

A photograph of a large white boat, the "Mavi Marmara", docked at a port at night. The boat is illuminated from within, and its name is visible on the hull. The surrounding area is dark, with lights from buildings and street lamps reflected in the water.

Slow Boat to Gaza

RAY McGOVERN TELLS OF
THE EFFORTS OF A SMALL GROUP
OF AMERICANS TO BREAK
ISRAEL'S SIEGE OF GAZA



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ColdType.

Ray McGovern, a veteran army officer and former CIA analyst, tells of the efforts of the US Boat “Audacity of Hope,” part of the international “Freedom Flotilla II: Stay Human,” which attempted to break the siege of Gaza in late June, which was stopped and prevented from sailing by Greek authorities under intense pressure from Washington and Tel Aviv. McGovern works with Tell the Word, a publishing arm of the ecumenical Church of the Saviour in inner-city Washington

Photographs by Len Tsou, Laurie Arbeiter and other passengers and ground crew on the Audacity of Hope.

These essays originally appeared at www.consortiumnews.com

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ColdType

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Slow Boat to Gaza

The Audacity of Hope in a Greek military dock after being impounded by coastguards.

MAY 19, 2011

An open letter to President Obama

Dear Mr. President:

Your speech on the Middle East earlier today emboldens me to claim your protection as we set out to put flesh on your rhetoric. Fifty of your fellow citizens will be sailing on "The Audacity of Hope" to Gaza next month.

You spoke eloquently today about "times in the course of history when the action of ordinary citizens spark movements for change because they speak to a longing for freedom that has been building up for years." And you lamented "failure to speak to the broader aspirations of ordinary people."

We, the passengers and crew of "The Audacity of Hope," sailing to Gaza in June together with the 2nd International Freedom Flotilla, represent ordinary

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With respect to the situation in Gaza, perhaps you will agree that it hardly suffices to bemoan the fate of one "Palestinian who lost three daughters to Israeli shells in Gaza," who, as you put it, has a "right to feel angry"

Americans determined to speak to the aspirations of the 1.5 million ordinary Gazans yearning to be free.

We will be delivering thousands of letters of support and friendship from other ordinary Americans who are persuaded, as Dr. King put it, that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

I write you for assurance of your support and protection as we try to embody your rhetoric. You emphasized that "the United States supports a set of universal rights," and that this US support is "not a secondary interest." It is, rather, "a top priority that must be translated into concrete actions."

Bold words. With respect to the situation in Gaza, though, perhaps you will agree that it hardly suffices to bemoan the fate of one "Palestinian who lost three daughters to Israeli shells in Gaza," who, as you put it, has a "right to feel angry."

That Palestinian and his dead daughters are four, but 1,400 Gazans were killed

by Israeli forces in December 1998-January 1999 – and 1.5 million Gazans remain deprived of the universal rights of which you spoke.

Gaza is a sequestered, crowded open-air prison, in which Israel keeps “inmates” at a subsistence level of existence. This amounts to the kind of collective punishment banned by international law and is enforced by an equally illegal Israeli naval blockade.

Many Americans have long been puzzled that you choose to exempt Gazans from your concern about universal rights, and have tired of waiting for a cogent explanation. So we ask you to look upon our voyage to Gaza as our attempt to implement your rhetoric about what ordinary citizens can do – not only to “speak” but to act to meet the broader aspirations of the ordinary people of Gaza.

On May 20, you will have an opportunity to inform Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of our intention to sail to Gaza next month. You have probably already been briefed on Israel’s far-flung diplomatic and propaganda offensive to prevent our boat and the other boats of the international flotilla from embarking for Gaza.

Indeed, the Israelis may be emboldened by your lack of response to the killing of nine passengers, including an American citizen, on the 2010 relief flotilla and the wounding of dozens of other peaceful passengers. This year we expect you to speak up for us beforehand.

And please do not try to pretend that \$3 billion of our taxes – our annual gift to Israel – cannot be translated into the kind of leverage that will spare “The Audacity of Hope” from harm at the hands of the “Israeli Defense Forces.”

Finally, allow me to suggest talking points not likely to be included in your

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briefing papers. These points transcend rhetoric and spring from a faith heritage you share with Netanyahu. They deal with the doing of justice, the preoccupation of the prophets of the Judeo-Christian tradition.

Before your meeting, have a look at what Isaiah says about “proclaiming liberty to captives and release to prisoners” and how Jesus of Nazareth repeats that, word for word, eight centuries later. Think about it, and be prepared to put justice above politics.

Please let us – and the world – know how the discussion goes.

Yours truly,
Ray McGovern

JUNE 18, 2011

Gaza and American ‘Security’

Stuffing my backpack before setting out to board “The Audacity of Hope,” the US boat to Gaza, I got a familiar call from yet another puzzled friend, who said as gently as the words allow, “You know you can get killed, don’t you?”

I recognize this caution as an expression of genuine concern from friends. From some others – who don’t care about Gaza’s plight or who do not wish us well – the words are phrased somewhat differently: “Aren’t you just asking for it?”

That was the obligatory question/accusation at the end of a recent interview taped for a BBC-TV special scheduled to air this coming week as we put to sea to break – or at least draw attention to – Israel’s illegal blockade of Gaza and the suffering it inflicts on the people there.

I also have been cautioned by a source

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Passengers ready to board the Audacity of Hope.

with access to very senior staffers at the National Security Council that not only does the White House plan to do absolutely nothing to protect our boat from Israeli attack or illegal boarding, but that White House officials "would be happy if something happened to us."

They are, I am reliably told, "perfectly willing to have the cold corpses of activists shown on American TV."

I mention this informal warning for the benefit of anyone who may have harbored hope that the US government would do something to protect us American citizens from the kind of violence used by the Israelis against last year's flotilla. Better to be up front and realistic about what to expect.

Two millennia ago, "Civus Romanus Sum" automatically won lawful treat-

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Americans are put in harm's way by the view held by millions around the world that the United States is partly responsible for the injustices and the humiliations that Palestinians face daily

ment and free passage for Roman citizens in trouble. It was a matter of pride and a benefit of being part of a powerful empire.

Today, the contrast could hardly be clearer. It is sad fact that "Civus Americanus Sum" would engender laughter, rather than respect, if invoked by those of us working on behalf of justice for the Palestinians.

Americans also face the reality that they are put in harm's way by the view held by millions around the world – and especially in the Middle East – that the United States is partly responsible for the injustices and the humiliations that Palestinians face daily.

As I make my final preparations, let me turn around the question/warning to me about safety and direct it to those

who won't be onboard "The Audacity of Hope":

"You know you can get killed, don't you?" – if the US government continues to enable Israel in keeping a million and a half Gazans in a densely populated open-air prison with few prospects for a normal life.

The longer that goes on the more likely it becomes that many more Americans will become the target of terrorists seeking to inflict some pain on the great power that stands behind Israel whatever it does.

Suicide Bombings

We already know of two suicide bombs famously targeted against Americans that can be traced to outrage at US support for Israeli oppression in Gaza.

The 290 people aboard Northwest Flight 253 were spared on Christmas Day 2009 when the "underwear bomber" was prevented from setting off an explosive over Detroit. A week later, seven CIA officials were not as lucky. They were killed by a suicide bomber in eastern Afghanistan.

In recent interviews about Gaza and about my reasons for going on "The Audacity of Hope," I have called attention to the oft-repeated biblical admonition to show special concern for the widow, the orphan, the refugee.

All too often, I have watched eyes glaze over and overheard muted comments regarding what planet I might be coming from. For most folks, such concern or compassion, if any, seems to stop at the water's edge. After all, the widow, the orphan, the refugee might be a "terrorist."

