

# Israel Is Fueling Anti-Americanism Among U.S. Allies

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The attack in the international waters of the Mediterranean in the early hours of May 31 by an elite force of the Israeli navy on the Turkish – flagged Mavi Marmara civilian ferry crammed with more than 700 international activists, including several Americans, carrying 100 tonnes of cargo including concrete, medicines and children’s toys, and leading five smaller vessels of the Free Gaza Flotilla, which left eight Turks and a U.S. citizen of Turkish origin dead and wounded several others, has cornered the United States in a defensive diplomatic position to contain the regional and international fallout of the military fiasco of the “Operation Sky Wind” its Israeli regional ally launched against the flotilla; it “puts the United States in an extremely difficult position,” Marina Ottaway wrote in a report published by [Carnegie Endowment for International Peace](#) on May 31.

Containing angry Arab reaction and adverse repercussions on Arab – U.S. relations was most likely on the agenda of U.S. Vice President Joe Biden’s meeting with Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in the Red Sea resort of Sharm el-Sheikh on Monday. However Biden is the least qualified to allay Arab anger for being the most vocal among U.S. officials in “legitimizing” Israel’s blunder. The Gaza flotilla episode has dispelled the benefit of doubt the Arab allies have given to President Barak Obama’s promises of change in U.S. foreign policy in their region. To regain Arab confidence it needs more than U.S. official visits whether by Biden or by a better choice because at the end of the day politics is not about “good intentions”, but is rather about “good deeds,” according to the Egyptian veteran political analyst Fahmy Howeidy.

Despite a pronounced belief to the contrary by U.S. Senator Kerry, the Chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, the head of Israel’s Mossad, Meir Dagan, was more to the point when he said last week that “Israel is gradually turning from an asset to the United States to a burden.” Earlier this year CENTCOM Commander General David Petraeus told the Senate Armed Services Committee that “Arab anger over the Palestinian question limits the strength and depth of U.S. partnerships with governments and peoples in CENTCOM’s area of operations and weakens the legitimacy of moderate regimes in the Arab world.” Israel seems determined to complicate Petraeus’ mission further.

Washington has found its diplomacy faced with an Israeli fait accompli to be involuntarily embroiled in what the Israeli media harshly criticized as a tactical failure, which engulfed the U.S. administration in the roaring Arab and Muslim anger to be accused of being a partner to the Israeli adventure, thus fueling anti – Americanism in the same arena where the administration is doing its best to defuse and contain the anti – Americanism that was escalated by the invasion of Iraq in 2003, i.e. among U.S. regional allies. Once more, the Free Gaza Flotilla episode “will raise questions —not for the first time—over whether (Israeli Prime Minister Binyamin) Netanyahu can be a dependable partner for the United States,”

Michele Dunne wrote in a Carnegie Endowment report.

Ironically, the fiasco of the Israeli “Operation Sky Wind” has created a snowballing conflict not between Israel and its self-proclaimed arch enemy Iran, but with Turkey, traditionally Israel’s only regional friend, a key regional power, a NATO member, a U.S. ally and a hopeful of EU membership, as well as with the U.S. – allied camp of Arab and Palestinian moderates, whom both Israel and the United States endeavor to recruit in a unified anti – Iran front and who are their partners in the U.S. – sponsored Arab – Israeli “peace process, which Washington is now weighing in heavily to resume its Palestinian – Israeli track.

Israel is not making U.S. life easier in the region. “That’s it, Israel. Put your best friend on the spot, with stupid acts of belligerency, when hundreds of its sons and daughters are dying fighting your avowed enemy. It is time Israel realized that it has obligations to the United States,” wrote Anthony Cordesman, an analyst at the mainstream Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington (CSIS). Stephen Walt, a Harvard international-relations professor and co-author of the 2007 book, “The Israel Lobby and U.S. Foreign Policy,” agreed. Professor of International Relations at New York University, Alon Ben Meir, concluded in *American Diplomacy* on May 10th: “The Netanyahu government seems to miss-assess the changing strategic interests of the United States in the Middle East, especially in the wake of the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.”

