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FREE GAZA FLOTILLA

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INFORMATION

- ❖ On April 28th, the **Free Gaza Movement** and the Turkish IHH organization, announced that it intended to sail a flotilla to the Gaza Strip on May 24th. This date was later delayed until the end of May. The stated goal of the flotilla, dubbed "The Freedom Flotilla", is to bypass existing humanitarian aid channels and to make port in the Gaza Strip, despite Israeli maritime restrictions which exist in the region. This is the fourth flotilla launched by the organization.
- ❖ The flotilla consists of eight or nine vessels, including four cargo ships (images in appendix A):
 - **'MV Rachel Corrie'** – 68 meter-long boat capable of bearing 1200 tons of cargo and sailing under the flag of Cambodia. The *Rachel Corrie* departed Ireland on May 17th towards Cyprus but due to mechanical difficulties is expected to arrive in the region on June 3rd.
 - **'Eleftheri Mesogeios'** – 65 meter-long boat capable of carrying over 1100 tons of cargo and sailing under a Greek flag.
 - **'Gazze'** -84 meter-long boat capable of bearing 2000 tons sailing under a Turkish flag.
 - **'Defne Y'** – The largest of the three, the *Defne Y* is a 20 year old boat capable of carrying over 4400 tons of cargo and is sailing under a Kiribati flag.
- ❖ Also in the flotilla is the **Mavi Marmara**, a 93 meter-long ship capable of carrying 1,500 passengers. The ship loaded some 500 passengers in Anatolia.
- ❖ A number of other small yachts have also joined the flotilla, carrying varying amounts of cargo.
- ❖ With the exception of the *Rachel Corrie*, boats are expected to rendezvous south of Cyprus and continue towards the Gaza Strip. The flotilla is bearings approximately 700 passengers from 60 countries, as well as over 4,000 tons of equipment, including concrete and iron, contrary to Israeli policy in the Gaza Strip.
- ❖ In the weeks leading up to the flotilla's departure, extensive political and diplomatic efforts were made in order to clarify beyond the shadow of doubt that supplies could be transferred to the Gaza Strip through the existing channels, following security approval.



LEGAL ASPECTS

- ❖ As per the Interim Agreement signed by the Palestinian Authority and Israel, an agreement supported by the international community, the sea off the coast of the Gaza Strip is subject to Israeli naval control and Israel is entrusted with maintaining security in the area. In accordance with mutually accepted agreement, the entry of foreign vessels into maritime areas off the coast of Gaza is forbidden.
- ❖ As such, Israel has issued an advisory notice warning all foreign vessels to remain clear of the designated maritime zone. Entering this zone endangers the passengers of the boat and interferes with the Israeli Navy's security efforts.
- ❖ Israeli security operations in the region, which focus on preventing terrorist infiltrations or mass weapon transfers, stem from accepted practices of self-defense and in accordance with agreements signed between the PA and Israel.



FOCUS POINTS

- ❖ **The Gaza Strip is controlled by the Hamas, a hostile terrorist regime which refuses to recognize Israel, has made threats against Israel and continues to expand its military capabilities.** Due to the threat posed by Hamas, certain limitations and restrictions have been imposed. These limitations extend to maritime channels as well.
- ❖ **There is no humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.** Supplies continue to enter the Gaza Strip through the existing humanitarian crossings. These efforts reflect Israeli policy of cooperating with international organizations and ensuring ongoing assistance to the Gaza Strip.
- ❖ Since January 2009, the two ships which attempted to breach the naval blockade have been stopped in accordance with international law, and the goods onboard have been transferred to the Gaza Strip via the existing land channels. A similar offer has been extended to the organizers of the flotilla, who summarily dismissed it, reflecting the **provocative objectives of the flotilla.**
- ❖ Israel **unilaterally withdrew from the Gaza Strip in 2005.** Over the following two years, the Palestinian Authority failed to restrain Palestinian terrorism. Despite the ongoing attacks, which included the abduction of SSG Gilad Shalit, Israel voluntarily opted to **allow virtually unimpeded passage of goods and persons to and from Gaza**, subject to security restrictions.