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Americans have been so desensitized by years of the government's multi-colored "terror" warnings and protestations from politicians that nothing is more important than the safety of the American people that most citizens utter not a murmur as they watch their tax dollars enable the worst kinds of brutality abroad.

Or they train themselves NOT to watch, preferring the diversion of late-breaking news on Congressman Anthony Wiener's photogenic "junk."

It is mostly to such folks that I include the facts that follow, acknowledging that many of you readers are likely to be quite familiar with some or all of them.

It is for the non-readers, like perhaps those in your family or your neighbors, that I feel a need to make one more effort to expose the reality that by turning a blind eye to Israeli brutality in Gaza, our government and our media make Americans a great deal LESS safe and secure.

I am guessing that only a direct, fact-based appeal has much chance of prompting many Americans to push – if only out of self-interest – for a more utilitarian, and at the same time more moral, approach to the festering wound of Gaza.

The Fawning Corporate Media (FCM) will not array the facts as they should be arrayed (if they mention them at all). And, of course, that goes in spades for TV "news." Yet, it is not difficult to connect the dots, once you learn what they are.

What follows is intended for people like the fellow who flipped an obscene gesture at me after reading my bumper sticker that says simply, "God Bless the Rest of the World Too."

It is for those who choose to express

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Author Alice Walker displays one of the letters being taken to the entrapped residents of Gaza.



Before the boat's 'arrest' by Greek coastguards: Ray McGovern with Henry Norr, a California journalist,

their exclusive concern for just one segment of humanity by chanting "USA, USA" It is for those who have never heard of, or blithely reject, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s wise admonition that "injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere."

Little Known Facts

- Israel itself helped to create Hamas in 1987 as a Muslim fundamentalist, divide-and-conquer counterweight to the secular Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO).
- The bulk of Hamas's popular ap-

“Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere”



Passenger Megan Horan smiles beneath her message of love.

peal – like that enjoyed by Hezbollah in Lebanon – stems not from the crude rockets fired toward Israel, but rather from the tangible help they give to oppressed Palestinians.

And don't take my word for it. Here's what James Clapper, Director of National Intelligence, included as a sort of afterthought at the end of his 34-page "Worldwide Threat Assessment" before the House Intelligence Committee on Feb. 10, completely missed, for some reason, by the FCM:

"We see a growing proliferation of state and non-state actors providing medi-

cal assistance to reduce foreign disease threats to their own populations, garner influence with affected local populations, and project power regionally. . . .

"In some cases, countries use health to overtly counter Western influence, presenting challenges to allies and our policy interests abroad over the long run.

"In last year's threat assessment, the Intelligence Community noted that extremists may take advantage of a government's inability to meet the health needs of its population, highlighting that HAMAS's and Hizballah's provision of health and social services in the Palestinian Territories and Lebanon helped to legitimize those organizations as a political force.

"This also has been the case with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt."

I hope readers were not shocked by the diabolically clever way these "terrorist" movements garner public support by providing people life-saving medical care.

- It was on that public-service record (and also because of wide awareness of flagrant corruption in the PLO), that Hamas won a key parliamentary election in January 2006, defeating the PLO-affiliated Fatah party. While the election results were not disputed, they were not what the US, Israel, and Europe wanted. So the US and the EU cut off financial assistance to Gaza.

- Confidential documents, corroborated by former US officials, show that thereupon the White House had the CIA try in 2007, with the help of Fatah strongman Muhammad Dahlan, to defeat Hamas in a bloody civil war. That, too, did not go as expected. Hamas won handily, leaving it stronger than ever. (See "The Gaza Bombshell" by David Rose, in Vanity Fair, April 2008, for the entire sad story.)

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It is no secret that Israel enjoys financial (\$3 billion per year), military and virtually unquestioned political support from Washington

- Israel and Egypt then imposed a full blockade, completing a process begun 20 years earlier and reducing Gazans to a bare subsistence level and 45% unemployment..

- From Dec. 27, 2008, to Jan. 18, 2009, while President George W. Bush was a lame duck, Israel launched an armed attack on Gaza, killing about 1,400 Gazans compared to an Israeli death toll of 13. Israel's stated aim was to stop rocket fire into Israel and block any arms deliveries to Gaza. President-elect Barack Obama said nothing.

Guilt by Association

The United States is widely seen as responsible for Israel's aggressive behavior, which is hardly surprising. It is no secret that Israel enjoys financial (\$3 billion per year), military and virtually unquestioned political support from Washington.

What is surprising, in the words of widely respected Salon.com commentator Glenn Greenwald, is "how our blind, endless enabling of Israeli actions fuels terrorism directed at the US," and how it is taboo to point this out.

Take, for example, former CIA specialist on al-Qaeda, Michael Scheuer, who had the audacity to state on C-SPAN: "For anyone to say that our support for Israel doesn't hurt us in the Muslim world . . . is to just defy reality."

The Likud Lobby had already succeeded in getting Scheuer fired from his job at the Jamestown Foundation think tank for his forthrightness, and the Israeli media condemned his C-SPAN remarks as "blatantly anti-Semitic." There can be a high price to pay for candor on this neuralgic issue.

Yet, perhaps the most flagrant and egregious example of this syndrome is the unprecedently brief career – six

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To Gaza With Love: The Audacity of Hope prepares to leave harbour.

hours – of former Ambassador Chas Freeman as chair of the National Intelligence Council.

On the morning of March 10, 2009, Director of National Intelligence Dennis Blair welcomed Freeman to the job overseeing US intelligence analysis and praised his “long experience and inventive mind.” That afternoon, the White House succumbed to pressure from the Likud Lobby and told Blair that Freeman had to go.

Foreign policy analyst Chris Nelson described the imbroglio as a reflection of the “deadly power game on what level of support for controversial Israeli government policies is a ‘requirement’ for US public office.”

Freeman’s credentials were impeccable. He was not only widely regarded as one of the very brightest foreign policy specialists around but had this weird addiction to speaking truth to power. He also would not bow to the Likud Lobby.

That was simply unacceptable. After all, Freeman might have braced the President with the reality of how Wash-

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It was a brutal offensive, by any reasonable standard, but one that was defended in Washington as justifiable self-defense

ton’s blind support for Israeli behavior is risking American lives.

Let’s move at this point from the general to the specific, and show how Israeli attacks on Gaza and oppression of its inhabitants, have inspired a number of anti-American terrorist acts – with more and bigger to follow as the night the day.

Christmas Day Bomber

Remember Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab who almost downed Northwest Flight 253 over Detroit on Dec. 25, 2009? What was his motive and how was this 23-year-old Nigerian of privilege persuaded to do the bidding – however amateurishly – of al-Qaeda in the Persian Gulf?

An Associated Press report quoted Abdulmutallab’s Yemeni friends to the effect that he was actually “not overtly extremist.” They pointed out, however, that he was angry over Israel’s wanton slaughter of more 1,400 Gazans a year before.

It was a brutal offensive, by any reasonable standard, but one that was defended in Washington as justifiable self-defense.

Nor was Abdulmutallab the only terrorist motivated by the carnage in Gaza. When the Saudi and Yemeni branches of al-Qaeda announced that they were uniting into “al-Qaeda of the Arabian Peninsula,” their combined rhetoric railed against the Israeli attack on Gaza.

And how does a 32-year old Jordanian medical doctor, Humam Khalil Abu Mu-lal al-Balawi, from a family of Palestinian origin get radicalized to the point where he decides to blow himself up in order to kill seven American CIA operatives and a Jordanian intelligence officer?

Al-Balawi’s suicide bombing, near Khost, Afghanistan, occurred on Dec. 30, 2009, just five days after Abulmutallab’s attempt fizzled.

