ADDRESS BY THE HON BARRY COHEN AM

TO THE NSW JEWISH BOARD OF DEPUTIES

ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING – 17 AUGUST 2010

When Vic Alhadeff invited me to address you tonight I was delighted to accept. He told me that my subject would be "Israel, Jews and the Media."

The news that a flotilla of boats was on its way to Gaza to break the blockade of Gaza by the IDF and Egypt was well publicized by the international media for weeks prior to the clash that occurred on the 31st May.

Those commanding the flotilla had been warned repeatedly that if they wanted to provide humanitarian aid to the residents of Gaza they could dock at Ashdod or El Arish and their aid would be transported to Gaza. The flotilla repeatedly ignored these suggestions because as one of the organizers, Greta Berlin, admitted later the flotilla's objective was to break the blockade.

What happened then is now a matter of public record, much of it caught on film. Let me quote from the report of the *Intelligence and Terrorism Centre*: "*the Turkish ship, the Mavi Marmara, manned by the radical Islamic IHH led the violent confrontation with the IDF. The violence was not spontaneous but rather an organised, premeditated action carried out by a hard core of 46 IHH operatives who boarded in Istanbul*"

Their weapons included knives, axes, tools, metal cable and metal clubs which they used to attack the Israeli commandos. Clearly there was a massive failure of Israeli intelligence. The commandos obviously had no idea of the reception they would receive because their first weapons of choice were paint-ball guns. Not the sort of weapons one chooses when planning violence. When attacked with clubs, railings etc. they reverted to small arms. When the fight was over 9 IHH thugs were dead and a similar number of Israeli commandos were wounded, many of them seriously.

What happened then was par for the course. The facts were well publicized but the first interpretation of the clash was told through the usual pro-Palestinian, pro-Hamas, anti-Israel journalists who portrayed the Israelis as a bunch of murderers intent on killing as many of the "peace activists" on the Mavi Marmara as possible. Fortunately, some honest journalists, realizing what had actually happened pointed out that if the IDF had been planning violence they would have more lethal weapons than paint-ball guns.

Over the next few weeks millions of words were written about the "brutal" Israelis. A day rarely passes without a headline story about the Mavi Marmara.

Much of the international media claimed that Israel was guilty of war crimes for daring to stop the flotilla that could have been carrying weapons for use against Israel like the 10,000 rockets fired in recent years into Israel. The language used to describe Israel's action was *barbaric, brutal, genocidal* and the like. There was virtually no criticism of the Turkish thugs who organised the whole thing.

It is almost two months since the Mavi Marmara clash and the media haven't let up. As usual the word that is used to describe Israel's "crimes" is "proportionality".

Let me quote from a column I wrote in The Australian late last year.

When PM Netanyahu was asked by an interviewer whether the fact that 1300 Palestinians had died in Operation Cast Lead and only 13 Israelis, was disproportionate? Netanyahu replied, "Would you have preferred more Israelis had died?"

No one raised the proportionality of the Allies during the London Blitz, when 76,000 British civilians died. Arthur "Bomber" Harris, commander-in-chief of Bomber Command, "proportionately flattened German cities, killing more than 600,000 Germans. In the Pacific War 1700 US civilians were killed, mostly at Pearl Harbor, while Australia lost 700 in Darwin. The allies' response was to "proportionately" bomb Tokyo, Hiroshima and Nagasaki: 580,000 Japanese perished.

Israel's approach in the Gaza conflict was highlighted in a speech to the UN on October 16th: "Mr President, based on my knowledge and experience I can say this: during operation *Cast Lead* the Israeli forces did more to safeguard the rights of civilians in a combat zone than any other army in the history of warfare. Israel did so while facing an army that deliberately positioned its military capability behind the human shield of the civilian population. The IDF took extraordinary measures to give Gaza civilians notice of targeted areas, dropping over two million leaflets and making over 100,000 phone calls. War is chaos and full of mistakes. But mistakes are not war crimes."

The speaker? The Israeli ambassador? An Israeli general? An Israeli politician or a rabid Zionist? No, it was Lt. Col. Richard Kemp, the former commander of British forces in Afghanistan. What a different picture from that which appeared in the international press. Many Western journalists covering the Gaza conflict should hang their heads in shame.

You are aware of hundreds of terrorist actions that have occurred throughout the Middle East during the past 7 years that are far worse than what happened on the Mavi Marmara. Barely a week passes when a bomb doesn't explode in a mosque, a market place, outside a police station in Pakistan, India, Iraq, Afghanistan, not to mention Israel, that hasn't killed anywhere between 30 to 100 innocent bystanders. Mostly they are not aimed at military targets but at normal men, women and children going about their daily business.

And the media's reaction? If you're lucky it gets a few pars and some photographs of the blood and gore and they move on. Thousands of people have died in this fashion and thousands more have been seriously injured and no one gives a damn.