However official Washington so far acts and speaks in a way that would contain adverse fallout of the Free Gaza Flotilla episode on bilateral relations with Israel, otherwise it would make a bad situation worse if one is to remember that the episode made Netanyahu cancel a summit meeting with Obama – after he was forced to cut short his visit to Canada – that was scheduled specifically to mend bilateral fences. But the motion which was unusually “personally” presented to the Israeli Knesset by the opposition leader, Tzipi Livni, for a no-confidence vote in Netanyahu’s government on Monday because, as she said, “the current government doesn’t represent the State of Israel to the world” and hurts “ties with the United States” made public what the U.S. administration has been trying to keep away from the spotlights. Trying to defuse the repercussions of Israel’s blunder, the U.S. leaned on Israel “quite a lot” to release hundreds of Turkish peace activists who were on board of Mavi Marmara, Turkey’s Deputy Under Secretary for public diplomacy Selim Yenel told *The Jerusalem Post* on Thursday. Fueling anti – Americanism among Arabs and Muslims is absolutely not in the interests of the United States, but this is exactly what current Israeli policies boil down to. Soaring Israeli – U.S. relations further was the first casualty of the Israeli attack.

Disrupting U.S. regional strategic plans was the second U.S. interest threatened by the attack. Both sides of the Arab and Turkish – U.S. alliance find themselves now on the opposite side of the Arab – Israeli conflict, which was on the verge of an historic breakthrough on the basis of the U.S. – sponsored so –called “two – state solution”, which enjoys the support of the major world powers thanks only to all of them being on the same side. The U.S. – led Middle East camp seems now fractured and divided. The opposite camp led by Iran and Syria seems more confident and united. The U.S. position is weaker and their stance is stronger. Washing seems to loose the initiative in the region to its adversaries thanks to Israel initiating a conflict with U.S. moderate allies. For Israel and its U.S. advocates this should flash a red light.

In this context, U.S. presidential peace envoy to the region, George Mitchell, who

unfortunately was already in the region trying, unsuccessfully yet, to overcome the adverse reaction of these same allies to other Israeli blunders, should have lamented his Israeli bad luck and regretted his mission. General Secretary of the Arab League, Amr Mousa, said that “everything” is now left “hanging in the air,” including mainly the Palestinian – Israeli “proximity talks,” the focus of Mitchell’s mission.

In the wider context, the emergency meeting of the Arab foreign ministers in Cairo on June 2 was in direct opposition to the U.S. stance vis-à-vis the Israeli attack, in terminology, perspective and demands, but specially as regards the U.S. – Israeli justifications for continuing the blockade of Gaza. To make their message for lifting the siege clear, Mousa was scheduled to visit Gaza next week. Without naming the U.S., they stressed that the continued support to Israel “by some states” and giving “immunity” to its disrespect of international law “in a precedent that threatens the whole international system .. is a big political mistake.” They reiterated that the Arab Peace Initiative “will not remain on the table for long.” 60 percent of Arabs now believe Obama is too weak to deliver a peace agreement, according to a recent poll conducted by YouGov and quoted by The Christian Science monitor on June 4.

The Arab hard core of the U.S. assets of moderates is the six-nation Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC); in a statement, they condemned the attack as an act of “state terrorism.” Kuwait, a member, stands among them as an instructive example of how Israel is fueling anti – Americanism. This country which hosts some twenty thousand U.S. troops on reportedly one third of its territory in support of the U.S. – led “Operation Iraqi freedom” had sixteen of its citizens on board of the Israeli – attacked Mavi Marmara. In response, in a vote by consensus the Kuwaiti parliament in which the cabinet ministers are members recommended withdrawal from the Arab Peace Initiative. With Iran across the Gulf and the explosive situation across its northern borders with Iraq, the echo of General Petraeus’ warning reverberates louder here.