Though most US media stories treated al-Balawi as a fanatical double agent driven by irrational hatreds, other motivations could be gleaned by looking at his personal history.

Al-Balawi’s mother told Agence France-Presse that her son had never been an “extremist.” Al-Balawi’s widow, Defne Bayrak, made a similar statement to *Newsweek*. In a *New York Times* article, al-Balawi’s brother was quoted as describing him as a “brilliant doctor.”

So what led Dr. al-Balawi to take his own life in order to kill US and Jordanian intelligence operatives? His brother said al-Balawi “changed” during the three-week-long Israeli attack on Gaza.

Al-Balawi actually volunteered with a medical organization to treat injured Palestinians in Gaza, but was promptly arrested by Jordanian authorities, his brother said.

Adding insult to injury, the Jordanian intelligence service coerced al-Balawi into becoming a spy to penetrate al-Qaeda’s hierarchy and provide actionable intelligence to the CIA.

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Taking full advantage of amateurish tradecraft by his CIA and Jordanian handlers, al-Balawi exacted his revenge.

“My husband was anti-American; so am I,” his widow said later, adding that although her two little girls would grow up fatherless, she had no regrets.

So, what does all this have to do with Gaza? Readers, please take out a piece of paper. You have five minutes to answer that question in three sentences or less. (Those who get their information only from the *New York Times* and *Washington Post* will be granted an additional five minutes because of their handicap.)

Moribund Fourth Estate

I continue to be amazed at how many otherwise well-informed Americans express total surprise when I refer them to 9/11 “mastermind” Khalid Sheikh Mohammed’s explanation regarding his motivation for attacking the United States, as cited on page 147 of the 9/11 Commission Report:

“By his own account, KSM’s animus toward the United States stemmed not from his experience there as a student, but rather from his violent disagreement with US foreign policy favoring Israel.”

One can understand how even those making an honest attempt to follow such key issues closely can get confused. Five years after the 9/11 Commission Report, on Aug. 30, 2009, readers of the neo-conservative *Washington Post* were given a diametrically different view, based on what the *Post* called an unidentified “intelligence summary”:

“KSM’s limited and negative experience in the United States – which included a brief jail stay because of unpaid bills – almost certainly helped propel him on his path to becoming a terrorist … He stated that his contact with Americans,

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The cargo: Not weapons, but thousands of letters of solidarity to the people of Gaza.

while minimal, confirmed his view that the United States was a debauched and racist country."

Apparently, the *Post* found this revisionist version politically more convenient, in that it obscured Mohammed's actual explanation implicating "US foreign policy favoring Israel."

It's much more comforting, if a bit of a stretch, to view KSM as a disgruntled visitor who nursed his personal grievances into justification for mass murder.

An unusually candid view of the dangers accruing from the US identification with Israel's policies appeared several years ago in an unclassified study published by the Pentagon-appointed US Defense Science Board on Sept. 23, 2004. Contradicting President George W. Bush, the board stated:

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Are we starting to get the picture of what the United States is up against in the Muslim world – and, more importantly, why?

"Muslims do not 'hate our freedom,' but rather, they hate our policies. The overwhelming majority voice their objections to what they see as one-sided support in favor of Israel and against Palestinian rights."

Are we starting to get the picture of what the United States is up against in the Muslim world – and, more importantly, why?

An enhanced PR effort is not going to do the trick. And yet it seems as though the US political/media establishment is incapable of confronting this reality and/or taking meaningful action to alleviate the underlying causes of the violence?

Eye For An Eye

Revenge has not always worked out very well in the past – and particularly not in

spirals of violence beginning in Gaza.

Does anyone remember the brutal killing of four Blackwater contractors on March 31, 2004, when they took a wrong turn and ended up in the Iraqi city of Fallujah – and how US forces virtually leveled that large city in retribution after George W. Bush won his second term the following November?

How many know of the epidemic of horribly disfigured babies born there since, believed to be the result of depleted uranium and other US weaponry?

If you read only the Fawning Corporate Media, you would blissfully think that the killing of the four Blackwater operatives was the initial step in this particular cycle of violence; that it was started by fanatics who – along with their neighbors – got the pummeling by US forces they deserved.

You wouldn't know that the killings represented the second turn in that specific cycle.

On March 22, 2004, nine days before the Blackwater incident, Israeli forces assassinated in Gaza, Sheikh Yassin, a founder of Hamas and its spiritual leader – a withering old man, blind and confined to a wheelchair.

That murder, plus sloppy navigation by the Blackwater people, set the stage for the next set of brutalities in Fallujah.

The Blackwater operatives were killed by a group that described itself as the "Sheikh Yassin Revenge Brigade." Pamphlets and posters were all over the scene of the attack; one of the trucks that pulled around body parts of the mercenaries had a poster of Yassin in its window, as did store fronts all over Fallujah.

But Blackwater contractors are American, you may be thinking. Why would the "bad guys" in Fallujah blame the Americans for Israel's assassination of

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Even the sainted Gen. David Petraeus, in a rare moment of candor in March 2010, admitted in written testimony to Congress that Israeli behavior endangers US troops

Sheikh Yassin in Gaza?

If you have read down this far and cannot figure that out, you may wish to go back to reading the *New York Times*.

Et Tu Petraeus?

Even the sainted Gen. David Petraeus, in a rare moment of candor in March 2010, admitted in written testimony to Congress that Israeli behavior endangers US troops. His testimony stated:

"The enduring hostilities between Israel and some of its neighbors present distinct challenges to our ability to advance our interests in the Middle East. Israeli-Palestinian tensions often flare into violence and large-scale armed confrontations.

"The conflict foments anti-American sentiment, due to a perception of US favoritism for Israel. ... Meanwhile, al-Qaeda and other militant groups exploit that anger to mobilize support."

Petraeus's statement is obviously true, but he quickly came to regret his truth-telling, desperate to retract it out of fear that he had offended America's influential neocons and the Likud Lobby – and might end up like Ambassador Chas Freeman.

Many neocons regard any suggestion that Israeli intransigence on Palestine contributes to the dangers faced by American soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan – or by the US public from acts of terrorism at home – as a "blood libel" against Israel.

So, when Petraeus's testimony began getting traction on the Internet, the general quickly e-mailed Max Boot, a neocon writer based at the high-powered Council on Foreign Relations, and began backtracking on the testimony. The groveling was stomach-turning but informative:

"As you know, I didn't say that," Petra-

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Sailing to victory: Retired US Army colonel Ann Wright, who resigned her commission in opposition to Bush's war on Iraq.

eus said, according to a March 18, 2010, e-mail to Boot. “It’s in a written submission for the record.” (No doubt the general, who is soon to take the helm at the CIA, will be more careful in the future not to let his underlings slip hard truths into his written testimony.)

The “horse’s mouth” e-mail exchange was made public by James Morris, who runs a Web site called “Neocon Zionist Threat to America.” He said he acquired them by chance, after he sent an e-mail congratulating Petraeus for his testimony.

In responding, Petraeus forgot to delete the trail of e-mails with Boot in which they collaborated to find ways to knock down the story of the general’s implicit criticism of Israel. [For details, see Consortiumnews.com’s “Neocons, Likud Conquer DC, Again.”]

Back to the Flotilla

As we embark on “The Audacity of Hope”

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and its humanitarian mission to Gaza, we can expect no help from the likes of Petraeus, senior NSC officials, or, for that matter, President Barack Obama, who last year maintained a studied silence when Israeli forces killed nine passengers and wounded fifty in stopping a similar flotilla.

