Palestinian side has insisted that, as a prerequisite for any new

talks, Israel must begin to abide by international law. Israel has refused.

So it might come as something of a surprise to the uninitiated observer that Israel and the United States are pointing fingers at the Palestinians in this affair.

For instance, Israeli Ambassador to the United Nations Ron Prosor stated in the Security Council on July 26 that “now is the time for the international community to tell the Palestinian leadership what it refuses to tell its own people there are no shortcuts to statehood. You cannot bypass the only path to peace.”

For the initiated this statement makes no sense at all. If 20 years of negotiating gets you nothing but more violence and more theft, to describe that process as the “only path to peace” is to contradict yourself.

Something that has proven incapable of achieving X, cannot be the “only path” to X. Just so, to say that there can be no shortcuts to X and therefore one must persist along a road that has historically proven not lead to X is, well, a non-sequitur.

Israel’s staunch ally, the United States, also opposes, with equal illogic, the Palestinian move toward UN recognition.

Rosemary DiCarlo, the US deputy ambassador to the UN, announced that the U.S. will oppose any “unilateral action” on the part of the Palestinians at the UN. She interpreted the Palestinian move as an effort to “isolate Israel at the United Nations.” She insisted that the Palestinians resume negotiations.

In response to DiCarlo, Riyad Mansour, Palestine’s UN observer, pointed out that “120 countries already recognize an independent Palestinian state” and so coming to the UN is hardly a “unilateral” action on the part of the Palestinians. He went on to explain that UN recognition of a Palestinian state at this time would be “the consecration of the the two-state solution” and help make that solution more inevitable.

Unfortunately for Mansour, his words belie the fact that Israel has no intention of allowing a meaningful two-state solution. In fact, all this Palestinian National Authority (PNA) talk and maneuvering goes on against the backdrop of a stark reality: Israel is inexorably eating up Palestine.

The reason decades of negotiation have settled nothing is because they were meant to settle nothing. The Israelis from the word go used the “peace process” as a cover to steal Palestinian property. They are close now to being able to

present the world with a fait accompli, those ugly “facts on the ground” and they don’t want any complications.

What sort of complications? Actually, these are more psychological than concrete.

As Ali Abunimah has pointed out the United Nations has never done anything to stop Israeli theft and this “symbolic” gesture of UN recognition will not impact it either. So why should the Israelis care?

Well, here are a couple of possibilities: a) such a move toward recognition on the part of the UN General Assembly would actually replicate the process by which Israel itself became recognized as a state and b) this move would also echo the original intention of the UN to have Palestine divided between Jews and Arabs.

Psychologically, the entire process must resonate deeply within Israeli/Zionist consciousness. It is giving them a sort of national anxiety attack.

## **Alternatives**

Leaving aside Israel’s psychological angst and the Palestine National Authority’s [PNA] fantasy that their maneuvers will make a viable solution “inevitable,” we come back to the question of what is really most likely to work in the long term? I think that we have to confront some hard truths at this point.

–Israel will continue to illegally swallow Palestine. For the Zionists this is a zero-sum, one-state game.

–The United States will continue to be an accomplice to the crime by protecting the criminal.

–The PNA is helpless to stop this.

–Sadly, the peace process is a fraud. A cover for the on-going crime.

So what is the path of resistance that has the greatest chance of changing the facts on the ground?

Well there is Hamas, which is, in fact, the real government in Palestine if we are to take seriously the notion of democracy. That was confirmed by its victory in free-and-fair elections in January 2006. That makes Hamas a lot more legitimate than the present PNA and as legitimate as the Israeli government.

True, Hamas refuses to recognize Israel and would destroy the Zionist state if it could. But then Israel refuses to recognize Hamas and is, in fact, trying to destroy it. Both governments have used terrorist methods, though Israel has used them more consistently.

In the end, the real issue is, once more, one of power. Hamas cannot destroy Israel. Ultimately Israel can destroy Hamas. As an option for long-term success, for changing the facts on the ground, Hamas does not look like the answer.

That brings us back to BDS: boycott, divestment and sanctions. The Israeli historian and advocate of Palestinian rights, Ilan Pappé, has pointed out that BDS as part and parcel of an overall “civil society struggle in support of Palestinian rights has been successful in key European countries.”

There can be little doubt that public opinion is shifting away from Israel even in the heartland of Zionist influence, the United States. The aim of this movement is to replicate with Israel the process that brought apartheid South Africa to its knees.

And, through this process, to actually realize a one-state solution for Palestine. Not, of course, the one state solution the Israelis seek, but rather a new state of Palestine/Israel that offers “equality and prosperity for all the people who live there now or were expelled from it by force in the last 63 years.”

In my opinion there is actually a good chance that a worldwide BDS movement, growing steadily for say the next quarter century, can actually achieve the de-Zionization of Israel. On the other hand, creating “equality” and “prosperity” in the new state that results will have its own problems, but that is a different struggle for a different time.

Right now, Ali Abunimah is right, UN recognition of Palestine as a pseudo-state on the West Bank and Gaza Strip will solve nothing and may well cause more problems for the Palestinians on the ground.

Alternatively, Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions within the context of increasing worldwide awareness of Israel’s essential racist nature shows real promise of results in the long term.

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