

the Israeli soldiers and, thus, force was being used in order to protect these soldiers' lives—well, only these pictures of wounded and dead so-called peace activists were highlighted in reports of this incident.

This distortion is intended to deceive the people of the world. The so-called activists created the violence that erupted when the flotilla was intercepted for inspection.

Now, apologists will simply say that those pipe-wielding thugs were justified because the Israelis should never have stopped and interdicted those ships aimed at giving humanitarian supplies to the people of Gaza. Well, why was that inspection necessary? Never stop asking that basic question. Why was it necessary for that inspection?

They weren't stopping the supplies; they were simply inspecting the cargo. Why are the Israelis insisting on inspecting the ships going to Gaza? Because Palestinian territory is being used to launch thousands of rockets and artillery at civilian communities in Israel from Gaza.

Now, the purpose of the flotilla was not to put food and humanitarian aid in the hands of the Palestinian women and children. That would have happened anyway because the Israelis, they just wanted to inspect this and then let that food and humanitarian supplies go forward.

No, that wasn't the purpose. The purpose of the flotilla was to prevent Israel from stopping the missile attacks on Israeli women and children by preventing Israel from interdicting weapons shipments into Gaza with the humanitarian aid as a cover.

No. These missile attacks from Gaza are, by anybody's definition, a terrorist attack. If the Palestinians want food and humanitarian supplies, end the rocket attacks.

□ 1830

Israel would be very happy if that happened, to let any food and humanitarian aid go into Gaza. And this is not an unreasonable demand on the part of the Israelis to at least inspect the cargoes in order to ensure that they are not being used to cover up the shipment of weapons that are being used to kill Israeli citizens. If you are launching explosive projectiles into Israel, Israel has a right to look at what you are shipping into your country to make sure you are not shipping in those items that are necessary to shoot these things into Israel and kill women and children.

So in reality, the so-called peace activists were not victims at all. They were belligerent, they were hostile, they were seeking more killing in the form of not only just killing these Israeli soldiers trying to inspect their ships, but killing more Israeli civilians through rocket attacks. They also, of course, are not just killing innocent people; they are undermining any chance for peace and reconciliation be-

tween the Palestinian people and the Israeli people.

No, those so-called peace activists were the villains in this situation, and those Israeli troopers who tried to at least inspect it to see that rockets were not being smuggled in, they were the heroes of the day. The world needs to seek truth in this issue and ignore the distorted picture they are being presented.

MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

A message in writing from the President of the United States was communicated to the House by Mr. Williams, one of his secretaries.

THE ISRAELI BLOCKADE AND THE FLOTILLA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker's announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentleman from New York (Mr. WEINER) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the majority leader.

GENERAL LEAVE

Mr. WEINER. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent that all Members may have 5 legislative days within which to revise and extend their remarks and include extraneous material on the subject of the Special Order that I and Leader HOYER will be convening for the following hour.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from New York?

There was no objection.

Mr. WEINER. Mr. Speaker and my colleagues, in the overnight hours of May 31, about 10 days ago, news broke that we now have become very familiar with—the previous speaker referred to it, and several of my colleagues have come to the floor this evening to talk about it—where a flotilla coming from Turkey was intercepted as part of the effort of the State of Israel to defend a blockade that was set up.

I want to spend the next hour talking a little bit about that boat and how it progressed, where it came from and why, and perhaps importantly drill into a little bit the idea of what the blockade is all about and what the history was. It is impossible to fully understand this issue only looking at it from the point of Israeli naval officers climbing on board a ship and saying, okay, I think I understand the story because I see that picture. That would no more be the truth than to watch the closing scene of Casablanca and say, okay, I understand what happened in this movie.

This was indeed a tragic thing. Anytime there is loss of life, anytime you have military officers, commandos climbing on a boat, something has broken down, something has failed. But what I don't think is fully understood, and still to this day isn't understood at capitals around the world, is who initiated this thing and why it was initiated.

Make no mistake about it, my colleagues, as Leader HOYER will be mentioning when he arrives here shortly, the condemnation that rang around the world against Israel is almost a default position in European and Arab capitals of the world. There is almost no surprise. It is also true that those very same quarters are the ones that criticize the United States at just about any opportunity. And in many of those same places you also see far too much joyous chest beating anytime something like this goes down where the United States or Israel is involved.

It was undoubtedly unfortunate that it occurred, but it didn't happen by accident. If you look at the history of this incident, it actually started not on May 31, when the sailors climbed aboard that boat, but it started on May 17, a couple of weeks earlier. What happened then? What happened then was the Israeli Government got wind of the idea that this flotilla was leaving from Cyprus, Turkey, and said, look, understand that there is a blockade around Gaza that controls what can get inside of Gaza for obvious reasons that I will go into further later. But, frankly, to stop weapons from going into Gaza, because it is weapons and missiles that have come into the Gaza Strip, which is controlled by the terrorist organization Hamas, that have been used to terrorize Israelis. Terrorize to the magnitude of about 10,000 rockets have left from Gaza since Israel left it in 2007 and Gaza was controlled by Hamas.

So they say we have an internationally recognized blockade that's been supported by both the Bush and Obama administrations to prevent ships from coming in without their having their goods inspected. So what the Israeli Government did is they reached out internationally to the sponsors of this boat and to the people on the boat and said, look, you are welcome to bring your supplies here to Gaza.

So it was on May 31 that this boat was intercepted off the coast of Gaza, but it was May 17 that Israel said, look, if you are interested in bringing humanitarian aid to Gaza, you are welcome to do it. All you have to do is bring it into Ashdod, which is right here, and we will look at the goods, make sure there is nothing dangerous in there, and then we will allow it to be escorted into Gaza via truck.

That's not an unusual occurrence. In fact, as of this morning 11,972 trucks during this period of time the blockade has been in effect have been escorted in just such a way. It's not unusual for humanitarian aid to come into Gaza. Despite much of the rhetoric we have heard from the international community, Israel facilitates it through a process.

Now, the people on those boats, this humanitarian boat that theoretically was trying to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza, said, no, we are going to take this flotilla of boats and we are going to go into the teeth of this blockade. They were reportedly warned repeatedly, and no one has disputed that.

They were warned, look, a blockade is essentially a military thing.

It is the same type of thing that we used in our blockade of Cuba. It is a recognized blockade. Because if you think about it, there aren't a lot of ways—if you look at the map here, this little stretch of land is what we are talking about. It borders Israel on some sides. Egypt, which is a participant in the blockade, they support and help support the blockade that Israel has. This huge coast here has been used in the past, particularly by the nation of Iran, to import weapons in.

But instead, this humanitarian ship, which was no humanitarian ship as we later learned, this humanitarian ship, said, no, we are going to keep going. Now, I ask you, ladies and gentlemen, none of us are naval officers in this Chamber. Actually, Congressman SESTAK is a naval officer, and I don't see him here today. But when it comes to enforcing a blockade, you don't have a lot of tools in your quiver.

Now, there are some ways that you can debilitate a boat, that you can stop its rotors from turning by essentially jamming it up from waters underneath. That was done with one, two, three, four, five of the other boats that you didn't hear about in the newspaper. But those boats were stopped using the efforts of the military in Israel to stop them in the most peaceful way possible.

Now, if a boat is coming into a blockade and it might pose a threat to Israel or to the United States, I mean, you can very easily change the names of the country and say a boat was coming from Yemen to the United States, and it's coming in and it wants to cruise down into the East River. Of course the United States would not let that happen, and the Coast Guard would say you are going to stop right here so we can inspect what's on this boat. And if they kept going, certainly we would not say, oh, that's okay. Every step necessary would be taken to stop them.

