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## Pirates in the Mediterranean

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“Why didn’t they greet us with muffins and orange juice?” was my friend’s facetious question after listening all morning to the Israeli media’s coverage of the assault on the relief flotilla heading for Gaza, the navy assault that left nine citizens dead and many more wounded. Like a group of pirates in the Mediterranean, the Israeli navy attacked humanitarian aid ships in international waters, and yet Israeli officials and commentators were totally surprised when the passengers did not receive them with open arms. Going through the talkbacks on news sites, it seems that most Jews in Israel were also taken aback.

Later in the day, Foreign Minister Avigdor Lieberman held a press conference, in which he made two revealing declarations. First, he asserted that no country would allow a foreign entity to threaten its sovereign borders. This claim, however, reveals the basic lie regarding Israel’s Gaza policy.

Israel has to decide once and for all whether or not it withdrew from Gaza in August 2005. If it did and Gaza is an autonomous entity as Israel claims, then the attempt on the part of these humanitarian ships to reach the Gaza sea port is not an infringement on Israeli sovereignty. If, on the other hand, Israel considers the flotilla’s entrance into Gaza’s territorial sea line as a violation of its own sovereign borders, then Israel needs to admit that it has never given up its sovereignty over Gaza. Lieberman’s statement discloses, in other words, that Israel has fashioned itself as a unique creature in the international arena: the non-sovereign sovereign. When it suits its interests, the

government claims that it has relinquished sovereignty over Gaza, but when it does not, the government reasserts its sovereignty. Lieberman should keep in mind that with sovereignty comes responsibility. Thus, if Israel was indeed defending its borders yesterday morning then as sovereign, Israel is also responsible for the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip--for their livelihood as well as their security.

Lieberman's second declaration was that the Israeli military is the most moral in the world. No other soldiers, he said, would have dealt in such a forgiving way with the people on board the ships.

Lieberman conveniently ignored the fact that according to international law the Israeli soldiers were acting like pirates, since hijacking an unarmed humanitarian aid ship in international waters is by definition piracy.

Moreover, his second observation is informed by the lesser evil argument; namely, the Israeli military could have been more brutal and chose not to. As the great Jewish philosopher Hannah Arendt pointed out, "Politically, the weakness of the argument [for lesser evils] has always been that those who choose the lesser evil forget very quickly that they chose evil."