One of those killed, 19-year old Furkan Dogan, was a US citizen as well as a citizen of Turkey. Did he have time to tell the Israeli attackers, *Civus Americanus Sum?* Would it have done him any good?

In trying to piece together why I shall be on “The Audacity of Hope,” I came upon these words of Daniel Berrigan in his autobiography, *To Dwell in Peace*. Dan is reflecting on his own motives in joining eight others burning draft cards with homemade napalm on May 17, 1968, in Catonsville, Maryland:

“It was only after the Catonsville action that I came on a precious insight. ... Something like this: presupposing in-

tegrity and discipline, one is justified in entering a large risk; not indeed because the outcome is assured, but because the integrity and value of the act have spoken aloud.

"When such has occurred, matters of success or efficiency are placed where they belong: in the background. They are not irrelevant, but they are far from central. ...

"There was a history of such acts of ours. In such biblical acts, results, outcome, benefits are unknown, totally obscure. The acts are at variance with good manners and behavior.

"More yet: everything of prudence and good sense points to the uselessness, ineffectiveness of such acts. And, finally, immediate and perhaps plenary punishment is bound to follow. [Yet] one was free to concentrate on the act itself, without regard to its reception in the world. Free also to concentrate on moral preparation, consistency, conscience.

"One had very little to go on; and went ahead nonetheless. Looked at in this light, the 'little' appeared irreducible, a treasure."

Thanks, Dan. I certainly could not have said it better. And my thanks to any reader who had got down this far.

JUNE 26, 2011

Spirits of Justice Going to Gaza

For those who engage in the common struggle for Justice, an invaluable grace comes from getting to know new friends similarly engaged – and equally willing to speak with more than words.

Thus, it has been a great grace to get to

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In one recent article, Alice Walker addressed her reasons for joining the other 49 of us by putting her body on the line in sailing with "The Audacity of Hope," the US boat to Gaza

know folks like Alice Walker personally as well as through her writings – including some new ones. In one recent article, Alice addressed her reasons for joining the other 49 of us by putting her body on the line in sailing with "The Audacity of Hope," the US boat to Gaza. She wrote:

"They got as far as the truncheons and bullets of a few 'good ol' boys' of Neshoba County, Mississippi, and were beaten and shot to death along with James Cheney, a young black man with formidable courage who died with them. So even though our boat will be called 'The Audacity of Hope,' it will fly the Goodman, Cheney, Schwerner flag in my own heart."

As for me, I will be flying in my own heart the flag of Jonathan Daniels, a Danforth Graduate Fellow of 1961, with whom my Fordham '61 college classmate Brian Daley, S.J., author Palmer Parker, and I spent a week of Danforth Fellow orientation on the shore of Lake Michigan in September 1961. Four years later, Jonathan was dead. Here's some of the rest of the story:

On Aug. 13, 1965, Jonathan Daniels, in a group of 29, went to picket whites-only stores in the small town of Fort Deposit, Alabama. All were arrested and taken to jail in the nearby town of Hayneville. Five juvenile protesters were released the next day. The rest of the group was held for six days; they refused to accept bail unless everyone was bailed.

Finally, on Aug. 20, the prisoners were released without transport back to Fort Deposit. After release, the group waited by a road near the jail. Jonathan with three others – a white Catholic priest and two black protesters – went down the street to get a cold soft drink at Varner's Grocery Store, one of the few local stores that would serve nonwhites.

They were met at the front by Tom

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Ray McGovern protests at the US embassy in Athens after the relief boat is prevented from proceeding.

L. Coleman, an engineer for the state highway department and unpaid special deputy, who wielded a shotgun. The man threatened the group, and finally leveled his gun at 16-year-old Ruby Sales. Daniels pushed Sales to the ground and caught the full blast of the gun. He was killed instantly.

The priest, Richard F. Morrisroe, grabbed the other protester and ran. Coleman shot Morrisroe, wounding him in the lower back. Coleman was subsequently acquitted of manslaughter

charges by an all-white jury.

Richmond Flowers, Sr., the then-Attorney General of Alabama, described the verdict as representing the “democratic process going down the drain of irrationality, bigotry and improper law enforcement.”

Coleman died at age 86 on June 13, 1997, without having faced any further prosecution.

Jonathan Daniels, my friend who died way too young, was no stranger to the South. He had lived in Kentucky and Arkansas as a child. More important, he was educated at Virginia Military Institute, a military college whose history and tradition were inextricably bound with those of the South. He ultimately won the highest tribute from his classmates by being elected valedictorian of his class.

As a Danforth Graduate Fellow, Jon first chose to attend Harvard University to study English literature, but had long felt a desire to enter parish ministry. After a year at Harvard, he was admitted to the Episcopal Theological School. His subsequent involvement with the civil rights movement followed as a logical extension of his beliefs and faith tradition.

His considerable knowledge of the South was an invaluable help to him and to those with whom he worked to bring some Justice down that way.

In a remarkable paper, which Jonathan wrote during his first stay in Selma, he addressed how our motives, as he put it, can be “healthy and free within the ambiguities and tilted structures of a truly fallen Creation.” He added:

“I found very real, if ambiguous confirmation in that beloved community who ate and slept and cursed and prayed in the rain-soaked streets of the Negro ‘compound’ in that first week in Selma.”

At Jonathan's memorial service, the dean of the Episcopal Theological School, Rev. John B. Coburn, referred to the meaning he said Jonathan's life and death should have for us:

"Jonathan says he 'strained' an ear to hear what he should do. And he heard: 'He hath put down the mighty from their seat, and hath exalted the humble and meek. . . .' Then he knew what he must do. And he did it.

"God calls us. Life calls us. Mankind calls us to strain our ears. Wherever we are, in whatever situation we are called to hear what we should do. Then let us do it, for a man has died. God has died. And Love has come back again. So we have hope."

Justice was the main concern not only of the God of the Hebrew scriptures, but also of Jesus of Nazareth, and (I am gradually learning from instruction on the Quran) the teachings of the Prophet as well.

No Justice was to be had in Lowndes County, Alabama, in the Sixties. Today, Justice cannot prevail in Gaza – and the other occupied territories seized by Israel in the June 1967 war.

The *New York Times* made an unusually candid revelation in 1982 quoting from a speech in which Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who held that top post from 1977 to 1983, admitted that the 1967 war was carefully pre-planned by Israel.

"In June 1967, we had a choice," Begin said. "The Egyptian Army concentrations in the Sinai approaches do not prove that Nasser was really about to attack us. We must be honest with ourselves. We decided to attack him."

The *New York Times*, which in those days was more independent than it is now, actually printed Begin's words, though it has forgotten them since.

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Today, Justice cannot prevail in Gaza – and the other occupied territories seized by Israel in the June 1967 war

And so, all aboard "The Audacity of Hope." And what grand company I find myself in: Justice friends, old – like Ann Wright, Medea Benjamin, Ken Mayers, Robert Naiman and Kathy Kelly – and new – like Alice Walker, Paki Wieland, Gale Courey Toensing, and dozens of others.

May the spirit of Jonathan Daniels and the spirit of Ruby Sales (herself now a close friend who owes her own prophetic, productive life to Jonathan's sacrifice in 1965) be with us – together with those of Michael Schwerner, Andrew Goodman and James Cheney.

They are truly models of the enduring strength that comes of daring to hope.

JUNE 28, 2011

Thoughts of a Starving Ireland

Thinking further here in Athens about how it came to be that I joined the passengers on "The Audacity of Hope" and why I feel so strongly about the oppression in Gaza, it struck me that my Irish genes (as well as my theology) may be playing a role.

During the mid-19th Century potato famine, when the starving Irish were being treated in much the same way as Gazans are today, how much my ancestors must have wished for some sign that someone abroad actually cared about them.

