

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

June XX, 2010

President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, DC

Dear Mr. President:

We write to affirm our support for our strategic partnership with Israel, and encourage you to continue to do so before international organizations such as the United Nations. The United States has traditionally stood with Israel because it is in our national security interest and must continue to do so.

Israel is our strongest ally in the Middle East and a vibrant democracy. Israel is also a partner to the United States on military and intelligence issues in this critical region. That is why it is our national interest to support Israel at a moment when Israel faces multiple threats from Hamas in Gaza, Hezbollah in Lebanon, and the current regime in Iran. Israel's opponents have developed clever diplomatic and tactical ploys to challenge its international standing, whether the effort to isolate Israel at the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty review conference or the recent effort to breach the naval blockade around Gaza.

We fully support Israel's right to self-defense. In response to thousands of rocket attacks on Israel from Hamas terrorists in Gaza, Israel took steps to prevent items which could be used to support these attacks from reaching Gaza. Israel's naval blockade, which is legal under international law, allows Israel to keep dangerous goods from entering Gaza by sea. The intent of the measures is to protect Israel, while allowing humanitarian aid into Gaza.

Late last month when Israel learned that groups operating in Turkey wanted to challenge its blockade of Gaza, Israel made every effort to ensure that all humanitarian aid reached Gaza without needlessly precipitating a confrontation. Israeli forces were able to safely divert five of the six ships challenging the blockage. However, video footage shows that the Israeli commandos who arrived on the sixth ship, which was owned by the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation (the IHH), were brutally attacked with iron rods, knives, and broken glass. They were forced to respond to that attack and we regret the loss of life that resulted.

We are deeply concerned about the IHH's role in this incident and have additional questions about Turkey and any connections to Hamas. The IHH is a member of a group

of Muslim charities, the Union of Good, which was designated by the US Treasury Department as a terrorist organization. The Union of Good was created by and strongly supports Hamas, which has been designated as a foreign terrorist organization by the US State Department. We recommend that your administration consider whether the IHH should be put on the list of foreign terrorist organizations, after an examination by the intelligence community, the State Department, and the Treasury Department.

We commend the action you took to prevent the adoption of an unfair United Nations Security Council resolution, which would have represented a rush to judgment by the international community. We also deplore the actions of the United Nations Human Rights Council which, once again, singled out Israel. Israel has announced its intention to promptly carry out a thorough investigation of this incident and has the right to determine how its investigation is conducted. In the meantime, we ask you to stand firm in the future at the United Nations Security Council and to use your veto power, if necessary, to prevent any similar biased or one-sided resolutions from passing.

Finally, we believe that this incident should not derail the current proximity talks between Israel and the Palestinian Authority. We hope that these talks will move quickly to direct negotiations and ultimately, to a two-state solution to the Israel-Palestinian conflict.

Sincerely,

Harry Reid
Majority Leader

Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader