

Spain and Italy dispatch warships to Gaza flotilla as Israel considers violent assault

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30 September 2025

The Global Sumud Flotilla, a convoy of over 50 civilian boats carrying more than 500 activists, aid workers, and lawmakers from around 45 countries, is sailing through the eastern Mediterranean towards Gaza. According to activists, it is approaching “the high-risk area” where prior flotillas have been intercepted.

Two European imperialist powers, Spain and Italy, have dispatched warships to accompany the flotilla. Their stated mission is not to defend the ships, but to prepare for rescue operations in the event of them being illegally and violently attacked by the Israeli military.

Italian Defence Minister Guido Crosetto told parliament: “It is not an act of war, it is not a provocation: it is an act of humanity, which is a duty of a state towards its citizens.” Crosetto urged the organisers of the flotilla to deliver their humanitarian cargo in Cyprus, because “once they have left international waters and entered the waters of another state, security can no longer be guaranteed.” Italy will withdraw its warships after the Flotilla is 120 miles from Gaza.

Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez, speaking at the United Nations in New York, declared: “Tomorrow we will dispatch a naval vessel from Cartagena with all necessary resources ... to assist the flotilla and carry out a rescue operation.”

Turkey announced it would also participate in a rescue operation if necessary and has drones monitoring the flotilla.

The deployment of warships aims to deflect popular anger and provide governments that have facilitated genocide for two years with an alibi while the slaughter continues.

Spain and Italy are responding to a wave of protests against Israel’s genocide and their own complicity.

Demonstrations have swept Spanish and Italian cities for nearly two years.

On September 22 in Italy, tens of thousands of workers and youth took to the streets in more than 75 cities under the slogan “Let’s Block Everything”, triggering general strike actions, transport disruptions, port blockades, and the occupation of public squares. Dockworkers in Genoa and Livorno refused to load shipments bound for Israel, and in Ravenna port workers forced the mayor to block transit of explosive-laden containers.

In Spain, protesters have repeatedly confronted Sánchez over his government’s publicly denouncing the carnage while authorising arms sales, working with Israeli arms manufacturers and allowing Spanish ports to act as key transit ports for the delivery of weapons and bombs for the genocide. This anger exploded on 14 September when over 100,000 people poured into the streets of Madrid against the participation of the Israel–Premier Tech cycling team and forced the cancellation of the final stage of La Vuelta a España, one of cycling’s “Grand Tours.”

The flotilla includes Brazilian socio-environmentalist Thiago Ávila, Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg, Turkish-German activist Yasemin Acar, and Ada Colau, the former mayor of Barcelona. It carries Italian parliamentarians Arturo Scotto of the Partito Democratico (PD) and Marco Croatti of the Movimento 5 Stelle (M5S), as well as European Parliament members such as Annalisa Corrado (PD) and Benedetta Scuderi (Europa Verde/Greens–Left Alliance). From France, Emma Fourreau of La France Insoumise has joined and Mariana Mortágua of Portugal’s Bloco de Esquerda has taken part. Spanish politician Jaume Asens, linked to the Podemos-backed Barcelona en Comú, is on one of the ships.

The danger posed is another act of state piracy and bloodshed, recalling the 2010 assault on the Mavi Marmara in which nine activists were murdered.

Eden Bar-Tal, Director General of Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said the country's military "will not allow" the flotilla's ships to enter Gaza, adding that "Any further refusal [to deposit the aid in another port] will place responsibility on the flotilla's organizers." Foreign Minister Gideon Saar stated on X that the rejection of Giorgia Meloni's government's proposal that the flotilla's aid be offloaded in Cyprus and handed to the Latin Patriarchate of Jerusalem for distribution into Gaza was "proof that their real purpose is to provoke and to serve Hamas."

Israel has said it will not target the Spanish and Italian naval vessels but that it is undeterred by their presence. Bar-Tal stated: "We have no problem with the fact that there are ships around."

Two previous attempts to deliver aid by sea this year have been blocked by Israeli armed forces. In June, the *Madleen* was raided and its crew arrested and deported. In May, the *Conscience* was hit by drones off the coast of Malta and had to be rescued.

Israeli forces have killed Spanish troops in southern Lebanon, most notoriously Corporal Francisco Javier Soria in 2015. Madrid took no action. Italy, likewise, has suffered repeated incidents of Israeli fire against its United Nations contingents without retaliation.

The US, Israel's chief backer, long ago demonstrated how little even the lives of its own troops matter when imperialist alliances are at stake. In June 1967, during the Six-Day War, Israeli warplanes and torpedo boats attacked the USS Liberty, killing 34 American sailors and wounding over 170. The Johnson administration suppressed the evidence and covered up the crime to protect the alliance with Israel.

In parallel with Sánchez's deployment of a warship, the Spanish government has announced restrictions on the use of the US bases at Rota (Cádiz) and Morón de la Frontera (Seville) for transferring arms to Israel. For two years, Madrid has allowed these bases to serve as logistical hubs for Washington's vast arms shipments to Israel. Spain does not inspect US aircraft or ships, however, and Pentagon cargo can be concealed or rerouted via Germany, Italy, or the Azores. The government's new prohibition is yet another manoeuvre to defuse outrage.

Sánchez's other star measure, a decree on the arms embargo against Israel, is riddled with loopholes. Transfers of "defence material" are permitted whenever a prohibition would "undermine national interests." This allows the Spanish military industrial complex and the state to continue trading with Israel, while posturing as defenders of international law.

Spain, Italy, and their European counterparts are not breaking with Israel. They remain part of the NATO alliance arming and financing the slaughter in Gaza. Their naval deployments and base restrictions are an alibi, a way to present themselves as defenders of civilians while allowing the genocide to proceed unhindered. The decisive question is the independent mobilisation of the working class in every country against war, genocide, and imperialism.



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