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Editors: Dr. Roni Stauber  
Beryl Belsky

**DIE LINKE: BETWEEN ANTI-ZIONISM AND SOLIDARITY WITH ISRAEL**

Stefan Kunath<sup>1</sup>

The position of the German left vis-à-vis Israel and the Middle East conflict has been in a state of flux in recent years. This is a consequence of the transformation undergone by the German left itself, which culminated in the foundation of a new party, Die Linke (The Left), in June 2008. Formerly a parliamentary faction since September 2005, Die Linke consists of a conglomeration of several radical left organizations and former Social Democrats from West Germany, as well as members of the former ruling party of the German Democratic Republic (GDR), the Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS).<sup>2</sup> The result of such a disparate grouping is disunity on several issues. The position toward Israel is one of the most debated issues in the new party and its youth movement. The “Free Gaza” flotilla in May 2010 and Israel's reaction to it<sup>3</sup> added fuel to the fire, especially since three Die Linke activists were

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<sup>1</sup> Student activist and one of the founders of BAK Shalom (2007).

<sup>2</sup> Prior to September 2005, neither the PDS in East Germany nor the former Social Democrats, who had left the SPD party in West Germany, had been strong enough to gain 5 percent of the national vote in order to be represented in parliament. The common ground for unification was opposition to the SPD and the Green Party, which governed Germany at the time. Among others, the new Die Linke criticized the government's social reforms, as well as Germany's participation in ISAF, the NATO-led security mission in Afghanistan.

<sup>3</sup> On May 31, 2010, a flotilla of six ships attempting to break the siege of Gaza was intercepted by the Israeli navy. In the ensuing violent clashes aboard the *MV Mavi Marmara*, eight Turkish nationals and a Turkish American were killed and several Israeli commandos were wounded. The flotilla,

onboard: Bundestag members Annette Groth and Inge Höger, and Norman Paech (member of the Bundestag until 2009). Their participation prompted questions about the ideology of the German radical left, especially after political scientist Samuel Salzborn from the University of Gießen accused the party of cultivating antisemitism in Germany.<sup>4</sup>

Prior to the flotilla incident, a number of disputes arose within Die Linke regarding the approach that should be taken toward the Middle East conflict. Three examples are keys to understanding the situation in Die Linke today: 1) the discussion surrounding an invitation extended to senior Hamas official Dr. Ghazi Hamad to a Middle East conference organized by Die Linke's parliamentary faction in 2007; 2) the working group BAK Shalom, which has become a leading advocate for pro-Israel positions within the party's youth movement; and 3) Gregor Gysi, a leading party activist who works to combat anti-Zionist attitudes. A brief analysis of these subjects will be followed by an elaboration of the debate over the flotilla. In the last section, possible future developments in the party will be discussed.

### **Actors in Die Linke: Israel Supporters and Anti-imperialists**

In 2007, the first public disagreement within the party arose over how to approach the political situation between Israel and the Palestinians during the preparation of a conference about the Middle East conflict organized by Die Linke parliamentary group, together with the socialist Rosa Luxemburg Foundation.<sup>5</sup> The idea was to invite independent experts on the subject representing various views in order to obtain a comprehensive survey of the situation in the Middle East. When an invitation to Dr. Ghazi Hamad, government spokesperson of Hamas in Gaza at the time, was under consideration by the parliamentary faction, a group of members of Die Linke and its youth movement launched a petition to prevent his participation. They argued that Hamad could not be viewed as independent as long as he was the spokesperson of a

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allegedly carrying humanitarian aid and construction materials, was organized by the Free Gaza Movement and the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief (İHH).

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Salzborn, "Ist die Linke antisemitisch?" 19/7/2010, <http://www.ksta.de/html/artikel/1279196557629.shtml>.

<sup>5</sup> "One of the largest political education institutions in Germany today... [it] is officially recognized as a nationwide affiliated trust of Die Linke. As such it works closely with Linke affiliated state foundations and associations nationwide" – from the website of the foundation, <http://www.rosalux.de/english/foundation.html>.

ruling party. In addition, they expressed opposition to inviting a leading Hamas activist: “Hamas is an anti-democratic party, whose radical antisemitic program and policies are aimed at the destruction of Israel,” they stated.<sup>6</sup> The party should not invite an antisemite at a time of increasing antisemitic activity in Germany, a step that might also endanger the radical left camp. Moreover, they asserted, Die Linke had a responsibility to combat antisemitism, and providing a platform to a Hamas representative contradicted this principle.<sup>7</sup>

While the campaign was not a complete failure it was also not successful. On the one hand, Hamad was unable to attend the conference because the German government refused him entry; on the other, the discussion in Die Linke took place mainly at the district level, without the involvement of leading members, whose positions were not made public. Nonetheless, this was the first time a debate had been held about providing a platform to a movement that denies Israel’s right to exist.

