

Turkish video shows Greek coast guard trying to sink refugee raft

Kate Randall

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Video shot by the Turkish coast guard appears to show a man on a Greek coast guard ship attempting to sink an inflatable raft full of Syrian refugees in the Aegean Sea. Reuters reports the video was shot on November 12.

More than 600,000 refugees from the Middle East and Africa have made the treacherous journey to Greece by sea and thousands have drowned making the attempt. As many as 5,000 refugees are arriving on the Greek islands in unseaworthy dinghies every day.

The video released on Friday by the Turkish Institute of Public Diplomacy shows a man onboard a ship bearing Greek coast guard insignia attempting to strike the inflatable dinghy with a long pole when the refugees came alongside the vessel. As the raft begins to sink, the refugees can be heard frantically shouting for help and blowing whistles.

The footage later shows the refugees in a half-sunken raft waving to the Turkish coast guard and waiting to be rescued. The Turkish vessel reportedly took them aboard and took them to the Turkish port of Didim. According to Turkish media, there were 58 Syrian refugees onboard, including children.

Turkish officials sharply criticized the Greek authorities over the video, which was widely reported in Turkish media. Commander Rear Admiral Hakan Ustem of the Turkish Coast Guard told his Greek counterparts: *“We would be very pleased if you order your team to refrain from such acts.”*

The Greek coast guard issued blanket denials of the Turkish allegations, declaring, “The Headquarters of the Hellenic Coast Guard categorically denies reports in the foreign press and altered audiovisual material on a foreign website, according to which a vessel of the Hellenic Coast Guard is allegedly attempting to sink a boat with refugees.”

The video was reportedly shown to the head of the Greek coast guard, Vice Admiral Athanasios Athanasopoulos, during a high-level meeting on the plight of refugees in Ankara on November 18. The admiral was in Turkey along with Greek Prime Minister Alexis Tsipras, who was in Turkey attending a friendly soccer match between Greece and Turkey, and to discuss the refugee crisis.

The Greek coast guard denied that any talks took place, however, stating: “The Hellenic Coast Guard also categorically denies that talks took place between the heads of the two coast guards of Greece and Turkey as presented in reports in the Turkish press.”

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The Greek guard also stated that any attempt to sink a boat full of migrants is “incompatible with our values and culture and is absolutely deplorable.”

Whatever claims it may be making in this specific case, Greece’s Syriza-led government unconditionally supports the European Union’s hard-line policy against refugees.

The world was outraged when pictures showed drowned three-year-old Aylan Kurdi lying on a Turkish beach in September. Since then, more than a hundred children have drowned in the waters between Turkey and Greece.

The Syriza government could open the Greek-Turkish border fence, built with EU aid in 2013, thus stopping the dangerous sea crossings and allowing refugees to take a safe overland path to the EU. However, the Tsipras government has refused to take this step, citing fears that the EU would then impose harsher sanctions on Greece for opening the border, leaving Greece to manage the thousands of refugees on its own.



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