Well, that's kind of what happened here. What effectively happened was this boat said we are not going to stop, and they said we are going to leave the Israelis with no opportunity except to board the boat. That's what created the conflict. Israel did not create the conflict. They were essentially in a defensive posture, saying this is the line, don't cross it; and we are going to give you every opportunity before you reach the line to avert this conflict. The people on the boat chose not to. They wanted this conflict. They wanted this conflict. They did not want to deliver humanitarian aid; they wanted this conflict.

Well, once the conflict was upon the Israelis, I think by just about any definition of restraint the Israelis used restraint. They climbed aboard with quite literally paint guns on their shoulders to use when they landed. The only arms that they had were sidearms for the personal protection of these guys. And when they lowered them-

selves down on the boat, they were set upon by these humanitarian peace activists, I say with my tongue firmly in cheek. They were set upon with knives. They were set upon with steel poles. They were set upon with bullets. There were magazines and casings on the boat that did not match any of the Israeli sidearms. It was tragic that that happened. It was sad that it happened. But it was almost entirely the decision of the people on that boat.

Now, I say almost entirely, because that boat did not just appear out of the ether. It didn't just appear out of thin air. It had an enormous amount of support by some of the worst enemies of peace in that region, and some of the worst enemies, quite literally, not only of Israel, but of the United States as well. And I mean Turkey, Iran, Hamas. These are not entities that were looking for some peaceful resolution here.

Remember, once again to reiterate, here in the Gaza Strip, when elections were held in Israel, Israel does not any longer occupy the West Bank or Gaza. They left. They left it to the Palestinian people. This part here, the West Bank, is run by the Palestinian Authority.

Many of my colleagues know Mahmoud Abbas was here in Washington today and met with the President. This is a place that's had a great deal of economic growth. There has been a reduction in the amount of violence coming out of the West Bank. There are still problems, and I still think it is outrageous we provide any aid to the West Bank or Gaza so long as Mahmoud Abbas refuses to engage in direct negotiations for peace.

But putting that aside for a moment, in this area here, not the Palestinian Authority or Fatah, but Hamas, the terrorist organization Hamas that is funded by Iran, that gets their weapons from Iran and is in a declared state of war with Israel, has said they don't support a two-state solution, they support a no-State of Israel solution.

Now, who is it that has been supporting that? Actually, it's not Egypt here. They have been working very hard to enforce the border that they have here and help to enforce the embargo. But it's basically Iran. Iran has been exporting terror here, not only here, by the way, but also up here to Hezbollah, to Nasrallah in Lebanon through their agent Syria. But that is why the blockade exists. It's not just because Israel wants conflict. Quite the opposite: it's to try to prevent essentially a war going on here with more and more rockets and more and more armaments coming on shore.

So when this embargo is enforced, it's not only protecting the people of Israel; it's protecting the United States, because this is a way that Iran wants to set up essentially what is an agent of their own in the Middle East. That's what they want.

So when the Israelis boarded the boat, they were set upon. The sailors were beaten. They were stabbed and

shot, as I said. And when the dust settles, we had an opportunity, as all the world did, to see what was on that boat.

Let me tell you what the humanitarian aid was that was on that boat: 100 units of metal rods of various length—well, I am sure that was going to feed a lot of children; 200 knives of various sizes; 150 military-style and Turkish-produced self-defense vests, military-style; seven electric saws; 100 pipe wrenches; 50 wooden clubs; 20 axes; a telescopic sight for a gun; four night vision goggles; 100 diving lights; 150 head lamps; and of course boxes and boxes of propaganda and tapes, all of them in Turkish.

Now, if there was a true interest on the part of this boat of providing food or aid to the people of Gaza, I believe they had an opportunity, obviously, to go to Ashdod and drive it in. They did not want that.

So what is the correct response of the United States and the world community when confronted with these facts? Well, we have a couple of things. First of all, we should understand that even if we are the last country on Earth that understands the facts that I have been laying out here, even if we are the last country on Earth that understands the importance of Israel's role in the region and how they are set upon in a similar way that the United States was on September 11, except the difference is they have that every day, we should stand with Israel. Even if we are the last country on Earth saying it, we should say, look, the facts are the facts here.

As much as we would like to say Turkey is a player for peace here, no, they were a player for war here. And as much as we might like to say you know what, boy, I wish everyone would just get along in that region, it's Israel who is now sitting at the bargaining table for peace and the Palestinians who are refusing to do so.

□ 1845

But I think, my colleagues, we also have to consider something else, and that is all our relationships with some of the players who are behind us. Let's consider Turkey. This would not have happened were it not for the nation of Turkey taking the role that they did. They funded the ship. They provided international cover. The Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief, IHH as it's known in Turkey, has been linked to Hamas, and they helped to fund this. The Turkish Government just today voted against sanctions on Iran because, hey, this is apparently an agent, a country that they would like to be an agent for.

And for a lot of time, we kind of worship at the altar of the moderate Muslim state, the moderate Arab states that, you know what, we hope that they are there to be a fulcrum for peace, but it's not unlike a child wanting to see a unicorn. It would be great

if it happened, but we have to realize the facts are the facts, and NATO membership for Turkey has to be called into question here. We have to start to say to ourselves whose side is Turkey really going to be on, because what they did here is, rather than being an instrument for peace where they could have very easily said, We're sponsoring this boat. Go to Ashdod right here and offload the humanitarian aid. Or, We're sponsoring this boat. We're not going to have cases of knives on board. We're going to have cases of baby food because we want to help the people of Gaza.

That hasn't happened. And we also have to realize something else, and then I want to yield to some of my colleagues who have joined me.

We have to realize that the default position of Europe and the Arab capitals of the world is always going to be against Israel. We can't allow that and that alone to be the determinant of whether or not, of how our foreign policy is prosecuted. There's a terrorist state that controls Gaza right now. It's a terrorist state that, if they could, they would destroy the United States of America tomorrow, and they're starting with Israel.

The gentleman from Connecticut has been a great leader on this issue. I will be glad to yield to him.

Mr. HIMES. I thank the gentleman from New York for his eloquent treatment of the facts, and I thank him for focusing on the facts at hand.

One of the most disheartening aspects of the flotilla situation was the extent to which the facts were initially set aside by much of the world, and instead, prejudice was allowed to emerge, a prejudice against our ally, Israel. And we subsequently learned, of course, that the facts are a good deal more complicated than perhaps we were led to believe initially. As my colleague from New York points out, this was a flotilla with more than one agenda, a flotilla with a clear intention of provoking the kind of response that was ultimately provoked. And make no mistake, there's not a person in this Chamber or anywhere else that isn't saddened by the loss of life in the Mediterranean.

But I'd like to step back for a moment, away from the immediate facts that Mr. WEINER did such a good job at articulating, to some larger issues that cannot be lost in the week-to-week, the day-to-day of our relationship with the State of Israel.

The best way I can encapsulate what I'm talking about here is that Israel, for the United States, is family. We speak of a special relationship with Great Britain. We have at least a special relationship with the nation of Israel. It is a relationship of family. In some cases, very literally. In other cases, and for this Nation as a whole, we are family because we share so many values, so many of these values that are incorporated into this building, into our constitutive documents,

our Judeo-Christian values, to which we owe a debt of obligation to Israel. And, of course, it is the only democracy in a very, very dangerous region. For that reason alone, we would resonate with the State of Israel. And, of course, something that is all too often forgotten, the economic ties that we have, the economic similarities, economies based on innovation and creativity.