An important development in this respect was the establishment of BAK Shalom in spring 2007 as an ideological working group within Linksjugend Solid,<sup>8</sup> Die Linke’s youth organization, in Berlin. BAK Shalom became a counterforce in the debates over Die Linke’s relations with Israel and its attitude to extreme anti-Israel manifestations. Defining itself as a task force against antisemitism, anti-Zionism, anti-Americanism, and regressive anti-capitalism within Die Linke, the group stands for strong solidarity with Israel, “including solidarity with defense measures of any kind.”<sup>9</sup> Antisemitism, they believe, is an integral part of capitalism and modern society, and flourishes with the regression of the latter into barbarism, as demonstrated by the case of Nazi Germany. The image of the Jew as a capitalist exploiter is an important component of modern antisemitism, whose proponents does not exclude some socialists and leftists. Since the nineteenth century antisemites have automatically blamed Jews for the failures of capitalism instead of studying its conceptual and structural problems.

For BAK Shalom, the Jewish homeland is the right and just solution for the negative consequences of modern society’s attitudes toward the Jews. At the same time BAK Shalom calls for solidarity with all emancipatory movements in the Middle

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<sup>6</sup> “Hamas raus aus den Köpfen!” 2007, <http://www.israel-debatte.de/texte.html>.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> *Linksjugend* means “left youth”; *Solid* is an acronym for socialist, left and democratic.

<sup>9</sup> Declaration of Principles of BAK Shalom, 2007, <http://bak-shalom.de/index.php/english/>.

East that are struggling for secularization, liberalization, and democratization, such as women's and students' movements in Arab and Muslim nations.<sup>10</sup>

In April and May 2008 the first public showdown took place between BAK Shalom and Norman Paech, then spokesperson for foreign policy of Die Linke parliamentary group. On April 23, 2008, he called Israel an apartheid state, which “sprayed Palestinian fighters with bullets and killed them.”<sup>11</sup> He claimed Israel might use illegal uranium enriched bullets because Palestinian medical practitioners were unfamiliar with the kinds of injuries they caused.<sup>12</sup> Moreover, he trivialized Hamas attacks on Israel by referring to Qassam missiles as “New Year firecrackers” and argued against a two-state solution to the conflict.<sup>13</sup> BAK Shalom demanded his immediate resignation as spokesperson because of his alleged anti-Zionism and sympathy for Hamas.<sup>14</sup> However, since it numbered only 60 members, mainly young professionals and students, the group was not strong enough to bring down Paech. Nevertheless, it was the first time that large media networks reported on the dispute within Die Linke. Paech ignored the criticism and branded the BAK activists “clearly stupid.”<sup>15</sup>

As a result of high media interest in the dispute within the new party, senior Die Linke politicians began to intervene. In May, on the occasion of Israel's 60th anniversary, MP Gregor Gysi, leader of the parliamentary group, stated that anti-Zionism was no longer an arguable position for the left in general, and for Die Linke, specifically, “because if we choose a position of enlightened Jewish anti-Zionism... we still have the problem of ignoring the worst experiences of the twentieth century, which expose enlightened Jewish anti-Zionism as a total illusion.”<sup>16</sup>

Gysi also distanced himself from traditional Soviet anti-imperialism in relation to Israel since it did not take into consideration the emancipation of peoples. Soviet anti-imperialism was an instrument used in international relations to define and

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Quoted by BAK Shalom, “Notizen zur Veranstaltung,” 5/5/2008, [http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2008/05/notizen\\_zur\\_veranstaltung\\_mit\\_normanpaech\\_neukoelln0804.pdf](http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2008/05/notizen_zur_veranstaltung_mit_normanpaech_neukoelln0804.pdf),

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

<sup>14</sup> BAK Shalom, “Antizionismus in der Linken – Norman Paech als außenpolitischer Sprecher untragbar!” 5/5/2008, <http://bak-shalom.de/index.php/2008/04/30/antizionismus-in-der-linken-norman-paech-als-ausenpolitischer-sprecher-untragbar/>.

<sup>15</sup> “Gromykos falsche Erben,” 5/6/2008, <http://jungle-world.com/artikel/2008/23/21925.html>.

