

INTERNATIONAL CRISIS GROUP - NEW MEDIA RELEASE

Flotilla Attack the Deadly Symptom of a Failed Policy

Brussels/Washington/Jerusalem, 31 May 2010: The International Crisis Group condemns Israel's assault on a flotilla of humanitarian aid bound for Gaza, which resulted in a tragic loss of life.

At the same time, the incident is an indictment of a much broader policy toward Gaza for which Israel does not bear sole responsibility.

For years, many in the international community have been complicit in a policy that aimed at isolating Gaza in the hope of weakening Hamas. This policy is morally appalling and politically self-defeating. It has harmed the people of Gaza without loosening Hamas's control. Yet it has persisted regardless of evident failure.

"The flotilla assault is but a symptom of an approach that has been implicitly endorsed by many", says Robert Malley, Director of Crisis Group's Middle East Program. "It is yet another stark illustration of the belated need for a comprehensive change in policy toward Gaza."

International condemnation and calls for an inquiry will come easily, but many who will issue them must acknowledge their own role in the deplorable treatment of Gaza that formed the backdrop to today's events. The policy of isolating Gaza, seeking to turn its population against Hamas, and endorsing a "West Bank first" approach was not an exclusively Israeli one. To focus on this recent tragedy alone is to miss the much wider and more important political lessons.

The policy toward Gaza is in need of thorough re-examination. The US, EU and Quartet as a whole have been calling for relaxing the siege on Gaza. That is welcome, but opening the humanitarian tap is not an appropriate answer to a policy whose fundamental premise is morally callous and politically counter-productive. Instead, Gaza should be open to normal commercial traffic with adequate international end-use monitoring.

"Today, we have witnessed the sad outgrowth of a failed and dangerous policy", says Louise Arbour, Crisis Group President. "One hopes it can provide an opportunity for a long-overdue course correction."

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