Following the Hamas coup in the Gaza Strip in June 2007, terrorist attacks and rocket launches increased dramatically. **Consequently, in September 2007, the Israeli Ministerial Committee for National Defense Issues defined the Hamas-controlled Gaza Strip as a *hostile entity*.**

- ❖ Israel insists on mechanisms that will ensure its security interests. In the absence of such mechanisms, **Israel has no choice but to enforce certain restrictions** to ensure Israeli security and to prevent the Hamas military build-up. This policy has been subject to continuous review and scrutiny by Israel's top judicial body – the Supreme Court.
- ❖ **The humanitarian crossings continue to operate, providing the local population with food, supplies and medical assistance.** This effort takes place in full coordination with NGOs operating in the region. Today, it is evident that these measures have played a vital role in preserving standards of living within the Gaza Strip, ensuring that **there is no humanitarian crisis in the Gaza Strip.**

	Trucks	Supplies (tons)	Medical Evacuations	Fuel (million liters)
January	1,841	40,009	1453	6.9
February	2,208	52,128	1,239	6.3
March	2,190	54,688	1,349	5
April	2,528	60,626	1,339	5.8
Sum	8,767	207,451	5,380	24

Humanitarian Supplies Transferred to the Gaza Strip, 2010

- ❖ The flotilla organizers claim that the true objective of the flotilla is to provide the residents of the Gaza Strip with humanitarian aid. As shown above, supplies may be transferred to the Gaza Strip through existing channels, pending coordination with the Israeli government and NGOs. The *Free Gaza* and the *IHH*, both highly political movements with a history of deliberately endangering activists, have **opted to ignore these channels**, and challenge the Israeli security restrictions.
- ❖ Offers to transfer the flotilla's supplies via the existing channels were extended to the flotilla's organizers. These were rejected, **reflecting the proactive nature of the flotilla**, which directly threatens the safety of the flotilla participants and places them at risk, including from threats which emanated from the Gaza Strip.

The IDF enforces government policies, protecting Israel's borders and security. IDF operations rely on accepted methods which conform to international standards, and in many cases exceed them. The IDF will not hesitate from taking measures in order to enforce government policy.

APPENDIX A: PARTICIPATING SHIPS



Name: *'Eleftheri Mesogeios'*
Flag: Greece
Maximum Speed: 11.5 knots
Height: 10 meters
Width: 64 meters
Cargo Capacity: 1133 tons
Made in: 1967



Name: *'Rachel Corrie'*
Flag: Cambodia
Maximum Speed: 12.5 knots
Height: 10 meters
Width: 68 meters
Cargo Capacity: 1205 tons
Made in: 1967



Name: *'Gazze'*
Flag: Turkey
Maximum Speed: 12 knots
Height: 10 meters
Width: 68 meters
Cargo Capacity: 2000 tons
Made in: 1981



Name: *'Defne Y'*
Flag: Kiribati
Maximum Speed: 12 knots
Height: 15 meters
Width: 95 meters
Cargo Capacity: 4412 tons
Made in: 1980



Name: *'Mavi Marmara'*
Flag: Turkey
Maximum Speed: 10 knots
Height: 19 meters
Width: 93 meters
Made in: 1994

APPENDIX B: PRIOR FLOTILLAS

Previous Flotillas

- ❖ August 23rd 2008: A naval protest consisting of two vessels – the "*Free Gaza*" and the "*Liberty*" – with 40 pro-Palestinian activists of various nationalities (primarily American and British) sailed from Cyprus to the Gaza Strip. The flotilla contained minimal quantities of humanitarian aid, electing to bring in 5,000 balloons, as well as political figures and journalists in order to provide coverage of the provocation.
- ❖ October 29th 2008: A ship from Cyprus with 27 pro-Palestinian Free Gaza activists arrived at the Gaza coast.
- ❖ November 8th 2008: The "*Dignity*" arrived at the Gaza coast, carrying 13 European parliament members, together with Arab and European media representatives. The delegation members remained in the Gaza Strip for three days, during which they toured the Gaza Strip and met with senior public figures, including Ismail Haniyeh, the Hamas Prime Minister.
- ❖ June 29th 2009: A ship sailing under the Greek flag, named the "**Spirit of Humanity**" departed from Port Larnaca, Cyprus, to Gaza Strip, carrying with it 21 activists from 11 different countries. The ship held three tons of humanitarian aid, including medical aid, children's toys and reconstruction kits for twenty family homes.
- ❖ While the first two flotillas were allowed to enter Gaza, since December 2008 permission to land has been denied.

APPENDIX C: PARTICIPATING ORGANIZATIONS

- ❖ The flotilla is comprised of three major organizations: **Free Gaza**, **ECESG** and **IHH**.
 - **Free Gaza Movement** – An international human rights organization which sets its purpose on publicizing the Israeli blockade, as well as organizing flotillas with the intention of providing additional humanitarian aid into the Gaza Strip.
 - **Insani Yardim Vakfi (IHH)** – a Turkish pro-Palestinian human rights organization with a strong Muslim orientation. The IHH is a non-government organization which provides humanitarian relief into areas of war and conflict.
 - **The European Campaign to End the Siege on Gaza (ECESG)** – an umbrella body of non-governmental organizations across Europe which strives to raise the international awareness regarding the "Gaza crisis", as their website calls it.