<sup>16</sup> Gregor Gysi, “Die Haltung der deutschen Linken zum Staat Israel,” 14/4/2008, [http://die-linke.de/nc/die\\_linke/nachrichten/detail/archiv/2008/april/kategorie/nachrichten/zurueck/nachrichten/artikel/die-haltung-der-deutschen-linken-zum-staat-israel/](http://die-linke.de/nc/die_linke/nachrichten/detail/archiv/2008/april/kategorie/nachrichten/zurueck/nachrichten/artikel/die-haltung-der-deutschen-linken-zum-staat-israel/).

distinguish Soviet allies and their enemies during the Cold War. Israel is perceived as an imperialist nation because it is an ally of the U.S. in the Middle East, he said.<sup>17</sup>

In late May, some Linke members and sympathizers responded to Gysi's arguments in an open letter.<sup>18</sup> The most well-known were Sahra Wagenknecht, MEP until 2009, and since September 2009 a Bundestag deputy; leader of the orthodox left-wing Communist Platform (*Kommunistische Plattform*) within Die Linke, MP Ulla Jelpke; and Hans Modrow, a leading politician in the GDR during the period leading up to reunification. Regardless of the political use of anti-imperialism by the Soviets, they said, this concept was necessary for revealing and reducing imperialist profit and the threat of war it poses at the international level. Their criticism of Israel, they claimed, should be seen as part of the “anti-imperialism concept,” because Israeli policy was influenced by American ambitions, which were undoubtedly imperialist. Moreover, Israel colonized the West Bank, oppressed Palestinians as second-class citizens, and behaved aggressively toward other Arab nations. As to the issue of antisemitism and its relation to criticism of Israel, which had become a central issue in the debate, they argued that its existence was not a reason to accept Israeli government policy without question, but that critics should be careful to avoid any antisemitic overtones.<sup>19</sup>

Today anti-imperialists in Die Linke accept Israel's right to exist, but are extremely critical of Israeli policy; at the same time, they ignore the antisemitic ideology of Islamist organizations such as Hizballah and Hamas, as well as their terrorist attacks against Israel, since these groups are viewed as political actors fighting against Israeli oppression and for Palestinian independence. According to the anti-imperialists, violations of human rights by Israel, and not by Hamas the oppressed, should be condemned.

During the two-year period 2008–9, the pro-Israel faction of Gysi and BAK Shalom gained strength thanks to the publicity surrounding the debate. Since early 2010 the dispute has risen to a new level, centering mainly on determining how to analyze the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. While BAK Shalom and some Die Linke members regard these efforts as motivated by anti-Zionist attitudes and demonization

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<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> “Staatsräson und Regierungsbeteiligung,” 20/5/2008, [http://die-linke.de/partei/zusammenschluesse/kommunistische\\_plattform\\_der\\_partei\\_die\\_linke/dokumente/staatsraeson\\_und\\_regierungsbeteiligung/](http://die-linke.de/partei/zusammenschluesse/kommunistische_plattform_der_partei_die_linke/dokumente/staatsraeson_und_regierungsbeteiligung/).

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

of Israel, traditional anti-imperialists are concerned about the labeling of Israel critics as antisemites.

The escalation of the debate in 2010 was manifested in several events.

### *1. Anti-imperialists: Peres is preparing for war against Iran*

On January 27, 2010, International Holocaust Remembrance Day marking the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz in 1945, Israeli president Shimon Peres addressed the Bundestag about the Iranian threat to Israel. After the speech, while the rest of the house rose to their feet to applaud him, a few Die Linke representatives remained seated to demonstrate their disapproval, among them, Christine Buchholz, a member of the party's executive board and activist in the party's Trotskyist Marx21 network, and Sahra Wagenknecht. After Michael Leutert (MP), co-founder of BAK Shalom, criticized Buchholz, she explained that she rejected Peres' comparison of Iran to Nazi Germany. His analogy with the policy of appeasement until 1939 was inappropriate and only served as "ideological armament for a new war in the Middle East."<sup>20</sup>

Criticism of Sahra Wagenknecht centered mainly on her candidacy for the party's deputy leadership position. Leutert explained that he might not be able to vote for someone who did not show due respect for the Israeli president.<sup>21</sup> BAK Shalom said the memorial day for the victims of National Socialism should not be used for criticizing Israeli policies.<sup>22</sup> Wagenknecht responded that her attendance at the ceremony testified to her respect for the victims. However, she could not applaud someone who was responsible for war. Additionally, Wagenknecht claimed that contrary to what Peres said, Iran had no nuclear weapons. His alarmist talk of another Holocaust was just a pretext to start more wars.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Christine Buchholz, "Ich klatsche nicht für ideologische Kriegsvorbereitung," 2/2/2010, <http://christinebuchholz.de/2010/02/02/ich-klatsche-nicht-fur-ideologische-kriegsvorbereitungen/>.

