



Liberal Democrat Friends of Israel

The Gaza Flotilla - Events of 31 May 2010

The events of 31 May 2010 were deeply tragic and lessons must be learned about why this incident resulted in this loss of life.

Any calls for action must not forget the reasons for the embargo and the threat posed by Hamas control of Gaza.

Hamas took control of the Palestinian Authority in a violent and illegitimate coup in 2007. They have refused to accept a Palestinian Unity agreement with the Fatah movement that would bring about Palestinian elections.

The isolation of Hamas by the international community is due to their failure to meet three clear conditions set down by the Quartet (made up of the US, UN, Russia and the UK). These are that Hamas should renounce violence, recognise Israel and accept previous peace agreements. Israel too would be ready to speak to Hamas if they accepted these conditions. Hamas is also holding captive an Israeli soldier, Gilad Shalit, who they kidnapped in 2006 and have repeatedly rejected prisoner swap deals for his release.

The embargo exists to prevent the smuggling of weapons into Gaza. Iran has been seeking to send arms and rockets to Hamas as well as to Hezbollah in Southern Lebanon. An increase in this arms smuggling would be destabilizing for the whole Middle East as well as a threat to Israel's security.

Humanitarian aid regularly enters Gaza via Israel - there is a well established coordination between Israel and international aid agencies to bring aid to Gaza. This is used on a daily basis by UNWRA, Red Cross and other UN and international agencies. Israel offered to transfer the aid from the ships in the flotilla to Gaza over land once it had been checked for weapons that could have been smuggled in along with the aid.

The international community also committed in UNSC Resolution 1860 to prevent the smuggling of weapons to Gaza after Operation Cast Lead.

As long as Hamas remains in charge of Gaza, and continues to refuse to renounce violence – and uses violence as seen by the rockets that have been launched into Southern Israel and the kidnapping of Gilad Shalit, Israel will want to act to prevent weapons being smuggled into Gaza.

Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has indicated that Israel is willing to discuss the nature of the embargo and any international support that could be given but any discussions on the embargo and relations with Hamas need to take into account Israel's security needs against the proven threat to Israel from an organisation that has long refused to renounce violence.