Did no one know how the Irish were being deliberately left to starve to death, while the English were making a killing by exporting Irish meat and produce? Did no one care?

How much in need of support, if only

SLOW BOAT TO GAZA

moral support, were they? How few had the money to sail from Queenstown (Kobh) or Belfast in the hope of living, and perhaps even coming to live well, in America?

How they must have longed to see sails of a different spelling or flags of a people committed to Justice voyaging to show the emaciated Irish that someone from abroad cared about their plight. Lacking then was any meaningful expression of international solidarity.

A century and a half later, Israeli officials have actually bragged about “putting Gazans on a strict diet” – in other words, condemning them to a subsistence living just barely above the point where they would starve and perhaps subject Israel to charges of ethnic cleansing by starvation. But this attitude must not stand today in Gaza.

Letter Carriers

Thankfully, four of my great-grandfathers survived the Irish famine. And both my grandfathers – as well as my grandmothers – had the audacity of hope, so to speak, to leave Ireland for America. My grandfathers found work in the US Post Office – both of them.

My mother’s father, Lawrence Gough, eventually became a supervisor in one of the branches in the Bronx. My father’s father, Philip McGovern, became a proud letter carrier in the central Bronx neighborhood into which my father, my five siblings, and I were eventually born – and where I spent my first 22 years.

Phil McGovern, the letter carrier. It struck me that, in carrying letters of support to Gaza, I am trying to be faithful not only to a faith tradition with the inescapable mandate that we “Do Justice,” but also to the Post Office and letter-carrier tradition that I inherited from my

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grandfathers.

As our Irish cousins like to say: “Yes, I do believe so.”

My theology can be summed up in the words of Dean Brackley, S.J., now in El Salvador:

“Everything depends on who you think God is, and how God feels when little people are pushed around.”

JULY 2, 2011

July Fourth Shame on the Founders

Indignities experienced by me and my co-guests on “The Audacity of Hope,” the American boat to Gaza, over the past ten days in Athens leave no doubt in my mind that Barack Obama’s administration has forfeited the right to claim any lineage to the brave Americans who declared independence from the king of England 235 years ago.

In the Declaration of Independence, they pledged their lives, fortunes and sacred honor to a new enterprise of freedom, democracy and the human spirit. The outcome was far from assured; likely as not, the hangman’s noose awaited them. They knew that all too well.

But they had a genuine audacity to hope that the majority of their countrymen and women, persuaded by Thomas Paine’s Common Sense and the elegant words of Thomas Jefferson, would conclude that the goal of liberty and freedom was worth the risk, that it was worth whatever the cost.

These days we have been seduced into thinking that such principles have become “quaint” or “obsolete” – words used by President George W. Bush’s White House counsel Alberto Gonzales

to make light of important international agreements like the Geneva Conventions.

As every American should know, and remember, the principles enshrined in the Declaration of Independence were based on the firm belief that ALL men are created equal, that they have UNALIENABLE rights – among them life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

Not just “all Americans,” mind you, but *all people*. The Declaration of Independence was meant to be a statement expressing the “self-evident” rights of all mankind. Those principles had a universality that was a beacon to the world.

True, American democracy and, indeed, the Founders themselves were far from perfect. In the early decades of the Republic, basic rights were denied to women, to black slaves, to Native Americans and to many of the poor. But Americans worked on building that “more perfect union” and are still working on it.

Justice was always at the heart of the American ideal. That we still have a long way to go in securing that justice must not be allowed to obscure the fact that ours is a noble and courageous experiment. Or at least it was.

That President Barack Obama would have popularized the phrase “audacity of hope,” after which we named our boat, now seems a cruel hoax, particularly as many of us recalled the high hopes we had once harbored for Obama the candidate. Instead of an “audacity of hope,” Obama the president has often displayed a “paucity of courage.”

But it’s not just Obama. Sadly, all too many of Americans now think of the sacred principles expressed in the Declaration of Independence as applying to Americans, but not to many others – like the 1.6 million people locked in the nar-

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row confines of Gaza.

The tendency is to think of ourselves as “exceptional” – so special that we need not care about suffering elsewhere in the world, including the suffering enabled by our own tax dollars.

It is also sad that many US politicians – from the Chief Executive to members of Congress – have been seduced by money and political expediency into disregarding our first president’s farewell address, George Washington’s warning to avoid what he called “entangling alliances” and a “passionate attachment” to goals of another country.

At the time, it was France that Washington had in mind. Today, the “entangling alliance” and “passionate attachment” relate to Israel. Common values are adduced to try to justify conflating US objectives and actions with the goals and behavior of our “ally,” Israel.

Why the quotation marks around “ally?” Because decades ago, when the US government broached the possibility of a mutual defense treaty with the government of Israel, it refused to go along. Mutual defense treaties, you see, require internationally recognized borders and normally a mutual commitment to avoid attacking other countries at will and without forewarning.

The difficulties, which we on “The Audacity of Hope” have encountered at the hands of the Greek government, are clearly a result of Israeli pressure with a likely assist from Obama’s diplomats.

In my own writings, I have highlighted what I have learned about the extraordinary power of joint US-Israeli influence. But it is something quite different to watch that influence be brought to bear on the government of Greece, a seafaring nation normally devoted to unfettered navigation.



Noisy protest outside the US embassy after the boat is refused permission to sail to Gaza.



Second stage of the protest: Joe, Carol and Kathy on hunger strike outside the US embassy.

And for what purpose? To prevent our “ally” Israel from being exposed for its brutish behavior vis-a-vis the people of Gaza.

I thought I'd seen everything. But the Israeli accusation that our Gaza flotilla is carrying sulfur to pour on Israeli com-

mandos attempting to board our boats ... well, that one takes the cake. Plus, the accusation by an Israeli official that we had vowed to shed the blood of Israeli Defense Forces. Amazing.

On the US side, Secretary of State Hillary Clinton appears as unconcerned about what might happen to us at the hands of Israeli (or Greek) commandos as she was on Feb. 15 as she watched me brutalized just 12 yards in front of her during a speech she was giving at George Washington University.

My offense then? Standing quietly – motionless, actually – with my back turned toward her, as a way of showing that not everyone in that audience was oblivious to the killing, maiming and other suffering inflicted on millions of people in Iraq, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Yemen ... and the list goes on.

Last week, Clinton charged the international flotilla, of which “The Audacity of Hope” is a part, with planning to enter

“Israeli waters” and warned of the consequences – in effect, giving Israel carte blanche to have its way with us.

Meanwhile, descriptions of last year’s violence, in which Israeli commandos staged a night-time boarding raid on the Turkish ship Mari Marmara in international waters in the Mediterranean Sea and killed nine passengers including one American, get expressed in the passive voice. Violence by whom, a Martian might ask.

In any event, we have long since made it abundantly clear that we had no intention to enter “Israeli waters.” Is it conceivable that Madame Secretary still doesn’t know that or is she simply spreading a falsehood meant to discredit our mission? Gazan waters are not Israeli waters. Neither, we thought, is the Aegean Sea.

Adding transparent insult to injury, eight days ago the State Department spokeswoman obfuscated when asked directly, twice, whether the US government considered the Israeli blockade of Gaza legal. This determination to fudge on this key issue (the blockade is, on the face of it, against international law) has not stopped US government functionaries from speaking as if the Israelis are well within their rights.

Worse still, we have learned that some US officials wouldn’t shed a tear if we got our comeuppance at the hands of the Israelis.

Before leaving the United States, I was cautioned by a source with access to very senior staffers at the National Security Council that not only does the White House plan to do absolutely nothing to protect our boat from Israeli attack or illegal boarding, but that White House officials “would be happy if something happened to us.”

