

MEMMO

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Flotilla Sought Provocation, Not to Provide Assistance

The primary aim of the Gaza flotilla was not to provide humanitarian relief; it was to cause a provocation with Israel. Its top organizers and some of its participants are radicals with ties to terrorist groups that sought a violent confrontation. In contrast, the Israeli navy had worked hard to plan a peaceful interception of the six ships and its personnel only used force when their lives were at risk. Israel has legitimate self-defense reasons to inspect the cargo going into the Hamas-controlled area, where the U.S.-designated terrorist group has smuggled in thousands of munitions and rockets for use in attacks against Israeli civilians.

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- The flotilla's organizers willfully ignored repeated warnings that they would be denied entry—including messages from the European Union—and offers by Israel to transfer humanitarian goods through the Israeli port of Ashdod.
- One of the flotilla's leaders, Greta Berlin, stated that "this mission is not about delivering humanitarian supplies, it's about breaking Israel's siege on 1.5 million Palestinians," the AFP reported on May 27.
- The main organizer of the flotilla—supported by the Turkish government—was the Turkish Humanitarian Relief Foundation (IHH), which has publicly affirmed its links to Hamas, maintains an office in Gaza and has ties to other terrorist organizations.
- IHH has also been linked to al-Qaeda and played a role in al-Qaeda's failed Millennium bombing of Los Angeles International Airport, according to French counter-terrorism magistrate Jean-Louis Bruguière, who testified during the trial of failed bomber Ahmed Ressam.



The head of the group that organized the flotilla, Bulent Yildirim (left), is closely linked with Ismail Haniyeh's U.S.-designated terrorist group Hamas.

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- Individuals aboard the vessels had clearly prepared for violence, chanting an Islamic battle cry recalling the killing of Jews and calling for martyrdom, according to an Al-Jazeera [report](#).
- While intercepting six ships attempting to break the naval blockade of Gaza after frequent warnings not to proceed, Israeli soldiers were attacked immediately upon boarding one of them.
- As Israeli soldiers descended upon the ship one-by-one from a helicopter, they were prepared with non-lethal paint guns and under strict orders not to use deadly force unless absolutely necessary.

- The outnumbered soldiers were immediately and [brutally attacked](#) with [crowbars, clubs and knives](#) and shot at with guns stolen from soldiers, seven of whom were injured. One soldier was [thrown to a lower deck 30 feet below](#) and sustained a severe head injury.
- Israeli soldiers reacted with the utmost restraint. Only when their lives were in danger did they seek and receive permission to open fire. Regrettably, nine flotilla participants were killed and others injured. Seven Israeli soldiers were injured.

Israel has a legitimate right to self-defense and reason to be concerned about cargo going unchecked into Hamas-controlled Gaza.

- The charter of Hamas, the U.S.-designated terrorist group that seized Gaza in an armed coup from the Palestinian Authority in 2007, calls for the destruction of Israel.
- Israel's actions are aimed at blocking arms and explosives shipments to Hamas, which is at war with the Jewish state. Hamas has fired more than 7,000 rockets and mortar shells into Israel since Israel *withdrew* from Gaza in 2005.
- Hamas continues to operate a vast network of [tunnels](#) under Gaza, which it uses to smuggle weapons from Iran and Syria for attacks against Israeli civilians. It also has repeatedly sought to smuggle in weapons through [the sea](#).
- According to international legal experts, it is legitimate for a state to impose an embargo on international waters during wartime. Israel's detention of the flotilla ships—and its use of force to defend its soldiers when attacked by some of the radicals—is acceptable under international law.
- Egypt also has imposed a blockade on Gaza to protect its own internal security by constructing an underground steel wall along the Sinai-Gaza border to help stymie the flow of illicit goods.

Israel continues to facilitate a vast operation to provide humanitarian goods and medical services to the people of Gaza.

- Since the end of the Gaza war in 2009, Israel has facilitated the transfer of more than a million tons of humanitarian supplies to Gaza and 133 million liters of fuel. Israel is now in the process of [unloading the items from the flotilla](#) and is transferring legitimate humanitarian items into Gaza via established mechanisms.
- To handle the delivery of humanitarian aid and other civilian issues related to Palestinian life in Gaza and the West Bank, Israel has a special unit in the Ministry of Defense—the Coordinator of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT).

The U.N. issued a presidential statement condemning the events leading up to the incident, which some have interpreted as a criticism of Israel.

- It would have been preferable if the U.N. and Obama administration had blocked any action implying criticism of Israel for defending itself. Nonetheless, intervention by the United States prevented passage of a Security Council resolution condemning Israel.
- The administration continues to express its confidence in Israel's ability to conduct its own investigation of the incident despite calls for an international inquiry.
- During the Security Council deliberations, Alejandro Wolff, deputy U.S. representative to the U.N., said the “direct delivery by sea [of humanitarian supplies] is neither appropriate nor responsible” and criticized Hamas’ “continued arms smuggling and commitment to terrorism.”
- The United States must now maintain its longstanding position not to allow the Security Council and other U.N. organs such as the U.N. Human Rights Council to exploit unfortunate incidents by passing biased, anti-Israel resolutions that obscure the truth and accomplish nothing.