Thirdly, the Israeli attack has split the Turkish and U.S. NATO allies into opposite sides of the international ensuing divide. Ankara found itself in a head to head diplomatic clash not with Israel, but with the U.S. in the United Nations Security Council, the Geneva – based UN Human Rights Council and the emergency meeting of NATO, where Washington acted as Israel’s mouthpiece and attorney. Turkey is now for the first time experiencing the U.S. double standards and pro – Israel biased policy, which the Arabs have been victims for decades. It might be interesting to note here that both Turkey and Greece, two U.S. and NATO allies, have set aside their historical hostility to each other to publicly disagree with the U.S. in their defense of breaking the Israeli siege of Gaza. “The US response to Israel’s disproportionate use of violence against innocent civilians constitutes a test case for US credibility in the Middle East,” wrote Suat Kiniklioglu, the Turkish ruling party’s deputy chairman.

In the same Carnegie Endowment’s report, director of the Middle East Program Marina Ottaway expected potential adverse repercussions beyond the Middle East. “In addition to the predictable Arab reaction, ... there has been a harsher than normal response from European countries. This could potentially reopen U.S. tensions with Europe that developed during the Iraq war and have slowly begun to heal under the Obama administration,” she wrote.

How could any sensible observer interpret this adverse fallout on U.S. foreign relations and on Arab and Turkish – U.S. relations in particular as only the result of bad luck or an

unintentional Israeli tactical mistake? The only other interpretation to justify Israel's resort to bloody force is that Israel could no more tolerate a regional united Turkish, Arab and U.S. peace front, supported by the world community.

By aborting an international peace mission sponsored by moderate Arab and regional states, Israel sends a clear message that it wants them out of the game and prefers instead to deal only with pro - violence players, which vindicates a popular Arab belief, established over decades of the conflict, that Israel understands only the language of force.

Israel knows very well that its belligerency has been all along the main source of regional anti - Americanism. The U.S. knows it too. Repercussions of the Israeli attack seem to hit at the heart of what President Obama in mid - April declared as a "vital national security interest of the United States," i.e. solving the Arab - Israeli conflict. By escalating militarily and responding disproportionately, the extremist right - wing government of Israel is premeditatedly acting with open eyes to preempt the evolution of a united regional and international front in consensus on a two -state solution for the conflict; the best way to split the already burgeoning consensus is to fuel regional anti - Americanism as a tested ploy to disintegrate whatever Arab, Turkish and U.S. front might develop to pressure it into yielding to the dictates of peace.

U.S. traditional pro - Israel diplomacy has been all along playing in the hands of Israeli extremists, but this time against declared strategic U.S. interests. Nonetheless, Washington acts as if on intent to pursue a self - defeating policy; its biased foreign policy and double standards are antagonizing regional allies, but more importantly contributing to Israel's fueling of regional anti - Americanism.

Iran had no role whatsoever in the peaceful mission of the Gaza free Flotilla. Spotlight was kept focused on major Turkish, Arab and European civilian peace activists, who came from Europe, United States, Australia, and Turkey; major Arab input came from Kuwait, Algeria, Jordan, Lebanon and Yemen, all of them U.S. allies. Even Syria, which is accused of being an ally of Iran, has kept relatively a low profile in the whole episode and had no role in the mission either, although it spearheaded the opposition to the U.S. role in the aftermath during the emergency meeting in Cairo of the Arab foreign ministers. Israel could in no way authentically claim the flotilla mission had any Iran connection to justify its high seas blunder. Neither the organizers would allow any such role. Co-founder of the Free Gaza Movement's 69-year-old U.S.-born engineer, Greta Berlin, was quoted by AP on June 4 as saying the group has shunned donation offers from Iran and said the group doesn't accept donations from radical groups or states. Similarly, the de facto government of Hamas in Gaza has shunned a suggestion by the commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards to provide "protection" for future similar flotillas.

*Nicola Nasser is a veteran Arab journalist based in Bir Zeit, West Bank of the Israeli - occupied Palestinian territories.*

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