All three of these things make Israel family, and we can't lose sight of this as the facts are outed. As investigations are undertaken, we can't lose track of that underlying fact, especially in a world where our family is at risk—and this room is full of fathers and mothers, and we know what that phrase means.

I traveled to Israel last summer, and I stood at Sderot and saw how close and how severe the risks of Hamas, an entity dedicated to the destruction of the State of Israel, how that is not abstract. In fact, that is barely an arm's length away from the State of Israel. To the north, of course, Hezbollah, another entity, sponsored by Iran, dedicated to the eradication of the State of Israel. And, of course, Iran itself, not far away and hell bent on the creation of weapons of mass destruction and leaving absolutely no ambiguity about what it would do with those weapons of mass destruction.

I'm not saying that any of that changes the facts that my colleague from New York has laid on the table that will be investigated, that will be considered, that will probably be most interestingly and comprehensively investigated by Israel herself. But we cannot, any more than we lose loyalty to our sons and daughters, our cousins, our brothers and sisters and our spouses, forget that we are talking about family, and that when family is at risk, we lean in to our family, and we remind the world that there is a reason why Israel is part of our family—a reason of values, a reason of democracy, and the reason that we stand here today to remind the world that Israel is our family.

Mr. WEINER. I appreciate his thoughts and his leadership on this.

Just to put it in further context of the relationship between the United States and Israel, this is a tiny town of Sderot that you mentioned in your remarks. In the period of time since Gaza has been controlled by Hamas, there have been 6,066 rockets fired from that area into Sderot, 4,434 mortars. And I ask my colleagues to envision your town, envision the district that you represent, envision this city being under that type of barrage from a specific place. Do you think a blockade would be an excessive step to take? And that's why it's so important that we stand here today, and it's particularly important that Leader HOYER asked us to gather today to make these points.

And before I yield to anyone else, I want to yield to the majority leader of

the House of Representatives, STENY HOYER.

Mr. HOYER. I thank my friend for yielding. I thank my friend for leading this effort at my request, and I thank those who have joined in in raising our voice to defend actions that really need no defense, actions that any nation on Earth would take if it were similarly threatened, any nation on Earth.

Mr. Speaker, in the early morning hours of Monday, May 31, Israel naval forces intercepted six ships carrying mostly Turkish demonstrators attempting to break the blockade of the Gaza Strip. There was no confusion. That's what they said they were going to do. Israel gave them notice 2 weeks prior to this that they would not allow that to happen. So there was no confusion here about what was happening.

Five of the six ships complied with the IDF requests. The largest of them, however, the Mavi Marmara, refused, clearly bent on violent confrontation as it was boarded by Israeli defense forces, as they knew they would be. There was no confusion. These IDF troops were violently attacked with knives, clubs, and other weapons.

Let me remind you that in five of the six in this flotilla there was no violence. There was something in common on all of those ships. IDF forces were on all of those ships. But five of those ships, knowing full well that the blockade would not be allowed to be breached, offered no violent resistance.

At the end of the skirmish on the Marmara, seven members of the IDF had suffered injuries, including gunshot wounds and head trauma, and nine demonstrators, tragically, on the Mavi Marmara had been killed. No one wanted that result. I think not even those who were committing the violence on the IDF forces wanted that. But once violence is initiated, one cannot predict the outcome.

Those deaths are tragic. The events leading up to them deserve a full and scrupulous investigation. But this much, ladies and gentlemen, is clear. To call all the passengers of the Mavi Marmara nonviolent peace activists would be a victory for propaganda, not for fact. Peace activists don't launch attacks with knives and guns, and they certainly don't do so while chanting slogans calling for the death of Jews as an al Jazeera broadcast showed. Not an Israeli broadcast, but an Al-Jazeera broadcast showed the chants from those ships, from this ship, Kill the Jews.

However much we lament those nine deaths—and we do so—the fact is that the IDF was faced with an organized, violent assault and responded in self-defense, as we would expect any of our own forces to do wherever they may be sent to defend our country. Unfortunately, but not unsurprisingly, this incident has renewed international condemnation for Israel's blockade of Gaza from countries I suggest to my colleagues that would do exactly the same thing.

I cannot believe there's a country in Europe, in Asia, in Africa, in South America, or on the North American continent that would not say, If you breach this blockade that we have in place for our own security, we will confront you and stop you.

But that blockade exists for a reason: to keep weapons out of the hands of Hamas, a terrorist organization dedicated to the destruction of Israel and to random attacks on Israeli civilians.

Mr. WEINER has been pointing out the map. Probably most of us on this floor who are going to speak have been to Sderot. Some of us have been in the gymnasium that is an armed camp where it is the only safe place for the children of Sderot to play. Some have been with me to Sderot.

The attack on Israeli civilians has continued without abatement. I don't mean that it hasn't lessened from time to time, but never has there been a time when Israelis felt that the violence was concluded, because Hamas has made it clear that it will not conclude.

Hamas is dedicated to the destruction of Israel and to random attacks on Israeli civilians. The blockade was launched with the cooperation of Israel's neighbor Egypt when Hamas staged a violent coup to expel its political rivals and seize total control of Gaza. Who were its political rivals? Palestinians. The elected leadership of the Palestinian Authority.

And the blockade could end today, my friends, if Hamas recognized Israel's right to exist—as is the principle of the United Nations—gave up its commitment to murdering civilians, and released the Israeli soldier it holds captive.

To the extent that life is hard for those in Gaza, the prime cause is the terrorist organization that keeps them hostage, holds power through violence, and monopolizes the food and humanitarian supplies that Israel allows across the border.

Indeed, ladies and gentlemen, my colleagues, pay close attention to this point. Indeed, it is Hamas, not Israel, that is currently preventing the humanitarian goods from this very flotilla from reaching the Palestinians in Gaza. Not the blockade, but Hamas.

Finally, the United States should and will resist all one-sided attempts to condemn Israel at the United Nations. The UN, a body committed by its charter to universal human rights, has for much of its history, unfortunately, been sadly fixated on singling Israel out for condemnation—the only democratic nation in that region of the world that recognizes human rights. And we see the Supreme Court of Israel saying, time after time, you cannot do that government. That is a nation of laws. Yet it has been singled out for condemnation as much more serious crimes and crises have gone unaddressed throughout the world.

The biased record extends beyond the infamous 1975 resolution equating Zi-

onism with racism. The U.N. General Assembly has convened an emergency special session 10 times. Not, I would suggest to you, when the North Koreans killed, obviously premeditatedly, 46 individuals in their ship of South Korea in South Korean borders.

□ 1900

Six of the times that they met out of 10 have focused on one small besieged nation, Israel, while no emergency session was ever held on the Rwandan genocide, not held on the ethnic cleansing in the Balkans, not held on the genocide in Sudan.

The 2001 U.N. World Conference Against Racism neglected racism around the world to again single out, almost exclusively, Israel and Zionism. The U.N. Human Rights Council, whose members include Saudi Arabia, China, and Cuba, has only one permanent topic on its official agenda. Now, I have mentioned three genocides that have occurred. They are not on that agenda. Israel. Even Secretary-General Kofi Annan criticized the Human Rights Council for its "disproportionate focus on violations by Israel."

Should Israel comply with international law and the mores and values of the international community? Yes. Does it? Yes, yes, it does. And like every Nation, however, it enjoys the right to self-defense.

This troubled history is exactly why I'm skeptical that the United Nations will treat Israel justly now. What happened on Mavi Marmara needs a real investigation, not one colored by years of one-sided bias.

