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Freedom fighters or boat people?

By EMMANUEL NAVON
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The Greek economy is collapsing while the Gazan economy booms. In light of this, Greek activists in this year's flotilla seem more like boat people than freedom fighters.

Is it a coincidence that the last flotilla desperately trying to reach Gaza is setting sail from Greece? Ironically, while the Greek economy is imploding, Gaza's is booming. The angry Hellenes that are trying to break the blockade at the same time as fixing their ships have more in common with asylum-seeking boat people than modern-day freedom fighters.

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Violent protests are taking place daily in Athens. The Greek government recently passed an austerity bill through parliament to receive a bail-out from the EU, but the rescue plan to keep the bankrupt economy afloat is only a temporary fix. Debts that amount to 160% of its GDP make Greece insolvent. The government cannot finance its own budget deficit, and without help from the EU and the UN's International Monetary Fund (IMF), Greece will simply run out of finances.

Gaza, by contrast, has enjoyed a two-digit (16%) GDP growth in 2010. *The New York Times* recently reported that a new mall and two luxury hotels have just opened in Gaza. With the exception of weapons and ammunition, imports remain unrestricted.

The citizens of bankrupt European countries who are currently supported by German and US taxpayers' money, still cling to the "audacity of hope" tenet, and as such seem to have concluded that the next step should be to move to the sunnier shores of Gaza.

In reality, of course, the flotilla has a far more sinister agenda.

One of the key organizers of the second flotilla is Muhammad Sawalha, a Hamas activist living in Britain. Sawalha is one of the signatories of the "Istanbul Declaration" - a document that states, among other things, that "the Islamic nation" has an obligation to provide weapons to the Palestinians "so that they are able to live and perform the *jihad* in the way of Allah Almighty." Two more organizers of this year's flotilla are Walid Abu al-Shewarib, another member of Hamas from the German branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, and Amin Abu Rashid, a Hamas leader from Holland.

Hamas' strategy to end the maritime arms embargo imposed by Israel on Gaza is simple: necessitate a clash with the IDF, portray Hamas as the victim and Israel as the bully, and ultimately garner international support for Gaza's "liberation." To some extent, this strategy witnessed success last year, with Libération, the French

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daily, going as far as to label Israel a “pirate state.” In the words of the Israeli-produced “We Con the World” satire on the flotilla, “We’ll make them all believe that the Hamas is Momma Theresa... We’ll make them all believe the IDF is Jack the Ripper.”

That Hamas-in-Europe is organizing a flotilla to help Hamas-in-Gaza makes sense. They are, after all, co-workers and brothers-in-arms. But on the face of it, the support for medieval anti-Semites and misogynists by western liberals that include self-proclaimed progressive Jews seems downright inexplicable. Yet there is an explanation.

Among the crusaders of the flotilla are people like Adam Shapiro and Dror Feiler. Married to an Arab, the former hails from Brooklyn and is a Jew who claims not to regard himself as such. During the height of the PA’s acts of terror against Israel, in March 2002 Shapiro paid a visit to former PLO leader Yasser Arafat in his Ramallah-based compound. Dror Feiler is an Israeli-born musician raised on a kibbutz. Feiler moved to Sweden in 1973 and renounced citizenship of his birthplace.

If people like Shapiro and Feiler care so much about freedom and human rights, why do they not organize flotillas to countries like Syria and Libya where people are being butchered daily by tyrannical leaders?

Sadly, Shapiro and Feiler are obsessed with Israel, because it is the one country that stands as a testament to who they are and is a daily reminder of what they want to bury: their Jewish identity.

As for European and American leftists, Israel serves as another painful reminder of their failed attempt four decades ago to rid western society of its Judeo-Christian core. “Palestine” has become the mythical promised land of western nihilism.

Freedom-fighter-wannabes hope that walking on water in front of dozens of cameras will salvage them from misery, but unlike the real boat people, they are neither fleeing from massacre nor escaping starvation.

The writer is an International Relations Lecturer at Tel Aviv University and the founding partner of the Navon-Levy Group Ltd., an international business consultancy. He is also the author of numerous books on Israel’s foreign policy, including most recently, From Israel, With Hope: Why and How Israel will Continue to Thrive.

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