<sup>21</sup> Marcos Wehner, "Die Zeit der Lügen ist vorbei," 30/1/2010, <http://www.faz.net/s/Rub594835B672714A1DB1A121534F010EE1/Doc~EDDB6262DFEA6446CA1AD3B8B7E29DE50~ATpl~Ecommon~Scontent.html>.

<sup>22</sup> BAK Shalom, "Der Tag der Opfer des Nationalsozialismus darf nicht missbraucht werden!" 2/2/2010, <http://bak-shalom.de/index.php/2010/02/02/pressemitteilung-02-februar-2010-der-tag-der-opfer-des-nationalsozialismus-darf-nicht-missbraucht-werden/>.

<sup>23</sup> Sahra Wagenknecht, "Erklärung zur Rede des israelischen Staatspräsidenten Shimon Peres im Bundestag am 27. Januar 2010," 1/2/2010, [http://www.sahra-wagenknecht.de/de/article/651\\_erklaerung-zur-rede-von-shimon-peres-im-bundestag-am-27-januar-2010.html](http://www.sahra-wagenknecht.de/de/article/651_erklaerung-zur-rede-von-shimon-peres-im-bundestag-am-27-januar-2010.html).

Wagenknecht's candidacy was extremely important for the party's unity and balance between radical and more moderate members and between representatives from the East and the West. Therefore, Leutert's and BAK Shalom's criticism was interpreted as an attack on party unity. That is why some members did not condemn her conduct in public although they disagreed with her anti-Israel position. The campaign of Leutert and BAK Shalom against Wagenknecht's candidacy failed. At the party conference in May, she was elected deputy leader and Bochholz obtained an executive position.

2. *"Finkelstein successfully averted!"*<sup>24</sup>

BAK Shalom and its supporters were more successful in the next dispute, which concerned an invitation to the Jewish anti-Zionist Norman Finkelstein to be guest speaker at a meeting in the capital in February 2010. The Palestinian community and the district working group "Peace and International Policy" of Die Linke in Berlin were the organizers of the event, called "One Year after the Invasion of Gaza – the Responsibility of the German Government and the Continuing Siege of the Palestinian People." Immediately, BAK Shalom began planning protests. Finkelstein could not be an ally of the left, they explained, because he advocated relations with Hizballah and accused Israel, inter alia, of misusing the Holocaust for financial and political purposes. After the Heinrich Böll Foundation, affiliated with the Green Party, was informed of Finkelstein's views, they promptly canceled financial aid for the event. The organizers then requested funds from the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, which initially gave a commitment. However, after BAK Shalom and the district working group of the party's youth movement in Berlin called for a protest rally in front of the foundation's headquarters, it withdrew its support and Finkelstein canceled his flight to Germany.<sup>25</sup> Christine Buchholz, Sahra Wagenknecht, Norman Paech, Jan van Aken, and other MPs expressed their outrage to Heinz Vietze and Florian Weis, managing directors of the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation, accusing them of bowing to the pressure of a few.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> BAK Shalom's homepage headline after the cancellation of Finkelstein's presentation.

<sup>25</sup> Norman Finkelstein, "Psychobabble," 20/2/2010, <http://www.normanfinkelstein.com/psychobabble/>.

<sup>26</sup> "Zum Umgang mit Norman Finkelstein," 22/2/2010, <http://christinebuchholz.de/2010/02/22/zum-umgang-mit-norman-finkelstein/>.

Under the headline “Anti-Zionist Jews Out?”<sup>27</sup> published in the anti-imperialist daily *Junge Welt*, Ulla Jelpke asked why Die Linke was afraid of inviting an anti-Zionist scientist who wanted to talk about German responsibility toward the humanitarian crisis in Gaza. Zionist organizations had created a real “Holocaust industry,” she claimed, extorting support for Israel by exploiting the suffering of Jews murdered by German National Socialists. German Zionists were doing a great disservice to the struggle against antisemitism with their demand to muzzle the speech of anti-Zionist Jews.<sup>28</sup> A large number of articles appeared in *Junge Welt* arguing against BAK Shalom and pro-Israel supporters in Die Linke, and demanding an unconditional and free debate regarding the Middle East conflict and surrounding issues.<sup>29</sup>

