

MEMMO

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Israel Acts in Self-Defense to Limit Hamas Gaza Threat

Since Hamas brutally seized Gaza from the Palestinian Authority in 2007, Israel has tried to prevent weapons from being smuggled into the area while facilitating humanitarian aid. As Vice President Biden recently said, "I think Israel has an absolute right to deal with its security interest. ...The truth of the matter is, Israel has a right to know—they're at war with Hamas... whether or not arms are being smuggled in." Rather than working with Israel to provide humanitarian aid, the recent flotilla sought to break Israel's legal blockade and provoke a confrontation. Israel is working with the United States and others to further expand the delivery of aid into Gaza as it investigates the background and lessons from the flotilla incident.

Israel has a legitimate right to prevent arms from going to Hamas, which calls for the destruction of the Jewish state.

- 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 weapons into Gaza via the sea.
- Hamas continues to hold captive Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit, who was kidnapped from inside Israel nearly four years ago. The terrorist group has refused requests from the International Committee of the Red Cross to visit him.
- According to international legal experts, it is legitimate for a state to impose an embargo on international waters during wartime. Israel's blockade and detention of the flotilla ships is acceptable under international law.
- Egypt has also imposed a blockade on Gaza to protect its own internal security and is constructing an underground steel wall along the Sinai-Gaza border to help stymie the flow of illicit goods.



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The main aim of the recent Gaza flotilla—led by individuals with ties to terrorist groups—was to create a provocation, not to provide assistance.

- 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," AFP reported.
- 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 been linked to other terrorist organizations, including al-Qaeda.
- Israeli soldiers were attacked immediately upon boarding one of six ships attempting to break the naval blockade. The five other ships proceeded without incident to the port in Ashdod.
- The outnumbered soldiers were immediately and brutally attacked with crowbars, clubs and knives before being shot at with guns stolen from soldiers, seven of whom were injured.
- 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 in the well-organized attacks against the soldiers were killed.

Israel continues to facilitate the flow of humanitarian goods into Gaza while at the same time ensuring that its security concerns are met.

- 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 also facilitated the delivery of the flotilla's cargo into Gaza via established mechanisms.
- The Israeli government on average facilitates the entry of 220 tons of food to Gaza each day, 20 percent more than the required amount recommended by the World Food Program.
- Despite concerns Hamas could take materials such as iron and cement to build rockets and bunkers, Israeli has facilitated the transfer of 23 tons of iron and 25 tons of cement into Gaza during the first quarter of this year.
- Israel maintains a corridor for the transfer of medical patients out of Gaza into Israeli hospitals or other foreign medical facilities. In 2009, 10,544 patients along with 12,000 companions left Gaza.

The United States should back Israel's internal investigation into the flotilla incident and block unhelpful actions at the United Nations.

- Israeli Defense Forces Chief of Staff Lt. Gen. Gabi Ashkenazi has appointed an independent team of experts—headed by Maj. Gen. (Res.) Giora Eiland—to examine military elements of the flotilla operation and establish lessons from the event.
- The Israeli government has established a special commission—with international observers—to investigate the events leading up to the flotilla incident and to examine the roles played by terrorist organizations and outside countries in creating the violent confrontation.
- Israel's democratic institutions have repeatedly shown that they are fully capable of investigating such incidents. Previous investigations have at times leveled harsh criticism and held accountable the Israeli military and political leaders.
- In contrast, the U.N. has proven incapable of carrying out a credible independent investigation. The U.N.'s Goldstone Commission investigating Israel's 2009 operation in Gaza resulted in a one-sided critique of Israel that ignored Hamas' repeated and deliberate attacks on Israeli civilians.
- The United States should back Israel's right to self-defense and its internal investigations while blocking biased international efforts to "investigate" the matter.