One particular "incident" occurred 11 days after the Mavi Marmara clash. On the 11th July in an Ethiopian restaurant in Kampala, in Uganda, a couple of hundred people had gathered to watch a World Cup match on TV. A bomb went off killing 74 people and injuring another 70.

The prime suspect is the Somali Islamist group Al Shabab which is linked to Al-Qaeda.

What was fascinating was the different coverage afforded to the Kampala bombing and the Mavi Marmara. Within 48 hours the Kampala massacre had all but disappeared from the media. Again no one seemed to know who was responsible and no one seemed to care

There were no demands for a United Nations enquiry. No international condemnation by the usual suspects. Not a word from the Ahmadinijads the Gaddafis, the Assads, the Mahatirs and so on.

Recently another "incident" occurred in Afghanistan when almost the same number of people were massacred by the Taliban as had died on the Mavi Marmara. All were part of an aid group who had devoted themselves to saving the lives of Afghanis.

The medical team had stopped for lunch at a restaurant when 10 masked men attacked them. The Taliban claimed responsibility having accused them of being "spies and Christian missionaries."

This time there was some outrage and the butchery was widely condemned but it wasn't long before the issue was forgotten by the media. No enquiries, no attempt to identify the killers and bring them to justice, no thundering speeches from the politicians who had been so vociferous in condemning Israel.

The media always complain that they get blamed for everything but one of the great misconceptions about the Arab/Israeli conflict is that the conflict has caused the greatest death and destruction in the region since Israel was founded in 1948. This myth has been perpetuated by the media and promoted by an endless number of politicians: "Fix up this problem," they say "and there will be eternal peace in the Middle East." Really!

Forgive me for quoting myself again but in that column I wrote in The Australian I said: "The greatest myth about the Arab-Israeli conflict is that Israel is the root cause of all the problems in the Middle East. An examination of the numbers killed in other conflicts in the region since Israel was founded in 1948 shows a slightly different picture. They include Algeria: war of independence 600,000; civil war, 100,000. Sudan: first civil war (1955-72) 500,000; second civil war (1983-) 1.9 million; Darfur, 600,000. Iraq-Iran War, 1.5 million; Saddam Hussein purges, one million. Lebanon: civil war (1997-90)130,000. Afghanistan: Soviet invasion (1979-90), 1.5 million; civil war 100,000. Somalia: civil war (1977-) 500,000. Jordan 25,000. Chad: 30,000. Syria: 20,000. Turkey: 20,000. Yemen: 130,000. Total: 8.525 million. The Arab-Israeli conflict - about 85,000.

How is it possible for the "experts" to be so wrong? How can they be taken seriously? More importantly how has it become conventional wisdom? We know that the Left made a collective decision after the 67 war to make the Palestinians their next cause. They're entitled to pick whatever issue they like but it would be nice if they would stick to the facts.

Let me now turn to the local media where issues aren't so dramatic or life threatening but which show the consistent bias of the media.

The Jewish community has some good friends in the media in Australia and a few not so friendly.

One of the most odious practices of some journalists is the way they identify anyone of Jewish birth, if it is alleged that they have committed some misdemeanor.

I have been accused by some colleagues of being over sensitive about this and maybe I am but my gripe is not that the religion of Jews is identified but that other individuals' religions are ignored.

When I rang a journalist and got stuck into her about an article she had written in which she stated that the accused person was Jewish she seemed quite perplexed at my complaint, she replied irately, "It's part of the story."

 "How?" I asked.

She couldn't answer the question because there is none, I told her, "When you write about Rupert Murdoch, James Packer, Kerry Stokes, Quentin Bryce, Kristina Keneally or Clover Moore do you mention their religion. I haven't got a clue as to what their religion is and to coin a phrase, 'frankly my dear I don't give a damn.'"

Smart journalists have a different approach. They don't mention the words Jew or Jewish, instead they make sure that at some stage in the article or TV programme it's mentioned that Hyam Lebovitz visits Israel every year to see his aged mother. In the ABC programme (7.30 Report) they didn't mention Marcus Einfeld was Jewish, they just showed him singing in a synagogue choir.

Another favourite is the continued use of the term Jewish Lobby whenever any representations are made to government on Jewish issues. The object clearly is to play on anti-Semitic prejudice and to show how Jews influence government decisions.

Is there a Jewish lobby? There are various Jewish organisations which are represented here tonight who, if the occasion arises, will contact their local MPs and ministers and put forward their views on a range of subjects. Why should that be a cause for concern amongst the other 22 million Australians. The Jewish organisations represent around 120,000 Jews so it's not because of the voting power of the Jewish community.