Mr. Speaker, despite what happened last Monday, the fundamentals of this conflict remain just as they were the day before. The overwhelming majority of Israelis want to live in peace with the Palestinians side-by-side in two States. So I believe do most Palestinians, but the extremism and hate of groups like Hamas stands in the way.

In my view, Mr. Speaker, there were those on those ships who sought this confrontation. Again, not for the purposes of humanitarian relief but for propaganda and for putting Israel at risk from those who wish its destruction. It is not a secret wish. It is an articulated wish. All the world knows the intent of Hamas: to destroy Israel and remove Jews from the Middle East because they say so.

Let us not be confused, Mr. Speaker. Finding a way to peace is fiercely difficult. It should not be made more difficult by those who see more propaganda value than human values and these loss of lives.

I thank my friend from New York for leading this Special Order that is so important so that our voices are heard here and around the world as it relates to our commitment to the sovereignty, security, and safety of Israel.

Mr. WEINER. Well, I thank you, and before the majority leader leaves the floor, I think on behalf of all of us in this institution, long before you were

the majority leader here, it was hard to think of a Member of the United States Congress in maybe anytime in the 62-year history of Israel that has had a stronger sense of commitment to the U.S.-Israel relationship than you, whether it was leading this body in a condemnation of the Goldstone Report, a one-sided document produced by the United Nations; leading this institution in support for Israel and, in fact, for the United States during the Gaza war.

It is important, that final note that you made about who Hamas is, they are an enemy of Israel for sure, but they're also an outpost for Iran. We have something very strong in common with Israel beyond just our common sense of democracy and culture. We have the common enemy that when this boat was traveling, it was traveling essentially doing the bidding of Iran, and we have to recognize that Israel is on the front line of what is essentially a threat to us.

I want to thank you on behalf of all of us who fight all the time to keep that Israel-United States relationship close for all that you have done in leading this institution.

Mr. HOYER. I thank my friend for his comments and thank him for his leadership.

Mr. WEINER. It is also important that we recognize something else that the majority leader said about the use of human shields on that boat. There were probably some people on that boat who were completely without malice; although most of the loudest voices made it very clear that all of them that we heard seemed to want nothing more than conflict and more than having Israel wiped from the face of the Earth. But remember, when there was the war in Gaza, when there was the war in Lebanon, the one thing consistent about agents of Iran that they always do, these terrorist organizations, they're always using human shields. They're putting civilians and putting weapons in the neighborhoods of civilians all the time.

I yield to the gentleman from New York.

Mr. MAFFEI. I thank the gentleman from New York. I also thank the gentleman from Florida for his graciousness.

Mr. Speaker, I want to address exactly what the gentleman from New York (Mr. WEINER) was talking about and, that is, Iran's involvement and what we can do about it. Indeed, it has been since 2007 that Israel, along with Egypt, has instituted this blockade of the Gaza strip to stop individuals from smuggling weapons, and over the course of the blockade, as we have already talked about, Israeli defense forces have diverted numerous ships, all without incident. Nobody ever wishes for fatalities or injuries to occur during the enforcement of a blockade, but the fundamental thing to understand is that Israel has the same right to self-defense as any country.

Days before the incident, Israel notified Turkey and other governments participating that it would not allow flotillas to breach the blockade at Gaza, and as Mr. WEINER indicated at the beginning of this hour, humanitarian aid was allowed to be off-loaded in the Port of Ashdod.

I am confident that the Israeli government will conduct a full and credible investigation regarding this incident, and it is imperative that we draw on the special relationship that endures between the United States and Israel and continue to stand by our ally.

But I'm even more concerned that the media circus surrounding this incident may distract us from the real threat that Iran continues to pose, not just to Israel, not even just to its neighbors, but to the entire world, including the United States. The blockade was largely due to Iran's continued efforts to smuggle weapons, and we must keep an eye on that.

Now, in fact, the U.N. Security Council actually passed a resolution today, Resolution 1929, which imposes new sanctions against Iran because of its suspected nuclear weapon program, the Revolutionary Guard, ballistic missiles, and nuclear-related investments. The resolution does expand on three previous sanctions on Iran by strengthening and expanding existing measures and breaking ground in several new areas.

What the majority leader said about the United Nations is correct. We must always be somewhat skeptical about their resolutions. So the fact that even the United Nations is now passing this resolution should indicate a strong message about how dangerous Iran continues to be.

It is increasingly important that the United States stand with the State of Israel and impose even stronger sanctions than the U.N. has. A nuclear-capable Iran poses a major threat to the entire world. By combining a nuclear weapon with a current missile program, Tehran would be capable of targeting American troops and its allies throughout the Middle East and beyond.

Iran is one of the leading sponsors of terrorism and continues to spout anti-Semitic rhetoric regarding the State of Israel. President Obama has stated all options should remain on the table for dealing with Iran. However, currently tough sanctions that are strictly enforced remain the best option to try to persuade Iran's leaders to do away with their nuclear program.

Both Chambers of the 111th Congress have already passed Iran sanctions legislation. Currently, the conference committee has been working on reconciling these different bills. The legislation would increase pressure on Iran by restricting their ability to purchase or refine petroleum products. Despite being one of the largest producers of crude oil in the world, Iran lacks adequate refining capability to meet its own domestic needs for gasoline.

I believe only a consistent and appropriately tough sanctions policy will give the level of pressure on the current despotic State of Iran that has any chance of persuading Iran to drop its nuclear ambitions. The refusal of Iran to accept the existence of the State of Israel helped lead to the unrest in Gaza which helped lead to this incident.

The U.N. Security Council resolution is a good step, but America has an obligation to lead and not just follow.

I really thank the gentleman from New York for his indulgence.

Mr. WEINER. I thank you. The gentleman from Florida, I would be glad to yield to you.

Mr. GRAYSON. Thank you very much.

The question that has been raised by critics of Israel for the past week is why is Israel intercepting ships on the so-called high seas, 100 miles from its own shores, and the answer can be summed up in one simple phrase: self-defense. That simple phrase explains what we saw and explains Israel's continuing need to protect itself.

Over 1,000 rockets have been fired from Gaza into the territory of Israel, 1,000 rockets. Imagine what we would do if 1,000 rockets were fired into San Diego. Imagine what we would do if 1,000 rockets were fired into Seattle or into Detroit or any other border area.

In the case of Israel, 1 million people live within rocket range of Gaza, and those 1 million people have been living through hell for years with a 15-second warning to seek shelter when a rocket attacks. And as a result of that, 13 Israelis have died, but it's inflicted huge harm on the people who live within rocket range in south Israel. One-third of all the children in south Israel suffer from post-traumatic stress syndrome. Again, imagine what we would do to stop such attacks if they were directed against us.

That's the fundamental reason why Israel feels obliged, the Israeli military feels obliged, to do what it needs to do to protect its citizens. These ships were not in any way interfered with because they were carrying humanitarian aid. The ships were interfered with for one reason and one reason only. That's because they could have been carrying missiles and rockets and things that could be made into missiles and rockets. It's a fundamental duty of the Israeli military to protect the people of Israel, just as it's a fundamental duty of our military to protect us. What they did was what they needed to do in order to ensure the safety of their own people, and honestly, in the same circumstances, we would have done the same thing.

Thank you very much.

Mr. WEINER. I would say to the gentleman, I would actually argue that the military of Israel used such restraint. I mean, frankly, there aren't too many ways to stop a boat. One of the ways is to fire upon it. They chose to put their own sailors in jeopardy; al-

though there should have been no reason to believe that they would be on a humanitarian boat. Why would anyone expect that someone aboard a humanitarian aid ship would be set upon?