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The instructions, of course, come from a weak Greek government unable to stand on principle because of the economic damage that can be done to Greece by the US-dominated IMF, the European Union and Israel, a major trading partner

They are, I am reliably told, “perfectly willing to have the cold corpses of activists shown on American TV.”

So here we are, passengers and crew of “The Audacity of Hope,” awaiting further instructions from the local Greek authorities, some of whom have been quite candid in expressing their embarrassment and resentment at being manipulated by Washington/Tel Aviv in this new Great Game.

The instructions, of course, come from a weak Greek government unable to stand on principle because of the economic damage that can be done to Greece by the US-dominated IMF, the European Union and Israel, a major trading partner.

We await a deus ex machina to extract us from this seemingly intractable situation. We remain determined to sail to Gaza at the earliest opportunity. And so do the passengers on the other boats in our international flotilla, at least on those boats that have not been physically sabotaged. (No one has claimed credit for the damage to propeller shafts to two of the boats, but Israeli officials have been cagey about whether they have had a hand in any underwater operations.)

Delays seem to be built into the scenery in this part of the world. After all, It took Odysseus 20 years to get back to Ithaca.

In this day of instant communication, in which audacity can trump cowardice, we continue to hope. Whatever our circumstances, they are light-years better than the everyday experience in Gaza. We are holding that before our eyes. We do not intend to let the suffering Gazans down.

On Friday, the Audacity of Hope did make a move to set sail, before being turned back by the Greek coast guard.

SLOW BOAT TO GAZA



Home-made cards identify passengers who protested outside the US embassy in Athens on July 4.

On Saturday, we were on a coast guard wharf with the boat impounded, the crew restricted, and the captain facing some significant charges.

The authorities said the guests were free to leave the boat, but it wasn't clear that we'd be allowed back on. So, we decided not to leave the captain. We remain determined to go to Gaza.

It would be a fitting way to celebrate the Fourth of July.

JULY 8, 2011

Gaza and a Liturgy for Justice

We passengers on the US Boat to Gaza represent a cross-section of America. Yet, if there is an emblematic trait that sets us apart from "mainstream" America, it is a common, radical determination to take risks to bring Justice for the oppressed – in this case, the 1.6 million people locked in an

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Replying to those who threw the “extremist” epithet at him, Dr. King acknowledged that he was, indeed, an extremist – “an extremist for love”

open-air prison on a narrow strip of land called Gaza.

While most of those calling us “radical” hurl the word as a barb, we welcome the label – but radical as derived from the underlying meaning of this word, “root.” Like radishes, we are rooted in soil, the soil of Justice.

“Extremist?” Yes, we confess to that too – as Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. did in his *Letter From the Birmingham City Jail*.

Replying to those who threw the “extremist” epithet at him, Dr. King acknowledged that he was, indeed, an extremist – “an extremist for love.”

“So,” wrote King, “the question is not whether we will be extremist but what kind of extremist will we be. Will we be extremists for hate or will we be extremists for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice – or will we be extremists for the cause of justice.”

A Different ‘Liturgy’

Our kind of extremism can be seen as rooted in a liturgy that rejects pseudo-worship, which prophet Isaiah warned that God finds sickening:

“Trample my courts no more! ... Your incense is loathsome to me. ... Make Justice your aim: redress the wronged, hear the orphan’s plea, defend the widow. ... I will strengthen you ... a light for the nations, to open the eyes of the blind, to bring prisoners out of confinement, and from the dungeon those who live in darkness. ...

“Do not dwell on things of the past. See, I am doing something new. Now it springs forth; do you not perceive it?”

And, finally, another passage from Isaiah typically read on the Jewish high holy day of Yom Kippur, which often is observed by many secular Jews, as well.

"What is the fast God desires of you? To feed the hungry, clothe the naked, break off the handcuffs from the prisoners."

Nice image, no? Breaking off the handcuffs from the prisoners. Whether literally or figuratively, that takes work.

And, as the passages from Isaiah suggest, this is central to a genuine liturgy – the DOING of Justice, not merely rhetoric about how nice it would be.

From the Greek Word For...

Even though we were able to sail only ten or so nautical miles toward Gaza, it was good to spend two weeks plus in Athens.

Being in Greece again, after more than three decades, brought memories from the ridiculous to the sublime – from the 2002 film "My Big Fat Greek Wedding" to the lines from Homer memorized during four years of studying classical Greek more than a half-century ago.

I could not find anyone old enough to try out my 2,500 year-old Greek on. But the incessantly repeated dictum of the proud Greek pater familias in the film kept coming back to me: "It comes from the Greek word for..."

To the ancient Greeks who coined the term, liturgy meant work in service to others. Leitourgia referred to the people and the root ergo "do" denoted public service.

In ancient Greece, it was de rigueur for "people of means" to use a good portion of their own assets for the common good – "to give back," as we might put it today.

Whether or not the early Christians were consciously following Isaiah's admonition against fulsome prancing in ostentatious religious displays, they also applied the word liturgy to the public work of the early church.

And a good thing too: for liturgy/wor-



**Jews,
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Muslims,
Buddhists,
agnostics,
atheists –
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by lifting
the Israeli
blockade**

ship should be the Church's central public activity – the work, the DOING which serves others, while affirming what the worshipers truly stand for and who they are.

Thus, in its purest and most faithful sense, liturgy requires a lived commitment to Justice, without which it is not true worship.

Jesus poured scorn, too, on the hypocrite religious leaders of his day: "Their words are bold but their deeds are few. They widen their phylacteries and wear huge tassels." (Phylacteries are small leather boxes containing scripture and worn during morning prayers).

In the view of Jesus, these well-adorned religious leaders oppressed, rather than helped, the poor. I'm sure glad that sort of hypocrisy doesn't happen any more!

Tzedakah is a Hebrew word commonly mistranslated as charity. But it is based on the Hebrew word tzedek meaning righteousness, fairness, justice.

Unlike philanthropy, which is completely voluntary, tzedakah is seen in Judaism as a religious obligation to be met by all – rich and poor.

Liturgy and the US Boat

We had no tassels on the boat, nor phylacteries. But in my view, we had lots of authentic liturgy.

Even some of my boat-mate friends may be surprised to see it put that way. Jews, Christians, Muslims, Buddhists, agnostics, atheists – all devoted to help bring Justice to Gaza, to break off the handcuffs and open the prison by lifting the Israeli blockade.

For those of us Christians, the spirit – if not the words – of Martin Luther, the Protestant reformer, hung in the background, helping to explain why we did all we could to place ourselves "where

SLOW BOAT TO GAZA



Greek coastguard vessel cuts off the Audacity of Hope as it runs for international waters.



Armed coastguards make it clear that Greece will not let the Gaza boat travel any farther.

the battle rages.”

“If,” wrote Martin Luther, “I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at the moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing him.

“Where the battle rages, there the loy-

alty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield except where the battle rages is mere flight and disgrace if one flinches at that point.”

For me, it was a special grace of the US Boat to Gaza experience to find myself in the familiar company of so many Jews from New York City – some of them fellow Bronxites.

It brought back the companionship, camaraderie, and humor that were an integral part of my first 22 years on Bainbridge Avenue and 194th Street. The comfort level was there from the start, and it was not just nostalgia.

The more aware I became of the particular courage it takes to weather the inevitable charges of being “self-hating Jews” – even from one’s family and close friends – the more respect I gained for my Jewish co-travelers, many of whom gave adroit but unflinching leadership to the entire enterprise.

Whether “observant” Jews or not, they personified in a special way the prophetic Judaism that stood for the idea that only justice yields peace – the Judaism that

pulses with compassion for “the orphans, widows, and the exploited poor.”