Of course Jews lobby governments in the areas of interest to them. Why shouldn't they? The inference is that Jews have undue influence on issues such as Israel and the Palestinians because Australia, through successive Coalition and Labor governments, has given strong support to Israel. It suggests that people like Bob Hawke, John Howard, Kim Beazley, Kevin Rudd and now Julia Gillard have been supporters of Israel only because they were pressured to do so. It suggests that the overwhelming majority of MPs on both sides of the House who support Israel do so only because of the "sinister Jewish lobby." Apparently journalists can't believe that members of parliament had studied the subject closely, possibly been to Israel and had concluded that Israel was worth supporting.

I spent 21 years in the House of Representatives and I could count on my fingers the number of anti-Israel politicians. After Saturday there will be one less.

Why is the Jewish lobby singled out for special mention? How about the Catholic lobby? How about the Christian lobby, headed by Jim Wallace or Fred Nile? How about the trade unions whose numbers have dropped to a fraction of what they were a few decades ago? Does anyone question their influence, power and success in getting their goals implemented?

I could go on. Canberra is awash with lobbyists. How about Twiggy Forrest and his mining mates? The list of rich, influential business and agricultural lobby groups in Canberra is legendary. I'm a lobbyist myself. I have just registered as a lobbyist to promote early warning bushfire systems. There is only one reason the Jewish lobby is singled out for special mention because those who use such a term believe that when a lobby group is Jewish it must, ipso facto be "sinister". And that is anti-Semitism.

I don't propose to go into the different attitudes of the various newspapers or TV channels or individual commentators. They have their right to express their opinions and the Palestinians have a right to have their case put before the Australian people. I wouldn't want to live in a country where their view wasn't heard. The problem for Israel and the Jews in the Diaspora is that the same rights aren't extended to Israel in any Arab or Muslim countries and in many countries in Africa, the Middle East, Asia and South America, many of which are one party states, communist dictatorships, theocratic states or military juntas. These countries use the tolerance of the democracies to push their own agenda and the new pariah. Now that South Africa and apartheid are no more. Israel is the new pariah.

This speech may appear a little disjointed but these issues are closely connected because they show a streak of prejudice that is extremely worrying.

How many of you are familiar with Freedom House, an institution founded in 1941 by Americans concerned with mounting threats to peace and democracy. It has been "a vigorous proponent of democratic values and a steadfast opponent of dictatorships of the far left and the far right." Two of the original trustees were Eleanor Roosevelt and Wendell Wilkie.

It does a magnificent job monitoring freedom throughout the world. They have genuine credibility particularly in recent years when organisations like Amnesty International and Human rights Watch which

have become dominated by anti-Israel activists. The founder of Human Rights Watch recently resigned because of its non-stop attacks on Israel.

Freedom House measures the political rights of the 193 nation members of the UN.
Rather than read out all the 192 ratings I have brought copies of Freedom House's annual report for 2009.

Naturally, countries like Australia, Canada, Britain, the USA and the EU nations are all in the Free category. Among them is Israel with a 1.5 rating. Not one of the 21 Arab countries are listed as <u>Free</u> and only 8 are in the <u>Partly Free</u> category.

Those in the NOT FREE category include:

Egypt	Libya	Somalia
Algeria	United Arab Emirates	Eritrea
Iraq	Oman	Mauritania
Saudi Arabia	Qatar	
Syria	Western Sahara	

13 Arab countries out of 21 make up the 41 in the NOT FREE category

To that we can add:

Afghanistan	Russia	China
Iran	Tunisia	North Korea
Zimbabwe	Cuba	Burma

Those in the NOT FREE category are amongst the vilest regimes in the world. They are a hundred times worse than Israel. Yet it is Israel that is demonized in international forums. One of the freest countries in the world has to put up with being called Nazis, oppressors, barbarians and every imaginable insult by some of the worst regimes in the world. It is obscene.

The question is what can we do about it?

The problem is that Israel and its supporters are always on the defensive. They defend attacks as if they were debating issues in a democratic society while its opponents hurl abuse at Israel without consideration for the truth, accuracy or objectivity. Can you imagine a national leader in a democracy using language that Ahmadinejad or Gaddafi use against Israel? Some of the most evil regimes in the world use international forums such as the United Nations, the Inter parliamentary Union, the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association to demonize and delegitimise Israel. Israel has many friends who unfortunately also couch their language as if it was polite discourse in a democratic society. The time has come to talk to these oppressive totalitarian regimes in the only language they understand.

Leading the charge should be the European nations. I don't need to spell out why. Israel and the Jewish communities around the world must call on the democracies to denounce these evil regimes and stop the double standards that apply to Israel. Here at home we must ask the same of our media. We must demand that they stop refereeing just one side.

Those who support a free democratic Israel along side a free democratic Palestine must speak up now and in robust terms or in a few years it will be too late.