**Barak tells U.N. to shelve flotilla raid probe plan**

By Louis Charbonneau

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UNITED NATIONS (Reuters) - Israel's defence minister on Monday urged the U.N. chief to shelve plans for a U.N.-backed independent investigation of a deadly Israeli commando raid on a Gaza-bound aid flotilla last month.

Speaking to reporters after he met with Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon, Israeli Defence Minister Ehud Barak said he told Ban the United Nations should suspend plans to set up an inquiry into Israel's May 31 interception of a six-ship convoy heading to the Gaza Strip, in which nine Turks died.

"We expressed our view that for the time being, as long as ... new flotillas are in the preparation, it's probably better to leave it (a U.N. investigation) on the shelf for a certain time," Barak said.

He said the five-person panel Israel has established, which includes two foreign observers, would be sufficient for now.

"We are moving ahead with our independent investigation, which we believe is clearly independent, reliable, credible and should be allowed to work," Barak said.

It was not clear if Barak meant Israel might accept Ban's proposal at a later date. He declined to take questions.

Lebanon said earlier on Monday it would allow an aid ship bound for the Gaza Strip to sail despite warnings from Israel that it had the right to use all necessary means to stop ships that try to sail from Lebanon to Gaza.

The Turkish group that sent the flotilla intercepted by the Israelis on May 31 has also vowed to send more ships to the blockaded territory, home to 1.5 million Palestinians and ruled by Hamas Islamists since 2007.

Barak said it was "a bit irresponsible" for anyone to grant permission for more aid ships to sail for Gaza.

"It's well known that we asked all of them, as we asked the previous flotilla, to join us and go through (the Israeli port of) Ashdod," he said.

"We cannot accept someone who will just try to sail directly to Gaza," Barak said about the Lebanese ship. "We see the government of Lebanon as responsible. ... There could be friction which could lead to violence, which is totally unnecessary."

Nine pro-Palestinian activists were killed on May 31 when Israeli commandos boarded one of the vessels heading to the Gaza Strip in defiance of an Israeli naval blockade. Israel says the marines opened fire after being attacked by activists wielding knives, slingshots, metal bars and clubs.

Ban said on Friday he would press ahead with the establishment of an independent inquiry, which would include both Turkish and Israeli participation.

"I've been telling them (Israel) that my proposal is not incompatible with Israel's national investigation," Ban said.

Barak added he briefed Ban on Israel's decision to ease its embargo of Gaza, which came under renewed international criticism after the May 31 raid.