You know, to some degree the media has to be on notice that there is some responsibility to report the context of this thing as well, not just the end. When you see a sailor being tossed overboard, you know, it didn't seem like a very humanitarian act, and there was a shameful display by Reuters, who recently published a photograph of the sailor, the Israeli soldier, that fell on the ground, and they cropped out the guy standing next to him with a knife to explain where all that blood came from. That knife was held by someone on this humanitarian aid ship.

No one knows these facts better than Jerrold Nadler from New York. I would be glad to yield to him at this time.

Mr. NADLER of New York. Thank you, and I thank you for organizing this Special Order.

It has been absolutely galling to watch the hypocrisy and the fury, the undeserved fury directed at Israel for taking a step in its own self-defense. The so-called "Freedom flotilla," which went to break the blockade of Gaza, had to be intercepted. Israel and Egypt have been blockading Gaza. They've been blockading it not as humanitarian materials. Thousands and thousands of tons of humanitarian materials and food and supplies go through the checkpoints into Gaza every month by truck. But ships can carry anything.

Israel has stopped ships on the high seas carrying rockets to Gaza. When they were challenged and the Israeli government urged the Turks not to allow this flotilla to sail the way it was—and the Chinese by the way had this right. The Chinese press a day or two before the flotilla was intercepted printed the headline: "Turkey Challenges Israel." Not Israel challenges Turkey. Turkey Challenges Israel by sending these ships knowing that the goal was to break the blockade, not to deliver humanitarian aid.

When the Israelis made clear to the people on board the ships that if you land in Ashdod we will send all the materials straight through to Gaza except for any weapons we find, Greta Berlin, the head of the organization sponsoring it, said, no, we're not interested in delivering humanitarian aid.

Mr. WEINER. If the gentleman will yield for a moment, that's right here. It's not like they were being diverted somewhere far off.

Mr. NADLER of New York. They were in armed rocket range.

Mr. WEINER. Exactly.

□ 1915

Mr. NADLER of New York. Twelve miles, to be precise. Greta Berlin said, no, the aim is to break the blockade.

Now, a lot of people, a lot of countries were saying, the President of

France, "How dare they intercept ships on the high seas." "This is piracy," said Prime Minister Erdogan of Turkey.

Well, the law is very clear. If you are fighting someone—and Israel is fighting Hamas; Hamas controls the territory and has declared war on Israel and said that war will not stop until Israel is destroyed, maybe a ceasefire from time to time, but this war must continue until Israel is destroyed, as far as Hamas is concerned—then you are subject to blockade. That is a tactic of war.

And in a blockade, you can board the ship, you can, in fact, sink the ship if that's the only way to enforce the blockade, in international waters as long as it's clear that it's going to a blockaded area. And that's from the U.S. Naval Commander's Handbook.

But why was this being done? Because, we are told, they have to break the blockade. Why do they have to break the blockade? Because the overall issue is that we must end the Israeli occupation. This is the real sin. This is why so many people think that Israel is wrong: Because it must end the occupation.

People forget how the occupation started. The occupation of Gaza and the West Bank started when Israel resisted a war of aggression aimed at its extermination in 1967. But we are ignorant of history. History started 5 years ago.

Israel wants to end the occupation. Israel has offered to end the occupation, but there is a problem: Who do you give the land to?

And Israel has experience here. Israel withdrew from Lebanon in 2006, and the U.N. said, "We will send peacekeeping troops, and they will enforce Resolution 1701 to prevent the importation of rockets and arms." And what happened? There are 40,000 missiles in the possession of Hezbollah in Lebanon today because the U.N. peacekeepers stand aside. And Israel has learned that she cannot depend on the U.N. or the international community or anybody else to defend her.

Gaza Israel withdrew from in 2005 and left behind agricultural establishments and other things. What happened? Hamas took over and turned it into a rocket launching pad against Israel. Over 10,000 rockets have been launched against Israel.

Mr. WEINER. Just so everyone understands the points that Mr. NADLER is making, this piece of real estate, about the size of New Jersey, now has a terrorist agent here in Gaza in the south; a terrorist agent up here in Lebanon, governed by Hezbollah, at least about 25 percent of its government is, and Nasrallah, and Hezbollah controls this area here; and a terrorist agent of Iran right here in Syria, which once upon a time controlled literally the mountaintop overlooking the country.

So what the gentleman is describing is terrorist, terrorist, terrorist functions, all in support of the same en-

emies of the United States, and that's Iran.

Mr. NADLER of New York. But Israel still wants to end the occupation. Israel wants to be left in peace. Israel offered in 2000 at Camp David, in 2001 at Taba.

And what was their offer? Israel said, "We will withdraw from the entire Gaza Strip. We will withdraw from 97 percent of the West Bank. We will give land swaps to the Palestinians to make it equivalent to 100 percent of the acreage. And we will share Jerusalem. But, in return, they have to agree that the war is over." They wouldn't agree, and they started the first intifada.

Prime Minister Olmert renewed the offer in 2008, but they will not agree to end of claims or to demilitarization. That's the real issue. If they would agree to that, if the Palestinians would agree that the West Bank cannot be used—if they gave it back, that the West Bank would not be used as a rocket launching pad, that Gaza would not be used as a rocket launching pad, that Israel could live in peace if she withdrew, that deal could be made. And it could be made; it's been offered.

And until the Palestinians are willing to live in peace and are willing to talk about it—the Palestinians, even Abbas, won't even talk to the Israelis now, only to the Americans. Until they are willing to talk and make that agreement, the occupation will continue, and it will be the fault of the Palestinians, not the Israelis.

Mr. WEINER. Well, the gentleman makes an excellent point. And the gentleman from Virginia, I know, is expert on these issues, as well. And it is important to understand that, just today, Mahmoud Abbas was in town.

And I would gladly yield to the gentleman from Virginia (Mr. NYE), who has shown remarkable leadership on these issues in his brief time in the House, to pick up on some of the points that Mr. NADLER made.

Mr. NYE. I would like to start by thanking my colleague from New York for laying out the issue very concisely tonight and for his leadership on the issue. And, as someone who has spent a significant amount of time, myself, both in Israel and in a number of the surrounding countries, I want to rise today to reaffirm the U.S.-Israeli bond of mutual defense and security.

Our friendship gives us peace of mind in knowing that we will always have each other's support in one of the most volatile regions of the world. I maintain my strong support for Israel's right to exist and to protect herself. As the lone bastion of democracy in the region, Israel is our closest ally against terrorist groups, and I am committed to seeing our friendship continue.

The recent loss of life off the coast of Gaza is distressing. However, it is troubling that many have rushed to judgment while failing to recognize the serious security challenges Israel faces every day necessitating the Gaza blockade.

As my colleague has mentioned tonight, Hamas terrorists in Gaza launch frequent rocket attacks directed at Israeli towns than too often take the lives of innocent civilians. And, as our majority leader said earlier this evening in describing a trip that I joined him on last summer, Israeli children are forced to hide in concrete bunkers in order to have a safe place to play.

Hamas makes relentless efforts to import into Gaza, through any means possible, the parts for these deadly rockets, complicating Israel's efforts to safely allow humanitarian aid to enter Gaza.

Lasting peace between the Israelis and Palestinians requires that Israel can assure the safety of its population against terrorist threats. And that is why I recently introduced and helped pass in the House H.R. 5327, the United States-Israel Missile Defense Cooperation and Support Act.

The funds authorized by the bill will allow Israel to build two Iron Dome missile defense batteries that will help protect Israeli citizens living in cities like Sderot, who have been terrorized by over 8,000 indiscriminate rocket and mortar attacks on their homes, schools, and communities.