What a wonderful reminder that relying on Israeli kill-power rather than Justice for the Gazans is not truly Jewish. Nor is it safe. As one of my mentors, Daniel Maguire, Professor of Moral Theology at Marquette University, has put it:

“A tribal ‘Jewish’ state that ignores the prophet Zechariah’s warning that Zion cannot be built on injustice and bloodshed will, as the prophets of Israel warned, fall into the pit it is currently and frantically digging.”

July 16, 2011

Neocons Fume Over Boat to Gaza

My co-passengers and I of the US Boat to Gaza have now gone from “High-Seas Hippies,” according to the right-wing *Washington Times*, to participants in a flotilla full of “fools, knaves, hypocrites, bigots, and supporters of terrorism,” says Alan Dershowitz in his usual measured prose.

Poor Alan, he seems upset at our audacity not only to hope for humane treatment of the 1.6 million Gazans, who currently live under a cruel blockade, but to force the issue. To stop our boat before it could leave Greek waters, Israel’s Likud government gave itself a self-inflicted black eye and again brought the oppression of Gazans to worldwide attention.

This time, Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu’s government did not even have to kill people to add to Israel’s growing “delegitimization” before the civilized world. Facing growing international condemnation, Netanyahu and his

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I suppose if I had criticized some of the ugly extremism in Ireland a few decades back, I would be a “self-hating Irishman”

allies have reason to worry.

In recognition of our modest accomplishments, we US boaters have now made it onto Dershowitz’s “Dishonor Roll!” At first reading of his intended insults, my laughter was uncontrollable. I’ve been called a lot of things before, but I cannot remember being labeled a “knavе.”

Anyone know what a knave is? Does it have something to do with what Damon Runyon used to call “the Harvards,” among whom Dershowitz has long toiled as a law professor?

Dershowitz also lashes out at the American Jews onboard, including 86-year-old Holocaust survivor Hedy Epstein, with the shopworn epithet for Jews who dare to criticize Israel’s government as “self-hating.”

I suppose if I had criticized some of the ugly extremism in Ireland a few decades back, I would be a “self-hating Irishman.”

But the bottom line is this: Dershowitz’s Likud friends and their neocon chums in the Obama administration realize they have suffered a stinging – and unnecessary – PR defeat. They could easily have let our peaceful boat carrying passengers, media and letters of goodwill reach the isolated people of Gaza.

What we boaters appear to have accomplished is to provoke the mighty diplomats of Israel and the United States into a full-court press that brought renewed attention to the plight of the Gazans.

Instead, Greek authorities, already tied up in knots over their national financial crisis, had their arms twisted to thwart a group of humanitarians and peace activists – including poet Alice Walker, retired Army Col. Ann Wright and Code Pink’s Medea Benjamin – from sailing a boat to Gaza.

SLOW BOAT TO GAZA



Guarded by Greek coastguards, the relief boat stands at the dockside.

By putting the issue of Israel's blockade front and center, we also managed to force discomfited US State Department spokespersons to dissemble about the legality of Israel's illegal blockade. They ducked declaring something so clearly illegal legal, knowing that otherwise they would have invited international ridicule.

But caution. The injured-animal syndrome among the Likudniks poses distinct dangers for the people of the Middle East – the more so, as we watch President Barack Obama continue to let Netanyahu walk all over him.

US Appeasement

Official Washington's appeasement of the Likud Lobby seems to encourage Israeli leaders to believe that not only the US Congress but also America's lustng-for-

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a-second-term President will condone just about any action Tel Aviv might undertake. That makes the situation very volatile.

In my view, there is more danger, in present circumstances, that the extreme right in Israel will flail out in a very misguided way than there has been in several years. The Netanyahu regime is in a very defensive, reactive posture.

It certainly appears that the Likudniks, the US neocons and some of the “Harvards” are running scared as Israel's growing extremism and anti-Muslim bigotry becomes harder to perfume over with every passing day.

Beyond expanding settlements on Palestinian lands and resisting serious peace talks, Netanyahu's government has taken to segregating not only Arabs from Jews

but secular Jews from ultra-Orthodox Jews.

Plus, over the past two years, Netanyahu's right-wing coalition has lost its co-opted ally Hosni Mubarak in Egypt as well as the once-friendly Turks and bit-by-bit its legitimacy. This reality is finally sinking in. Tel Aviv, Washington and Cambridge see a significantly weakening of Israel's worldwide standing.

And, as for "delegitimizing" Israel, no one could do that job better than the Likudniks themselves – the more so, given their penchant for knee-jerk overreactions and risible rhetoric.

The likely "legitimization" of a Palestinian state by the U.N. in September is being seen in some Israeli right-wing quarters as the last straw.

But Netanyahu's thuggish regime still can count on influential apologists like Dershowitz to excuse whatever it does. Dershowitz and other neocon voices pipe up whenever Israel's drift toward an unconscionable apartheid system is noted.

As part of that propaganda, we are now hearing, again and again, bizarre accounts about how wonderful life is for the Gazans. In his pro-blockade diatribe, Dershowitz depicted a fun-and-sun existence for these Palestinians, who are, in reality, trapped in what amounts to a squalid open-air prison.

Besides cutting the Gazans off from the world, Israel has strangled their economy by tightly restricting construction material needed to rebuild homes, businesses and schools damaged in Israel's 2008-09 invasion, which killed an estimated 1,400 Palestinians, compared to 13 Israeli deaths.

However, to gloss over the ugly reality, Dershowitz selectively cites a recent *New York Times* article, which noted that construction material smuggled in from

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Egypt in the aftermath of Mubarak's ouster is fueling a mini-construction boom in Hamas-ruled Gaza and slightly lessening the jobless crisis.

Here's Dershowitz's slanted version: "According to reporting by the *New York Times*, Gaza has been thriving recently. Luxury hotels are being built; stores are stocked with food; beaches are filled with children; and life is far better than in neighboring Al Arish, which is across the border in Egypt."

Yet, the few positives were only part of what the *Times*' Jerusalem bureau chief, he wrote, "So is that the news from Gaza in mid-2011? Yes, but so is this: Thousands of homes that were destroyed in the Israeli antirocket invasion two and a half years ago have not been rebuilt.

"Hospitals have canceled elective surgery for lack of supplies. Electricity remains maddeningly irregular. The much-publicized opening of the Egyptian border has fizzled, so people remain trapped here. The number of residents living on less than \$1.60 a day has tripled in four years. Three-quarters of the population rely on food aid."