BAK Shalom dismantled the main arguments and defended its claims of combating antisemitism, in an article called “Debates Yes – Antisemitism No.”<sup>30</sup> In the first part, they cited “antisemitic messages” published by Finkelstein years before, such as the claim that Israel was using the Holocaust to obtain financial and military aid.<sup>31</sup> Additionally, the working group provided proof of Finkelstein's sympathy for Hizballah and pointed out that his theses were supported by extreme right organizations in Germany and the Czech Republic.<sup>32</sup> BAK Shalom denied it was preventing a discussion about the Middle East conflict and Die Linke's position toward Israel and the Palestinians. “But that does not mean that Israel haters should have a podium on which to debate the issue of Israel, when in fact they were debating about Israel's right to exist.”<sup>33</sup>

The situation during this dispute resembled that which prevailed during the disagreement over the invitation to Hamas official Ghazi Hamad in 2007. In contrast to the latter episode, however, in this case, one section of the party held a public

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<sup>27</sup> An allusion to the National Socialist slogan “Jews out!” (*Juden raus!*). Ulla Jelpke, “Antizionistische Juden raus?” 23/2/2010, <http://die-rote-fahne.eu/pheadline4343.html>.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> “Kuschen vor Kriegstreibern,” *Junge Welt*, 23/2/2010, <http://www.jungewelt.de/2010/02-23/027.php>.

<sup>30</sup> BAK Shalom, “Debatte ja – Antisemitismus nein,” 12/3/2010, [http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2010/03/finkelstein\\_debattejaasnein1.pdf](http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2010/03/finkelstein_debattejaasnein1.pdf).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid; Wolfgang Wippermann, “‘Ein Spezialist für Israelfragen’: Finkelstein gegen Goldhagen und andere ‘jüdische Geschäftemacher’,” in *Das Finkelstein-Alibi*, ed. Rolf Surmann (Köln: PapyRossam 2001).

<sup>32</sup> Detlev Rose, “Finkelstein sagt Deutschlandbesuch ab – Die Linke und die Israel-Lobby,” 25/2/2010, <http://www.deutsche-stimme.de/ds/?p=2890>; “Odpor,” 26/1/2010, <http://www.odpor.org/index.php?page=clanky&kat=&clanek=1081>

<sup>33</sup> BAK Shalom, “Debatte ja – Antisemitismus nein,” 12/3/2010, [http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2010/03/finkelstein\\_debattejaasnein1.pdf](http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2010/03/finkelstein_debattejaasnein1.pdf).



demonstration against another part. The reaction to the cancellation of Finkelstein's visit was expressed in insults and the accusation that pro-Israel members were using Nazi SA methods.<sup>34</sup> The radical anti-imperialist group within Die Linke waited for an opportunity for take its revenge<sup>35</sup>; this came in the form of participation in the “Free Gaza” flotilla in May 2010, after the party congress.

### *3. Humanitarian aid to Gaza or support for Hamas?*

Groth, Höger and Paech participated in the “Free Gaza” flotilla in May 2010, claiming they were motivated by the wish to provide humanitarian aid to Palestinians in Gaza and to stop the siege, which Groth alleged was “contrary to international law.”<sup>36</sup> Höger declared that the aim of the flotilla was to generate publicity against Israeli policy.<sup>37</sup>

BAK Shalom, for its part, issued a press release, warning of another escalation in the Middle East conflict to which Höger, Paech and Groth’s participation in the flotilla would contribute. Moreover, they cautioned that leading Hamas members were on the ships.<sup>38</sup>

Emotions intensified following the violent confrontation between the Israeli navy and those aboard the *Marvi Marmara*, including Paech, Höger and Groth. Gregor Gysi immediately denounced Israel for the siege of Gaza and for stopping ships in international waters.<sup>39</sup> There were also concerns about the conditions under which the three Die Linke members were being held, as expressed by MP Jan van Aken, vice-chairman of the parliamentary group, in his press release demanding their liberation and branding the Israeli raid “an act of piracy” and “kidnapping.”<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Jürgen Elsässer, “Linke kuschelt vor Israel-Lobby,” 18/2/2010, <http://juergenelsaesser.wordpress.com/2010/02/18/linke-kuschelt-vor-israel-lobby/>.

<sup>35</sup> Paul Grasse, “Ausladung von Finkelstein hat wachgerüttelt,” 16/6/2010, <http://www.jungewelt.de/2010/06-16/052.php>.

