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"According to the best values of the IDF"

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When the commander of the Israeli navy, Admiral Eli Marom, announced at a press conference that the navy was about to intercept the flotilla of humanitarian aid ships to besieged Gaza "according to the best values and morality of the IDF," it was clear to me that there was going to be trouble.

On 5 June this year we mark 43 years of Occupation. The army that has ruled over another people for decades now, its foot on its neck, killing its children and civilians and imposing an apartheid regime on the Occupation zone, is an army that has gone from being a defence army to an army of war criminals with corrupt values.

And indeed the fears turned out to be justified. The sea commandoes, soldiers of Shayetet 13 [1], who are known in Israel as the best of the best and the elite of the elite, showed themselves as to be a gang of murderers when they hijacked the Turkish ship the Mavi Marmara, which in addition to its humanitarian cargo was carrying over 600 people on its decks, people of various nationalities including women, all of them unarmed civilians who wanted only to protest against the Israeli siege of Gaza.

In every army, not just the Israeli, commandoes are considered the elite of the elite. Their dangerousness to civilians stems among other things from the blind obedience that characterizes them: "we received an order and we carried it out, we did not ask questions," as one of the soldiers of the Shayetet who participated in the pirate action put it. Those "top quality" soldiers are carefully chosen by the army by means of a battery of tests, including psychological examinations and personal interviews, in order to ensure that nobody who thinks too much, or who is influenced by all kinds of "soft" ideas like human rights or empathy for human suffering, gets into the unit. The army needs them to be cruel people who will unblinkingly execute any order. The results have been felt by the passengers of the Mavi Marmara: nine killed and about fifty wounded (whom the army has prevented from being interviewed up to the time of the writing of these lines).

What really happened? Armed Israeli soldiers acted like a violent band of pirates and attacked a civilian ship in the open sea, outside of Israel's territorial waters.

In the course of the violent attack by the Israeli commandoes, who were backed by warships and helicopters, dozens of people were killed and wounded, as we have seen.

What do the Israeli media do, guided by the IDF Spokesman? They turn the tables. The IDF Spokesman distributed pictures showing unarmed civilians trying to defend themselves against the Israeli attackers with whatever was available to them: water hoses, plates, knives, etc. And thus, though a linguistic sleight-of-hand, the armed soldiers who were storming a ship that was not theirs become victims, and the civilian passengers who were defending themselves became attackers.

What we are witnessing here is the nazification of the language. In Germany the Jewish victims were converted into a gang of bloodsuckers. Here Israel's best journalists are enlisted into service to demonize of the passengers who were defending themselves.

Below are a few examples from the most popular newspapers in Israel, starting with Yediot Aharonot, the highest-circulation newspaper in Israel:

Eitan Haber, who in the past served as Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin's office manager, described the defenders as "contemptible." His colleague Nahum Barnea, winner of the Israel Prize for journalism, described them as "violent thugs." Alex Fishman, the newspaper's military correspondent, described them as "rioters." The settler-journalist

Yoaz Hendel wrote that they were "hooligans."

Amnon Abramovitz, the political commentator for Channel 2, the most-watched in Israel, described the victims' self-defence as a "provocation," in an article in the same newspaper.

The picture was no different in Maariv, the second-highest circulation newspaper in the country. The newspaper's senior correspondent Ben Caspit described the defenders as "savages." Ben Dror Yemini, who has become a propagandist like Goebbels (but without his talent) against the Left, described them as "angels of hate." And it was the same on all the television channels.

Not content with that, they went on to paint a picture according to which the invading soldiers who killed and wounded dozens of human beings were "lynch victims" - no less!

And in order to add colour to the army's lies, photos were published of knives that were found on the ship as proof that the passengers had stored "cold weapons" on board with premeditation. And what do we see in those photos? Kitchen knives of the type that can be found in every home, and of course also in every passenger ship that carries hundreds of passengers. The passengers ate, and cut vegetables, bread and other food items with knives - how strange!

If I had been one of the passengers, and as it happens I nearly did join them, I would have been a member of the defending party.

In fact the actions of the defenders on deck were consistent with Israeli law, which permits self-defence against intruders, up to and including shooting them to death.

That is the famous "Dromi law," named after the farmer Shai Dromi, who killed a Bedouin citizen and wounded his friend when, according to him, they had broken into his farm at night. In order to prevent Dromi from being convicted, right-wingers in the Knesset passed a law while the trial was still under way, which permits the shooting of intruders. The racist initiators of that law thought that it would only apply to Jews killing Arabs. It surely did not occur to them that it could apply to Turks defending themselves against invading Israeli soldiers - without killing anyone.