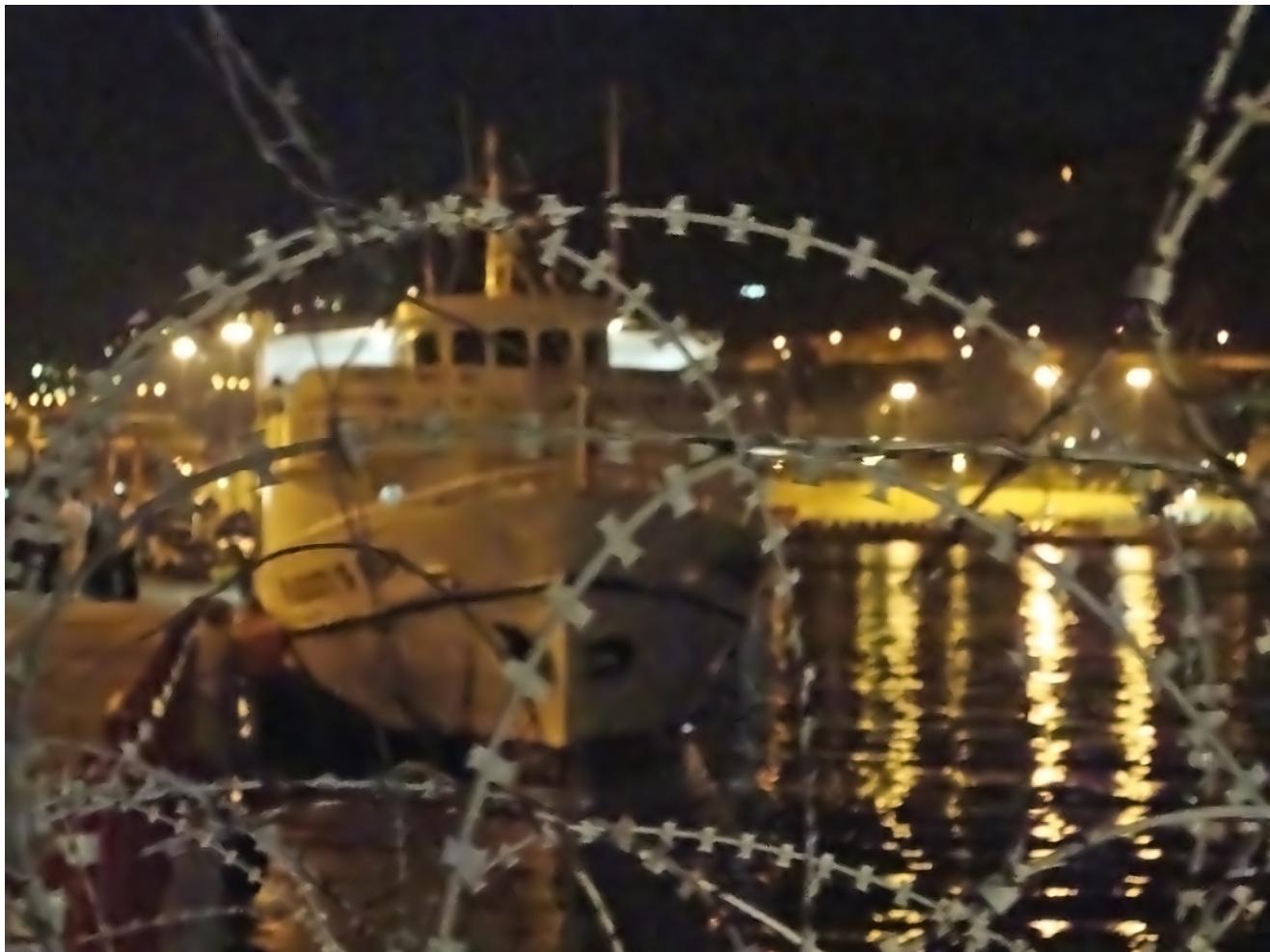
Strangled Economy

The Israeli human rights group Gisha, which has campaigned against the closure of Gaza, notes that while Gaza now has adequate food supplies, "economic recovery is blocked by sweeping restrictions."

Gisha noted that "The continued ban on export, construction materials, and travel between Gaza and the West Bank contradicts the 2010 Israeli government decision to facilitate economic recovery in Gaza.

"At least 83% of Gaza's factories are either closed or working at a capacity of 50% or less, according to the Palestinian

SLOW BOAT TO GAZA



Impounded at a military dock, the Audacity of Hope is out of action ... for now.

Federation of Industries. The manufacturing sector cannot recover under the present Israeli ban on export.

“Even during the winter agricultural season, when Israel allowed the export of agricultural produce, the quantities were economically negligible: an average of two trucks per day, compared to the 400 trucks a day agreed upon in the 2005 Agreement on Movement and Access.

“Israel has banned completely goods destined for Israel and the West Bank, even though prior to 2007, 85% of the goods leaving Gaza were sold to Israel and the West Bank.” [Emphasis in original.]

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**The situation
for Gazans
remains
horribly bleak**

In other words, the situation for Gazans remains horribly bleak, although perhaps slightly less bleak now that Egypt is looking the other way on the smuggling of concrete, steel beams and other construction material.

Under international pressure—brought about partly by earlier challenges to the four-year-old sea blockade—Israel also has lightened up somewhat on the land transport of some goods.

But Dershowitz’s slanted argument is offensive for other reasons. Arguing that some people in the Middle East might be worse off than the Gazans is reminiscent of the claims by white South Africans

that “their” blacks were better off than some blacks living in poorer parts of Africa, thus justifying apartheid.

Or the neocon musings in the United States some years back that slavery wasn’t so bad because Africans who were captured by European slavers and forcibly shipped to the New World had a chance for a better life – more so than Africans who weren’t lucky enough to be put in chains, crowded into foul slave ships (where many died), sold to plantation owners in a strange land, and then be subjected to whippings, rapes, endless humiliations and lynching. Yes, the “up-side” of slavery.

To tout a couple of “luxury hotels” being built in Gaza, some children at the beach and the possibility that some

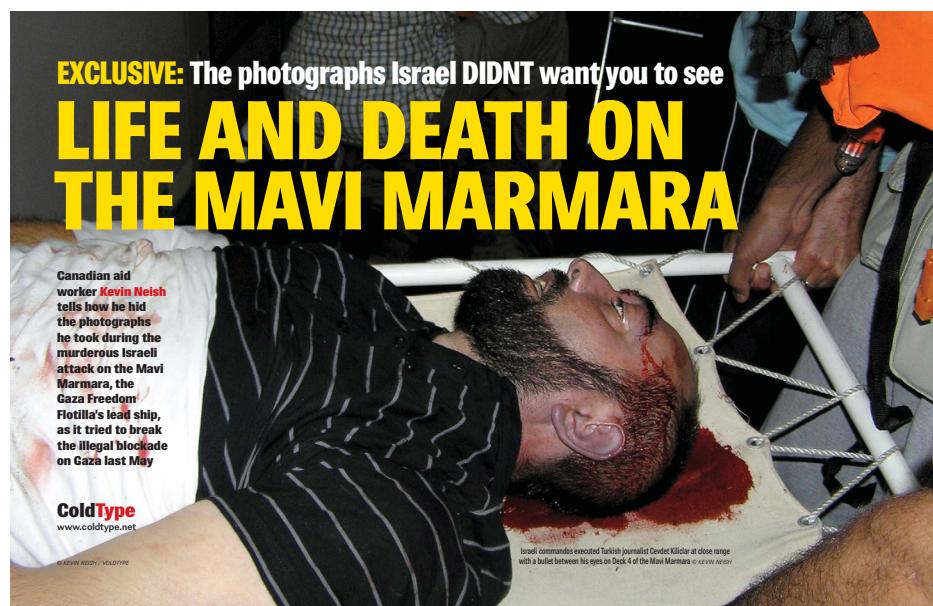
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Watch out
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months ahead

other Arabs might be more miserable than the Gazans – as an excuse for the entrapment and collective punishment of 1.6 million people – is the same kind of rationalizing on behalf of injustice.

As for Dershowitz’s insults toward me and the other passengers on our Boat to Gaza, the old saying surely applies: “Names can never harm you.” But we would all be well advised to keep a keen eye peeled for future sticks and stones.

We US boaters have just begun; we will get to Gaza. But watch out for Israeli-sponsored provocations, which could become the prelude to even more violence in the months ahead.

Our boat, “The Audacity of Hope,” remains impounded at a military dock ... for now.



Read Kevin Neish's account of the murderous Israeli attack on the Mavi Marmara, the lead ship of the first Gaza Freedom Flotilla, as it tried to break the illegal blockade on Gaza last year

<http://coldtype.net/photo.html>

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