<sup>36</sup> Annette Groth and Inge Höger, “Flotille mit Hilfsgütern gegen die völkerrechtswidrige Blockade Gaza,” 24/5/2010, <http://www.inge-hoeger.de/nc/presse/aktuell/detail/zurueck/archiv-be6096f984/artikel/flotille-mit-hilfsguetern-gegen-die-voelkerrechtswidrige-blockade-gazas/>.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

<sup>38</sup> BAK Shalom, “Gazahilfe per Schiff?” 29/5/2010, <http://bak-shalom.de/index.php/2010/05/29/gazahilfe-per-schiff/>.

<sup>39</sup> Gregor Gysi, “Verbrecherische Haltung,” 31/5/2010, <http://www.linksfraktion.de/pressemitteilungen/verbrecherische-handlung/>.

<sup>40</sup> Jan van Aken, “Linke-Bundestagsabgeordnete und Politiker der Linkspartei unverletzt in israelischem Gewahrsam,” 31/5/2010, <http://www.linksfraktion.de/pressemitteilungen/linke-bundestagsabgeordnete-politiker-linkspartei-unverletzt-israelischem-gewahrsam/>.

Following their release, Groth, Höger and Paech began spreading their version of the Israeli operation, mainly condemning the IDF's brutality, labeling it a war crime, and claiming that the conduct of all the activists had been peaceful and innocent throughout the mission.<sup>41</sup>

On June 2, Gysi met with Israel's ambassador to Germany, Yoram Ben-Zeev, to discuss the incident.<sup>42</sup> BAK Shalom was in a difficult position. The group was accused of supporting Israel unreservedly, no matter what it did. On the other hand, they were expected to show solidarity with Höger, Groth, and Paech. The group's silence during the first week after the incident benefited the anti-imperialist camp. MP Niema Movassat, for example, canceled his participation in a panel organized by BAK Shalom on the question of whether sanctions against Iran might be helpful in bringing down the Iranian regime.<sup>43</sup> Both the party youth movement in Movassat's state of North Rhine-Westphalia and the Hamburg youth movement fiercely attacked BAK Shalom.<sup>44</sup> Linksjugend Solid Hamburg also questioned why BAK Shalom was still tolerated within Die Linke and its youth movement, and why several MPs still supported some BAK Shalom members and employed them in their Berlin offices.<sup>45</sup>

Nevertheless, in their release about the incident the federal board of Linksjugend Solid did not refer to BAK Shalom, and only blamed Israeli policy. Israel was committing piracy and kidnapping in international waters, it said, and demanded an end to the siege of Gaza.<sup>46</sup> On June 23, Linksjugend Solid held a panel in Berlin,

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<sup>41</sup> Annette Groth and Inge Höger, "Pressekonferenz nach der Rückkehr von Inge Höger und Annette Groth aus Israel," 2/6/2010,

[http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYOc6CZ0MoM&feature=player\\_embedded](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYOc6CZ0MoM&feature=player_embedded).

<sup>42</sup> Michael Schlick, "Gregor Gysi trifft israelischen Botschafter," 2/6/2010,

<http://www.linksfraktion.de/pressemitteilungen/gregor-gysi-trifft-israelischen-botschafter/>.

<sup>43</sup> Niema Movassat, "Offener Brief an den BAK Shalom, Absage meiner Teilnahme an der Podiumsdiskussion "Sanktionen gegen Iran – ja oder nein?" 3/6/2010,

[http://www.movassat.de/files/movassat/Offener-Brief\\_Movassat.pdf](http://www.movassat.de/files/movassat/Offener-Brief_Movassat.pdf).

<sup>44</sup> Linksjugend ['solid'] NRW, "Offener Brief an den BundessprecherInnenrat des BAK Shalom," 2/6/2010, <http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2010/06/offener-brief-an-den-bundessprecherinnenrat-des-bak-shalom.pdf>;

