

Israel illegally intercepts aid flotilla bound for Gaza

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In an ongoing military operation in the Mediterranean, the Israel Defence Forces (IDF) have intercepted at least thirteen vessels of the Global Sumud Flotilla, which had been attempting to break the siege of Gaza and deliver food and medical supplies to the starving population.

The IDF's actions are part of Israel's flagrant offensive against international law. The vessels were attacked and taken over in international waters, on the basis of maintaining Israel's blockade of the Gaza Strip, which is itself illegal.

The attack on the flotilla has intensified mass popular hostility to Israel and its genocide in Gaza. Protests are being held in capital cities around the world, and in Italy a general strike has been called for Friday.

A statement by the flotilla's organisers reported: "On Wednesday ... at around 8:30pm [17:30 GMT], multiple vessels of Global Sumud Flotilla—notably Alma, Surius, Adara—were illegally intercepted and boarded by Israeli Occupation Forces in international waters."

The statement added: "Prior to illegally boarding the ships, it appears as though the Israeli naval vessels intentionally damaged ship communications, in an attempt to block distress signals and stop the livestream of their illegal boat boarding."

In an update posted to social media, flotilla spokesperson Saif Abukeshk stated that at least 201 people had been taken into custody by the IDF after the boarding of the vessels. They hailed from 37 countries, including 30 participants from Spain, 22 from Italy, 21 from Turkey and 12 from Malaysia.

As Abukeshk and others have noted, the detentions can only be described as a kidnapping, given that Israel had no jurisdiction or legal right over the vessels.

Among those arrested is the well-known Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg. The flotilla includes

numbers of other prominent figures, such as former South African MP Mandla Mandela, the grandson of Nelson Mandela, and several European politicians from France, Spain and Scandinavian countries.

Abukeshk's update indicated that, as of its posting, 30 vessels of the flotilla, which had set out from Spain in late August, remained at liberty and were seeking to approach Gaza.

The interceptions were the culmination of a series of aggressive actions by the IDF targeting the peaceful flotilla. Participants had reported that the vessels were being menaced by as many as 20 Israeli warships. Drones had hovered threateningly above, as the warships approached at such close quarters as to require evasive action.

Social media footage showed Israeli forces telling the vessels that they were "approaching an active war zone," and that if they attempted to "breach the naval blockade" they would be taken over, detained and subjected to legal proceedings.

In response to such a call over the ship's radio, Thiago Avila noted that the "International Court of Justice has made a provisional ruling that any attempt to hinder a humanitarian mission to Gaza is prohibited by international law."

The actions of the flotilla, he stated, were also in line with the findings of the International Criminal Court, which last November issued arrest warrants for Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and other Israeli leaders, on the grounds that their offensive on Gaza constitutes a crime against humanity.

The Israeli regime is impervious to such arguments. Those detained from the vessels are to be thrown into Israeli detention. Their immediate fate is uncertain, because many official Israeli institutions are in a shutdown due to Yom Kippur.

Under conditions where the IDF operation against the flotilla is continuing, some have recalled previous instances of Israeli attacks on attempts to break the siege of Gaza.

When the *Madleen* was intercepted in June, activists were targeted with chemical irritant sprays before being detained and deported. Those on a 2018 flotilla reported being beaten and brutalised before their detention. In 2010, Israeli commandos carried out a hostile boarding of the Turkish ship *Mavi Marmara*, killing ten of those on board.

The latest attack on the *Global Sumud Flotilla* has prompted widespread international condemnation.

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim condemned “intimidation and coercion” of vessels carrying “unarmed civilians and life-saving humanitarian supplies for Gaza.” The Colombian government announced that the Israeli diplomatic mission to its country would be expelled.

A number of other governments have issued statements of “concern” over the fate of their citizens who have been detained by Israel. Such statements are a nervous reaction to popular anger, under conditions where protests are being held internationally over the attack on the flotilla.

The interceptions and the circumstances leading up to them underscored the bogus character of such posturing. With the flotilla and its fate of particular interest in the Mediterranean nations of Italy and Spain, both countries dispatched military vessels on the pretext of protecting it from any aggression.

On Tuesday evening, however, organisers stated they had been told that “the frigate escorting the fleet will ask the participants to turn back,” well before they had approached Gaza. They told media outlets, “What Italy is doing is not protection but sabotage, and an attempt to undermine the mission, as it acts as a tool in the hands of Israel instead of safeguarding the volunteers.”

The Spanish government similarly called on participants to turn their vessels around and warned against breaching Israel’s maritime exclusion zone around Gaza.

The attack on the flotilla coincides with a stepped-up offensive against Gaza City by the IDF. In the past 24 hours, Israel has reportedly killed at least 73 people in the Strip, the majority of them in Gaza City. That included dozens of fatalities at two schools which had

been turned into makeshift refugee facilities.

The escalating attacks underscore the fraud of the “peace plan” outlined by Netanyahu and President Donald Trump earlier this week.

The plan demands the complete surrender of Hamas and of all armed Palestinian factions in Gaza. It envisions Gaza being ruled by a “transitional” regime headed by Trump and British war criminal Tony Blair.

It includes obvious elements of Trump’s proposals, when he declared earlier this year that the US would annex Gaza and transform it into a “Riviera.” The plan, for instance, forecasts the creation of a financial board that would “attract private capital,” “manage investment portfolios” and “provide investor facilitation.”

Shortly after the plan was unveiled, and was lauded by governments around the world, Netanyahu released a video in Hebrew declaring that under no circumstances would the IDF leave Gaza. In other words, the plan is simply a cover for and an element of the advanced operation to complete the ethnic cleansing of Gaza, in which all of the imperialist powers are implicated.

The latest developments underscore the reality that protests, no matter how courageous, are insufficient to halt the unfolding war crimes.

The independent strength of the working class must be brought to bear, including through strikes and industrial action aimed at halting all military supplies to the imperialist-Zionist war machine. That in turn must form one component of the development of an international anti-war movement, uniting the working class globally, in opposition to a capitalist system hurtling towards barbarism and war.



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