

How About a Real Flotilla for Peace?

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A very different story could have been written about cargo ships sailing from Turkey to the shores of Israel. A story with a better headline, telling of boats ready for peace, filled with the essence of life—water.

Over two years ago, Jewish National Fund (JNF), as part of its ongoing effort to alleviate the water crisis in Israel and help Israel provide more water to the entire region, began a thoughtful, diplomatic and philanthropic process to import water from Turkey to the Jewish state. This extra supply would have helped to narrow Israel's significant water deficit, benefiting not just Israel but its neighbors as well.

Our journey began in front of the National Investigative Committee on Water convened by Israel's parliament, the Knesset. We outlined our plan and received a positive response, later meeting with many high-level officials. We were excited about the upcoming opportunity to purchase water from Turkey and bring it to Israel—a plan that would help all.

A detailed business plan was developed by JNF outlining the plans for a private company to purchase five single-hull tankers previously used for transporting oil, which would be put into service after a thorough professional cleaning brought them up to international standards for water transportation. With the abundance of single-hull tankers available on the market—due to new regulations requiring double-hull tankers for oil transport—the price of these ships would have made our plan financially feasible. They would have been loaded with water from Turkey and sailed at a speed of 7-9 knots on the calm seas of the Mediterranean to the shores of Israel. JNF delegations traveled to Turkey numerous times, visiting the water loading site, meeting with officials, and even negotiating prices.

These ships of peace could have been today's story. Instead of causing provocation, they would have brought water to provide food and sustenance to Israelis, Palestinians and Jordanians as well. Today, Israel annually provides more than 80 million cubic meters of water to the Palestinians and 50 million cubic meters of water to the Jordanians, much more than is required by the Oslo Accords.

Water unloaded from the ships would have been stored in a JNF water reservoir and utilized to supplement Israel's water system, providing 110-150 million cubic meters of water a year. This would have helped Israel fill its water gap while building five desalination plants. It would have given the Palestinians and Jordanians time to work on their water solutions as well, even as Israel continued to supply them.

But these ships of peace were not allowed to begin their journey from Turkey. Perhaps unsurprisingly given its recent turn against Israel and its embrace of Iran, the Turkish government began demanding in early May that the water—meant for the region as a whole—be directed toward the Jordanians and Palestinians alone. This undermined our intention to deposit the water into Israel's national reservoir, which already serves Israelis, Jordanians and Palestinians. The project endured a further blow when Turkey's deputy foreign minister announced a suspension of all projects with Israel.

These ships of peace are what should be making headlines today. It's a shame the Turkish government decided to support a flotilla for Hamas instead.

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