Linksjugend ['solid'] Hamburg, "Unter der Knute der deutschen Staatsräson wird Krieg zu Frieden," 24/6/2010, [http://www.linksjugend-solid-hamburg.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/linksjugend/Antimilitarismus/Stellungnahme%20BAK%20Shalom\\_%20und%20die%20Free%20Gaza%20Flottille%20.pdf](http://www.linksjugend-solid-hamburg.de/fileadmin/user_upload/linksjugend/Antimilitarismus/Stellungnahme%20BAK%20Shalom_%20und%20die%20Free%20Gaza%20Flottille%20.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> Linksjugend Hamburg, "Unter der Knute der deutschen Staatsräson wird Krieg zu Frieden," 24/6/2010, [http://www.linksjugend-solid-hamburg.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/linksjugend/Antimilitarismus/Stellungnahme%20BAK%20Shalom\\_%20und%20die%20Free%20Gaza%20Flottille%20.pdf](http://www.linksjugend-solid-hamburg.de/fileadmin/user_upload/linksjugend/Antimilitarismus/Stellungnahme%20BAK%20Shalom_%20und%20die%20Free%20Gaza%20Flottille%20.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Linksjugend Hamburg, "Unter der Knute der deutschen Staatsräson wird Krieg zu Frieden," 24/6/2010, [http://www.linksjugend-solid-hamburg.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/linksjugend/Antimilitarismus/Stellungnahme%20BAK%20Shalom\\_%20und%20die%20Free%20Gaza%20Flottille%20.pdf](http://www.linksjugend-solid-hamburg.de/fileadmin/user_upload/linksjugend/Antimilitarismus/Stellungnahme%20BAK%20Shalom_%20und%20die%20Free%20Gaza%20Flottille%20.pdf).

<sup>45</sup> Linksjugend Hamburg, "Unter der Knute der deutschen Staatsräson wird Krieg zu Frieden," 24/6/2010, [http://www.linksjugend-solid-hamburg.de/fileadmin/user\\_upload/linksjugend/Antimilitarismus/Stellungnahme%20BAK%20Shalom\\_%20und%20die%20Free%20Gaza%20Flottille%20.pdf](http://www.linksjugend-solid-hamburg.de/fileadmin/user_upload/linksjugend/Antimilitarismus/Stellungnahme%20BAK%20Shalom_%20und%20die%20Free%20Gaza%20Flottille%20.pdf).

<sup>46</sup> Linksjugend, "Israel muss die Blockade endlich aufgeben", 1/6/2010, <http://www.linksjugend-solid.de/presse/pressemitteilungen/detail/browse/1/zurueck/presse/artikel/pe-israel-muss-die-blockade-endlich-aufgeben/>.

called “Free Gaza! – Die Linke and Their Resistance against the Siege of Gaza,” with Inge Höger, who discussed the strategy of “left-wing resistance.”<sup>47</sup>

One week after the incident, BAK Shalom responded. They presented a list of participants known for their Islamist and antisemitic attitudes and quoted some of the antisemitic and anti-Zionist statements they had made.<sup>48</sup> Moreover, they demonstrated the connection between the Turkish IHH (Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief), which had organized the flotilla, and Hamas.<sup>49</sup> Besides calling for an explicit condemnation of Hamas, the group demanded the expulsion of the three Die Linke members for participating in the flotilla, denouncing them for failing to criticize Hamas’ conduct in exploiting the suffering of the Palestinians for political propaganda purposes and denying them any political freedom. However, they defended neither Israel’s operation off the coast of Gaza nor the siege itself. Finally, BAK Shalom explained that solidarity with Israel was incumbent upon the group due to the antisemitic accusations leveled against Israel<sup>50</sup> after the operation during several pro-Palestinian demonstrations and on social networks.<sup>51</sup>

On June 10, Annette Groth reported her experiences on the flotilla to the Bundestag. She denied that the Turkish IHH supported terrorism and accused the Israeli media of disinformation. Being neutral in a situation of oppression, she said (referring to herself), turned one into an oppressor, and she pledged to continue fighting against the siege of Gaza.<sup>52</sup>

Since the incident, Inge Höger has been traveling throughout Germany and speaking of her experiences aboard the flotilla and in an Israeli prison. In Leipzig, 40 of the 90 participants at one of these events criticized Höger for not dissociating

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<sup>47</sup> Linksjugend, “Free Gaza!?” 2010, <http://www.linksjugend-solid.de/aktuelles/verbandsnews/>.

<sup>48</sup> BAK Shalom, “Stellungnahme des BAK Shalom zu den Reaktionen auf den Stopp der Free Gaza-Flottille,” 6/6/2010, [http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2010/06/free\\_gaza\\_stellungnahme\\_3.pdf](http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2010/06/free_gaza_stellungnahme_3.pdf); MEMRI, “Arab Media Reports on Flotilla Participants: Writing Wills, Preparing for Martyrdom, Determined to Reach Gaza or Die,” <http://www.memri.org/report/en/0/0/0/0/0/4265.htm>, 1/6/2010.

