

THE IMPENDING INTELLIGENCE GAMES

After the Israelis attacked a flotilla carrying humanitarian aid the other night, and particularly after the US quietly stated it would wait to learn all the details of the attack, I knew the US and Israel would claim to have had intelligence about the flotilla that would somehow “justify” violations of international law.

Sure enough, Israel told other countries that members of Hezbollah were on the flotilla.

Israeli officials are privately telling their international counterparts that they had intelligence that Hezbollah operatives were hidden among the crew and passengers of several ships. The initial plan was to board all the ships, separate the alleged terrorists, bring the flotilla to Ashdod, and then deal separately with the Gaza activists. But the intelligence was apparently non-specific, the commandos were trigger-happy and tense (unusually so for the Israelis) and they did not anticipate that passengers and crew on one of the ships would turn against them. A cascade of failures, unclear rules of engagement and a climate of tension → a tragedy.
[emphasis Marc Ambinder's]

And, as Max Blumenthal reports, they even tried to make—then backed off of—a claim that some flotilla participants were members of al Qaeda.

In a special meeting of the Security Cabinet it was disclosed that a group of 40 people on board the Mavi Mamara with no identification papers belong to Al Qaeda. The terrorists were equipped with bullet proof vests, night-vision goggles, and weapons.

Hey, Israel?!? You should check for those members of Hezbollah-I-mean-al-Qaeda inside those aluminum tubes over there. Right. Right over there, next to that fancy letter from Niger.

Mind you, I have absolutely zero doubt that the US, if not Israel itself, has detailed intelligence on the planning and make-up of the participants in the flotilla. The flotilla has been planned very publicly for months, flotilla members openly challenged Israel and its blockade of Gaza, and presumably planners used email and phones to plan the trip. The US government would require no warrant to wiretap all but the few American participants in the flotilla. Plus, the IDF has openly admitted it sabotaged five of the six ships in the flotilla (though I wonder whether they did this with some kind of electromagnetic pulse).

During his briefing on the operation to the Knesset's Foreign Affairs and Defense Committee, Colonel Itzik Turgeman hinted that the IDF had sabotaged the engines of the other five ships, saying that "they took care of them."

But that's why the described vagueness of the intelligence, the release of very limited, edited videos by Israel, and the immediate preference on the part of both the US and Israel for an Israeli-led, um, "investigation" stinks so much. If the evidence really justified killing civilians, Israel would state as much and show the proof it assuredly does have. But thus far, at least, rather than show proof, they're making unsubstantiated and changing claims.

Maybe they have proof, but they're not showing it.

Then again, if I were a Turkish activist hoping to incite Israel into doing something really stupid and I had reason to assume I was being

wiretapped, I might plant a vague suggestion
Israel (and the US, with its trigger-happy weak
intelligence analysis) might overreact to.

Which is why I expect we're in for some months
of claims and counterclaims about intelligence
relating to this flotilla.