Mr. Speaker, U.S.-Israeli cooperation on the Iron Dome system will help advance the cause of peace by supporting Israel's ability to defend civilian areas from terrorist attacks, creating the necessary space for a successful peace process.

Again, I want to thank my colleague from New York for his leadership on the issue.

Mr. WEINER. Well, I thank you.

And you are exactly right. Our cooperation with the State of Israel has never been higher, in terms of military and intelligence.

I yield to the gentlewoman from Florida, DEBBIE WASSERMAN SCHULTZ, a member of the Appropriations Committee, a powerful committee, who recently led a delegation to the Middle East which I was honored to be a part of. The House knows no stronger advocate for the U.S.-Israel relationship than she.

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. I thank the gentleman for yielding. And it was an absolute pleasure to join you on the CODEL to the Middle East in January where we learned quite a bit about the progress of the peace process.

And it has been noted by a number of our colleagues this evening that we cannot allow, in spite of all the recent controversy—which is unclear to me why a country that is defending its borders, its territory, and its people is controversial—but that we cannot allow it to take our focus off to that of a nuclear-armed Iran.

One of the things that is unbelievable to me has been the criticism and the questions that have been thrown at Israel: first, that they supposedly boarded the flotilla ships in international waters as if they somehow

didn't have the right to do that. That this is a legal blockade, there isn't any disputing that. They are well within their rights and, understandably, are defending their borders and their people.

Because what country would not make sure that items coming in from a ship to an area that is run by a hostile terrorist organization would not be checked to make sure that they are the genuine humanitarian aid that the people bringing the goods in say that it is? That is simply common sense. And I would think that the citizens of any nation would expect nothing less than their government.

But the other criticism that I have heard during the week is that somehow the people of Gaza—and no one denies that there is suffering that has gone on in Gaza. The people of Gaza went through a war. They continue to be ruled by a terrorist organization, and so, as a result, they are definitely suffering.

But it is important to note that, over the last 18 months, Israel has allowed a steady flow of humanitarian aid and food to go to the people of Gaza. One million tons of humanitarian aid, to be specific, have been allowed into Gaza over the last 18 months, the equivalent of one ton of aid per man, woman, and child in food and materials living in Gaza today.

Mr. WEINER. And I would point out, that same exact offer was made to this flotilla: Come to Ashdod right here. And it wasn't made an hour before; it was made 10 days before, as soon as the word got out, even before it had left port. The nation of Turkey, who was sponsoring this, and the sponsors of the boat were told, "Listen, just go right here, and we will take a look at what you have, and then we will escort it militarily into Gaza for you."

Ms. WASSERMAN SCHULTZ. And just a few days later, an Irish ship, the *Rachel Corrie*, was offered the same thing, to take their goods. And they were also challenging the blockade, yet had a very different response and accepted the boarding and accepted travel to the port of Ashdod and had their goods offloaded.

The point is that Israel cannot be expected to stand idly by and allow for goods to be flowing unchecked without making sure that there aren't hostile intentions behind those goods.

And as Israel continues to face unjust criticism on the world stage, the United States must continue and will continue to support our friend, ally, and partner. And I am so proud to stand with my colleagues today.

You have a tragic situation that occurred, but we cannot forget that this blockade exists because Hamas, the ruling party of Gaza, is a terrorist organization with the sworn goal to destroy the Jewish state. A blockade supported by both Israel and Egypt is a means to stop the smuggling of illegal materials and weapons to Hamas.

And I am so pleased that you have organized this special order hour this

evening and look forward to continuing to stand with you.

Mr. WEINER. I thank the gentlewoman. And as someone who represents south Florida, you know that if a boat came churning towards the coast, and let's say it came from Yemen, and it had people on it who were chanting "Death to Floridians," and it wouldn't stop when the military offered it an opportunity to, we would certainly not, as Americans, expect to say, "Okay, we will just see what happens when it reaches shore." You are exactly right to point out the necessity of stopping it in international waters. That's where blockades happen.

I yield to the gentlewoman from Pennsylvania (Ms. SCHWARTZ), who also understands these issues and, long before she even came to this body, was fighting to preserve the Israel-United States relationship.

Ms. SCHWARTZ. I appreciate your organizing this hour of special order and giving us the opportunity to speak about the Gaza flotilla incident and to speak in support of one of our Nation's closest allies, Israel.

While the full details of the incident aboard the lead ship that came in under the flotilla is still under investigation, it is apparent that the organizers of the flotilla intentionally sought to confront Israeli security forces and to defy the embargo of Gaza that was established by Israel and Egypt.

The organizers, the activists, as they called themselves, rejected means offered by Israel—that has been talked about tonight—to deliver the humanitarian aid used by internationally accepted organizations, including the Red Cross, repeatedly, to get that aid to Gaza.

The resulting altercation and loss of life could have been avoided had the organizers of the flotilla agreed to Israel's repeated offers for them to dock at one of their ports and allow the overland transfer of humanitarian aid to Gaza.

□ 1930

Israel has the right to defend and protect herself. The blockade of Gaza exists particularly because it needs to prevent arms being smuggled into Gaza and to protect the citizens of Israel, who have been the subject of thousands of rocket attacks launched by Hamas since 2005. Hamas, which is recognized internationally as an enemy of Israel and as a terrorist organization, has as its mission the destruction and dissolution of the State of Israel and is continuing to be a threat to the safety and security of the residents of Israel.

The loss of life is tragic, but there is no question that the organizers of the flotilla were clearly intent on provoking a military response rather than delivering humanitarian aid; otherwise, they would have worked with Israel to transfer the supplies to Gaza.

I see there are others who want to speak. Let me just conclude by saying

I am proud to stand with my colleague in support of Israel and the right that she has to defend and protect herself. We will continue to work towards peace and security for Israel, and I appreciate being here tonight.

Yet, in spite of the fact that Hamas is singularly focused on the destruction of Israel, Israel currently allows delivery of 10,000–15,000 tons of humanitarian aid a week to the people of Gaza.

The United States will continue to stand by our ally and friend Israel. And we will continue to work closely with all of our allies including Israel to suppress violent extremism around the world. We will continue to work to end hostilities in the Middle East and find a way to ensure security for the State of Israel and a future of peace for the Israeli and Palestinian people.

But, we will do so with a keen understanding of the threats against Israel and the threats against the values we share. I appreciate joining with my colleagues in standing tonight to support our valued friend, Israel and its right to defend herself and protect her people.

Mr. WEINER. I thank the gentlewoman. And I really want to apologize for interrupting you.

Perhaps the most important fighter for Israel in this institution is the chairwoman of the subcommittee, the gentlelady from New York (Mrs. LOWEY). I'm glad to recognize you.

Mrs. LOWEY. I thank the gentleman for organizing this Special Order and providing critical details of exactly what happened.

Let there be no doubt in anyone's mind: Israel has the right to defend herself and the responsibility to protect her citizens from Hamas, which denies Israel's right to exist and rains rockets down on its citizens.

While Israel reviews the flotilla incident and considers the best way to implement the Gaza blockade, we must not forget that failure to prevent weapons and other illicit materials from reaching Hamas would be a dereliction of Israel's most basic responsibility to its people. I stand firmly in support of Israel's right to self-defense, and I am committed to maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge so she can continue to defend her citizens.

As the blame-Israel-first crowd continues to attack our democratic ally, Israel, over a host of challenges in the Middle East, I am reminded of a simple yet powerful concept: "Words matter." The inflammatory rhetoric surrounding events in the Middle East in recent weeks and months only begets more hostility and discourages efforts towards a lasting peace agreement which the people of Israel, the people of the West Bank, and the people of Gaza deserve; and these words can incite those encouraging violence against Israel.

Mr. GARRETT of New Jersey. Mr. Speaker, our allies in Israel are in the midst of an ongoing crisis. Last week, this became crystal clear when so-called "freedom activists" attacked IDF soldiers. Regrettably, nine activists were killed and several Israelis were injured.

In the aftermath of this incident, Israel has endured criticisms from Turkey, the United Nations, and the press. Even the U.S. Administration has been somewhat muted in its support of Israel's self-defense. These responses mystify me when I consider the background and reality of recent events.

Fact: Israel is at war with Hamas. Hamas, which is recognized as a terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union, still abides by a charter which calls for the destruction of the State of Israel. Furthermore, Hamas continues to espouse anti-Semitic propaganda en masse. Since 2001, thousands of rockets have been launched from Gaza into civilian-populated areas in southern Israel, indiscriminately killing and injuring innocent, unsuspecting men, women, and children. That's why I introduced legislation in 2008 which highlighted and condemned the ongoing rocket attacks. My resolution passed the House with strong bi-partisan support, but the rocket attacks have continued.

Fact: Israel is not at war with the peaceful citizens of Gaza. Israel fully withdrew its soldiers and citizens from the Gaza Strip in 2005 in the hopes of attaining peace and creating an environment conducive to negotiations with the Palestinian Authority. Last week, after Israel diverted the flotilla to the port of Ashdod for inspection, Israel proceeded to transport the humanitarian cargo to the Gaza Strip. In fact, Israel takes a proactive stance in providing humanitarian supplies to Gaza's civilians.

Fact: Israel did not violate international law by imposing a blockade on Gaza. Historically, any sovereign nation at war may impose a blockade. Egypt, for example, had imposed a blockade on Gaza. The U.S. itself imposed a blockade on the Confederates during the Civil War, on Cuba during the Cold War, and on Germany and Japan during World War II. Israel is justified in its attempts to prevent radical organizations from supplying Hamas with weapons that could eventually harm Israeli civilians. To further that end, I recently introduced H. Res. 1241, which supports Israel's right to maintain and construct security fences along its borders.

Fact: The interception of the Mavi Marmara was not an isolated action by the Israeli Defense Forces. In recent history, Israel has peacefully diverted nine other "humanitarian" missions, inspected their cargoes, and delivered the aid to Gaza. The boarding tactics employed last week were necessary to restrain such a large vessel.

Fact: The main mission of the flotilla was not to provide humanitarian supplies for civilians in Gaza. The six ships were sponsored in part by the IHH, an extremist Turkish organization with ties to terrorist groups such as Al-Qaeda. While the IDF peacefully boarded five of the six vessels that made up the flotilla, activists and militants aboard the sixth vessel had armed themselves with iron bars, knives, and clubs.

Fact: Hamas is not Israel's only threat. In 2002, Israel intercepted a ship in the Red Sea which was carrying 50 tons of weaponry provided by Iran. In November of last year, Israel intercepted an Iranian ship carrying hundreds of tons of weaponry to Hezbollah in Lebanon. Iran's president has repeatedly declared his hatred for Israel while continuing his pursuit of nuclear weapon development. As a member of the Iran Sanctions Conference Committee, I

will continue to support prompt, strong action to deter Iran's evil ambitions.

I must ask those who condemn Israel, "Have you examined the facts?" It is crucial for the United States to stand beside Israel during these tumultuous times and I am heartened that more than a dozen senators and over 60 of my House colleagues have released statements supporting Israel. I urge the Administration, the media, and American citizens to join us in defending Israel from false assertions. Moreover, I encourage the Attorney General to prosecute any American citizen who aids Hamas. The strategic relationship between our two democratic governments must withstand the threats and actions of terrorists who seek to create a rift between our two nations.

Mr. BISHOP of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, the long-standing conflict in the Middle East unfortunately has added a new and tragic event to its history. I deeply regret the loss of life that occurred on May 31, 2010 when the Israel Defense Force intercepted the flotilla of six ships that sailed from Turkey to Gaza. Events went horribly awry when nine people died.

I want to repeat my support for the State of Israel and its right to defend itself from terrorist attacks in the strongest terms possible. Since 2005, when Israel disengaged from Gaza, over 10,000 rockets have been fired on the Jewish State, endangering the lives of thousands of civilians. Israel's naval blockade of Gaza has helped to ensure that the supply of munitions and weapons to Hamas, which has controlled the Gaza Strip since 2007, is kept to the lowest extent possible. The flotilla incident demonstrates once again that increased pressure must be placed on Hamas to recognize Israel's right to exist and to renounce terror. In addition, progress must be made in resolving the conflict between the Israelis and the Palestinians so that they can live in peace and security.

Mrs. LOWEY. Mr. Speaker, let there be no doubt in anyone's mind: Israel has the right to defend herself and the responsibility to protect her citizens from Hamas, which denies Israel's right to exist and rains rockets down on its citizens.

While Israel reviews the Gaza flotilla incident and considers the best way to implement the Gaza blockade, we must not forget that failure to prevent weapons and other illicit materials from reaching Hamas would be a dereliction of Israel's most basic responsibility to its people. I stand firmly in support of Israel's right to self-defense and am committed to maintaining Israel's qualitative military edge so she can continue to defend her citizens.

As the 'Blame Israel First' crowd continues to attack our democratic ally Israel over a host of challenges in the Middle East, I am reminded of a simple—yet powerful—concept: words matter. The inflammatory rhetoric surrounding events in the Middle East in recent weeks and months only begets more hostility; discourages efforts toward a lasting peace agreement, which the people of Israel, the West Bank, and Gaza deserve; and can incite those encouraging violence against Israel.

The Administration focused today on humanitarian and development assistance to strengthen the Palestinian Authority so it can serve as a viable partner in peace to Israel. Abu Mazen must make clear to all the Palestinian people that their security and a prosperous future depends on rejecting Hamas,

recognizing Israel and working with the international community and Israel to achieve a two state solution.

Despite the current, tense environment, some positive steps have been taken that will improve Israel's security as well as bolster U.S. national security interests.

Iran continues to be an existential threat to Israel, the region and the world, and I am pleased today's agreement by the U.N. Security Council to impose multilateral sanctions on Iran will hold the regime accountable for its reckless pursuit of nuclear weapons. I look forward to Congress finalizing strong bilateral sanctions and urge European partners and other responsible countries to do the same.

We must continue to strongly support the U.S.-Israel partnership which provides invaluable benefits to both of our countries national security.

Mr. McMAHON. Mr. Speaker, Israel is the only democracy in the Middle East, is our strong ally and true friend. Innocent Israelis endure attacks far too often.

Unfortunately, following the May 31 flotilla incident, Israel has come under assault in the media and international community once again.

This has resulted in a particularly sad time for the historically strong partnership between Israel and Turkey. As a bridge between East and West, Turkey is a source of dialogue between cultures, particularly for the Jewish people, who have lived in Turkey for more than five hundred years. This history has characterized the special relationship between these two countries since the founding of the State of Israel in 1948. For this reason, Prime Minister Erdogan's brazen rhetoric, support for the terrorist group, Hamas, and today's decision to vote against sanctions in the Security Council are misguided and thoroughly disappointing.

It is unfortunate that a leader, who once opened his country's doors to all of its neighbors, now chooses to follow the radical, fundamentalist maneuvers of groups like the IHH, instead of practicing the diplomacy for which it has been known.