<sup>49</sup> BAK Shalom, “Stellungnahme des BAK Shalom zu den Reaktionen auf den Stopp der Free Gaza-Flottille,” 6/6/2010, [http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2010/06/free\\_gaza\\_stellungnahme\\_3.pdf](http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2010/06/free_gaza_stellungnahme_3.pdf).

<sup>50</sup> Ferda Ataman, “Der Nahe Osten mitten in Berlin,” 8/6/2010, <http://www.tagesspiegel.de/berlin/der-nahe-osten-mitten-in-berlin/1854002.html>.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Annette Groth, “Angriff auf die Flottille war rechtswidrig,” 10/6/2010, <http://www.linksfraktion.de/reden/angriff-flottille-war-rechtswidrig/>.

herself from the Islamist movement.<sup>53</sup> Prior to Höger's arrival in Bremen on June 24, the local Jewish community contacted Petra Pau, vice-president of the Bundestag and representative of Die Linke parliamentary group, demanding a comment about the "Free Gaza" flotilla and the participation of the three Die Linke members. Her response was the only public criticism from a leading Die Linke member. In her letter, Pau said she thought the Israeli siege of Gaza was a political mistake. However, she opposed the flotilla and hence the participation of Die Linke members. In addition, she criticized the flotilla participants for cooperating with Turkish organizations "that are suspected of being pro-fascist,"<sup>54</sup> strengthening Hamas, and demonizing Israel worldwide. She claimed their actions added fuel to the fire of antisemites, who were now spreading hate against Jews throughout the world, and especially via social networks.<sup>55</sup>

### **Possible Future Developments**

The dispute over the "Free Gaza" flotilla was the culmination of Die Linke's debates about its relationship to Israel and the Palestinians. Because the majority of party members feared for the lives of Höger, Paech and Groth when the Israeli army stopped the *Marvi Marmara*, their views about Israeli policy deteriorated further. In the statements of several politicians and members of the youth organization, Israel was a brutal nation that disregarded humanitarian values.<sup>56</sup>

Besides BAK Shalom and Petra Pau, no one else in the party openly criticized the flotilla and the alliance between Turkish Islamists and left-wing activists. On the one hand, this could be regarded as a victory for the anti-imperialists and their struggle against the pro-Israel wing in Die Linke; on the other, the silence of many leading members could indicate a wish to wait out the criticism directed against the party for cooperating with Islamists.

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<sup>53</sup> "Free Gaza: Kontroverse Debatte in Leipzig," 13/6/2010, <http://www.inge-hoeger.de/politik/frieden/detail/browse/1/zurueck/frieden/artikel/free-gaza-kontroverse-debatte-in-leipzig/>.

<sup>54</sup> Petra Pau, "Free Gaza," 23/6/2010, <http://www.swr.de/report/-/id=6636856/property=download/nid=233454/mvqbrq/index.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Linksjugend ['solid'] NRW, "Offener Brief an den BundessprecherInnenrat des BAK Shalom," 2/6/2010, <http://bak-shalom.de/wp-content/2010/06/offener-brief-an-den-bundessprecherinnenrat-des-bak-shalom.pdf>; Die Linke, "Pressekonferenz nach der Rückkehr von Inge Höger und Annette Groth aus Israel," 1/6/2010, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uYOc6CZ0MoM>.

A possible future direction could be agreement on the basis of the parliamentary faction's official position toward the Middle East conflict. Accordingly, the deputies underline their responsibility to Israel because of the Holocaust; they also condemn antisemitism and racism and favor a two-state-solution to the Middle East conflict. The main criteria for the end of the Israeli occupation and the establishment of a Palestinian state are human rights and international law.<sup>57</sup>

Moreover, the Rosa Luxemburg Foundation could be instrumental in resolving the struggle between anti-imperialists and Israel supporters within the party. For example, the head of the foundation's office in Tel Aviv, Angelika Timm, tries to present a more balanced picture of Israel. Additionally, the foundation's work with human rights activists and Jewish-Arab projects in Israel might offer an opportunity for developing constructive criticism of Israeli policy without antisemitic and anti-Zionist motifs.<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> "Position der Fraktion Die Linke zum Nahost-Konflikt," 20/4/2010,

<http://www.linksfraktion.de/positionspapiere/position-fraktion-linke-nahost-konflikt/>.

<sup>58</sup> Angelika Timm, "Für ein differenziertes Israelbild - Kurzinterview mit Angelika Timm," 22/9/2009, <http://bak-shalom.de/index.php/2009/08/22/fur-ein-differenziertes-israelbild-kurzinterview-mit-angelika-timm/>.