And in order to complete the farce, the commander of the Navy, together with the Chief of Staff and the Minister of Defence, stated in a news conference that took place after the slaughter of the passengers by the soldiers of Shayetet 13 that the soldiers had "acted courageously" and "with high morality," because, after all, only nine people were killed. It is as if the commander of the Navy were saying that the passengers should say "thank you" to the soldiers for not having killed all of them. Really nice of them. I once heard a similar formulation from a neo-Nazi in Germany who said that the Nazis could have murdered a lot more Jews but because they exhibited self-restraint, many Jews remained alive. Such compassion!

Let us apply honest thinking to the matter: the brave and heroic ones were the passengers who defended themselves against armed and cruel Israeli invaders, trying to use everything that was within their reach in a struggle in which they did not have a chance, and many of them offered up their lives on the altar of humanitarian aid to the Palestinians in Gaza.

I am far from sharing the world-view of the participants in the flotilla who are members of the Islamic organization IHH, [2] but it has happened more than once that people who belong to different organizations that represent diametrically opposed opinions on many issues share an identical position on a certain issue. On the issue of

opposition to the siege of Gaza, I am in the same boat with all the participants in the flotilla, whether they be Islamists, Jews, Christians or secular.

The coverage of the massacre on the Mavi Marmara once again presented us with the familiar picture of the television channels united in one voice. Using mendacious laundered language, they all turned into the long arm of the army. Also the leader of the Opposition, Tzipi Livni, cast off her parliamentary role and became a government spokeswoman in interviews with the foreign media - a natural continuation of her role as Foreign Minister during the Gaza War.

There are those who have drawn a parallel with the illegal immigrant-ship Exodus, which set sail for Palestine with over four thousand Holocaust survivors in 1947. They were stopped by the British army and returned to Europe. The Exodus became an Israeli legend, and the Mavi Marmara too will probably join the canon of Palestinian legend. There are indeed a number of similarities.

In both cases a colonial army intercepted a passenger ship in order to prevent it from reaching its destination. Fifty British soldiers boarded the Exodus, and the passengers rose up and fought against them, exactly like the passengers on the Mavi Marmara. The British soldiers opened fire and killed three passengers out of a total of over four thousand. The Israeli soldiers proved to be more cruel, killing nine out of six hundred.

The Israeli soldiers obeyed orders. Not one of them asked, "wait a moment, why do we have to attack a civilian ship that is transporting humanitarian supplies to Gaza?"

As I said, soldiers in commando units are unmatched when it comes to obedience and implementing orders. That is one of the reasons why I advise young people who have not yet enlisted to avoid military service in general and so-called "elite units" like Shayetet 13 in particular; for they face a clear and immediate danger of being converted into licensed murderers. Civilian service is always preferable to military service, and if they must serve in the army, better to serve in units in the rear, inside the Green Line, in jobs that do not require the use of weapons.

If any future flotillas set sail from Turkey, the Turkish government should provide them with an escort of warships and fighter planes. A warning shot fired across the bow of an Israeli warship should make it clear to Israel that it is not worthwhile to behave like a pirate state.

The blockade is causing serious suffering to a million and a half innocent Palestinians, including thousands of children and old people who are suffering from malnutrition and disease and death because of the lack of medicines. It must be lifted.

The Hamas movement was nurtured and cultivated for years by the Israeli Occupation. The Hamas regime is certainly not a kindred spirit of mine, but it exists and it is necessary to talk to it. It is a terror entity no less than Israel is a terror entity. Those two terror entities have to talk to each other in order to find a political solution, and until it is found they must not wage the struggle on the backs of women, children and old people.

A year and a half ago I entered Gaza with a flotilla that brought medicines and other humanitarian aid. Other members of the group of which I was a member were concerned about what kind of reception I would receive as an Israeli. In fact I received a friendly reception. Clearly, they were eager to meet peace-loving Israelis who would treat them like human beings with rights. It was not only the people on the street who were happy to meet an Israeli who opposed the blockade; also political activists and government ministers.

"According to the best values of the IDF"

Instead of killing, liquidating, intercepting and suchlike terms from the lexicon of the Occupation, we must change the diskette and talk peace, even with Hamas.

Translated from Hebrew for Occupation Magazine by George Malent.

Notes

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Shayetet_13

2. <http://www.ihh.org.tr/anasayfa/en/>