Despite what Hamas supporters may be claiming now, the May 31, 2010 flotilla incident wasn't about bringing in supplies. It was about provoking Israel, a country whose people have been subject to countless terrorist attacks from Hamas supporters in the Gaza Strip. No one should be led astray, Hamas is a terrorist organization that stands for the annihilation of Israel and should not and cannot be accepted as a legitimate voice in Gaza. And, Just as America protects its borders, Israel—and any other country—has the right to maintain and defend its own borders.

Since Israel instituted its Gaza blockade, terrorist attacks against Israeli civilians have dramatically decreased, and it is not hard to see how the Israeli government would perceive the flotilla's actions as a direct confrontation. Primarily, though, we need to remain focused on what really threatens the shared interests of all democratic countries—a nuclear armed Iran. This is why I believe it is in our country's best interest to lower tensions in the Eastern Mediterranean. Turkey has unfortunately disappointed the global community today with its vote in the UN Security Council, but the passage of the sanctions package is an overwhelming victory for the United States, Israel and the overall security of the international community.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The time of the gentleman has expired.

MESSAGE FROM THE SENATE

A message from the Senate by Ms. Curtis, one of its clerks, announced that the Senate has passed a bill of the following title in which the concurrence of the House is requested:

S. 3473. An act to amend the Oil Pollution Act of 1990 to authorize advances from Oil Spill Liability Trust Fund for the Deepwater Horizon oil spill.

The message also announced that pursuant to Public Law 111-148, the Chair, on behalf of the Republican Leader, appoints the following individuals to serve as members of the Commission on Key National Indicators:

Dr. Wade F. Horn of Maryland (for a term of 3 years); and

Dr. Nichols N. Eberstadt of the District of Columbia (for a term of 2 years).

NOTIFICATION OF TERMINATION OF SUSPENSIONS WITH RESPECT TO ISSUANCE OF CERTAIN PERMANENT MUNITIONS EXPORT LICENSES FOR EXPORTS TO CHINA—MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES (H. DOC. NO. 111-120)

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following message from the President of the United States; which was read and referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and ordered to be printed:

To the Congress of the United States:

Pursuant to the authority vested in me by section 902(b)(2) of the Foreign Relations Authorization Act, Fiscal Years 1990 and 1991 (Public Law 101-246) (the “Act”), and as President of the United States, I hereby report to the Congress that it is in the national interest of the United States to terminate the suspensions under section 902(a)(3) of the Act with respect to the issuance of permanent munitions export licenses for exports to the People’s Republic of China insofar as such restrictions pertain to the LightScanner® 32 System used for gene mutation genotyping for individualized cancer treatment. License requirements remain in place for these exports and require review on a case-by-case basis by the United States Government.

BARACK OBAMA.
THE WHITE HOUSE, June 9, 2010.

THE ISRAEL BLOCKADE AND THE FLOTILLA

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under the Speaker’s announced policy of January 6, 2009, the gentleman from Missouri (Mr. AKIN) is recognized for 60 minutes as the designee of the minority leader.

Mr. AKIN. Mr. Speaker, I yield to the gentlewoman from New York (Mrs. LOWEY.)

Mrs. LOWEY. I thank the gentleman. I’m just going to complete my statement, and I appreciate your generosity.

The administration focused today on humanitarian and development assistance to strengthen the Palestinian Authority so it can serve as a viable partner in peace to Israel. But Abu Mazen must make clear to all the Palestinian people that their security and prosperous future—and we’ve seen an 11 percent growth in the West Bank—depends on rejecting Hamas, recognizing Israel, and working with the international community and Israel to achieve a two-state solution.

Despite the current tense environment, some positive steps have been taken that will improve Israel’s security as well as bolster U.S. national security interests. Iran continues to be an existential threat to Israel, the region, and the world. I am pleased today’s agreement by the U.N. Security Council to impose multilateral sanctions on Iran will hold the regime accountable for its reckless pursuit of nuclear weapons, and I look forward to Congress finalizing strong bilateral sanctions and urge European partners and other responsible countries to do the same.

We must continue to strongly support the U.S.-Israeli partnership which provides invaluable benefits to both of our countries’ national securities.

Mr. AKIN. I yield to my good friend from New York (Mr. ENGEL).

Mr. ENGEL. I thank the gentleman, and I will be brief. I rise in support of everything that my colleagues have said.

The U.S.-Israel relationship is a special relationship, and it’s a relationship that needs to be strengthened. The United States is Israel’s only true friend. In fact, when you look at the United Nations or the so-called Human Rights Council in the United Nations, it’s really a kangaroo court stacked up against Israel. No wonder Israel doesn’t accept what the so-called “international body” says about them, because they can never do anything right. They’re always condemned no matter what they try, no matter what they do.

My colleagues have pointed out that Israel, like every other sovereign nation, has the right to defend itself, that Israel has at least twice seized large caches of arms aboard Iranian ships bound for Hamas and Hezbollah, and a blockade is an appropriate security measure when employed in the face of hostility such as that directed by Hamas against Israel.

Hamas doesn’t recognize Israel’s right to exist, has vowed to destroy Israel, won’t abide by any agreements that have been signed by Israel and the previous Palestinian governments, and so Israel has to make sure that terrorist attacks don’t come from Gaza into Israel as they have for such a long time. As my colleagues have pointed out, Israel has offered to inspect the flotillas and let all the humanitarian

aid on the flotillas go to Gaza, but these people on the flotilla were obviously not interested in delivering humanitarian aid. They were interested in provoking a violent reaction from Israel.

I just want to stand in support of the U.S.-Israel relationship, a strong relationship. Israel is our best friend and ally in the Middle East. Hopefully, soon there will be a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, two states side by side living in peace and harmony, a Palestinian state and an Israeli Jewish state. That is something that we all strive to work for.

I want to thank Mr. WEINER for organizing this. I want to thank Mr. HOYER, our majority leader, for always being a stalwart. I want to thank Mr. AKIN for giving us the opportunity to speak. When it comes to Israel, this Congress is united with strong bipartisan support, and we’re going to keep it that way.

Thank you.

Mr. AKIN. I thank the gentleman. I think you’re articulate, and I think that that’s accurate to say: there is a good bipartisan sentiment that when a small nation is trying to defend itself, we have always stood for people.

The basic principle of people being allowed to be free and have some self-determination as to how they’re going to rule their own country and be free from the fear of terrorists, that’s something that Americans can really agree on. I appreciate you taking time on that subject, and also my good friend from New York taking the time to organize the hour. Very good job. Thank you.

Mr. WEINER. If the gentleman would briefly yield, I, too, want to add my thanks to you. I don’t know if they have C-SPAN in Israel, but sometimes it’s easy in that little country to feel beset on all sides. We share the same common sense that they do, that they’re victims of terror, and I want to thank you.

We disagree on a lot in this place—and you’re going to spend the next hour or so pointing out some of those things—but there are some things that have broad bipartisan support, and the support of Israel is one of those things, and I want to thank you for being at the forefront of that.

Mr. AKIN. Well, thank you very much, gentleman. And thank you for the leadership you’ve shown tonight.

DEMOCRAT’S MANAGEMENT OF THE ECONOMY

Mr. AKIN. I would now change gears here and get on to another subject.

We’re dealing with some weighty topics tonight; the previous was of course international relations, the other is closer to home, and it’s really the question of the economy: the Democrats’ management of the economy, what should be done with the economy, how does that affect jobs and how does that affect all of our lives. I guess it sounds like kind of a boring subject in some ways; but on the other hand, it so much influences and affects every single person in our country that I guess