

Israel violently and illegally intercepts Gaza flotilla, kidnaps organisers

Thomas Scripps
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Israel, aided by Greece, has kidnapped hundreds of people sailing in the Mediterranean as part of the Global Sumud Flotilla (GSF). The flotilla was bound for Gaza to protest the ongoing Israeli siege with a symbolic delivery of essential aid. Twenty-two of 60 boats were intercepted.

This was a violent act of piracy, carried out by Israeli armed forces 600 nautical miles off the coast of Gaza, in international waters, with the intent to commit grievous bodily harm and even murder.

Protesters report being fired upon by live and rubber ammunition and being manhandled with their hands tied. Three-dozen people suffered broken ribs and noses, serious neck injuries, and being knocked unconscious.

The GSF released a statement denouncing “the unlawful seizure of human beings on the open sea near Crete,” an “assertion that Israel can operate with total impunity, far beyond its own borders, with no consequences.”

It continued, “Silence from world governments signals that international law applies selectively and that the lives of civilians can be targeted by Israel, anywhere in the world, at any time, with no consequences. We demand accountability.”

The worst violence was directed against those trying to peacefully resist the abduction of two organisers: Thiago Ávila and Saif Abu Keshek. They remain in Israeli custody, appearing in court in Ashkelon on Sunday, where they were remanded for a further four days of interrogation.

Ávila, speaking through his lawyers, reported being “subjected to extreme brutality” when kidnapped, including being “dragged face-down across the floor and beaten so severely that he passed out twice”.

Abu Keshek was kept handcuffed and blindfolded

face-down on the floor all the way back to Israel. A statement released by the flotilla organisers reports, “Eyewitnesses have testified to the screams of Abu Keshek echoing throughout the ship as he was systematically tortured after being separated from the others”.

Both men are being kept in isolation in the Shikma detention facility, where they are held without charge.

The Legal Center for Arab Minority Rights in Israel, Adalah, told the media after a visit that they were now on hunger strike in protest. It stated that the “the treatment of the two activists, including the use of isolation, prolonged blindfolding and physical beatings, constitutes a grave violation of international law.”

Ávila was seized and detained during a previous sailing to Israel in autumn 2025, suffering abuse in the Ketziot prison.

178 other members of the flotilla were taken aboard the Israeli naval vessel *Nahshon*, where they report being denied food and water and being forced to sleep on a repeatedly flooded floor for the 40-hour journey to the Greek island of Crete, where local authorities were waiting to bus them away.

Others were left stranded at sea, in what the GSF called “a calculated death trap,” explaining, “After smashing engines and destroying navigation arrays, the military retreated – intentionally leaving... civilians stranded on powerless, broken vessels directly in the path of a massive approaching storm.”

All protest voyages to Gaza have been subjected to extreme violence and kidnapping, in flagrant violation of international law. In May last year, the *Conscience* was hit by drones off the coast of Malta, requiring rescue. In June, the *Madleen* was raided, its crew arrested and deported.

Last autumn, a flotilla was attacked by drones during

its journey then intercepted roughly 65 nautical miles off the coast of Gaza, again with individuals seized and detained in Israel for multiple days.

That the latest seizure was carried out hundreds of miles further from its borders reflects the growing impunity with which Israel is allowed to act as an imperialist outpost—in the Gaza genocide and the war on Iran and Lebanon—above all on behalf of the United States.

US officials gave their full support for the attack on the flotilla, threatening European governments who did not do the same. State department spokesperson Thomas Pigott declared the protest “a pro-Hamas initiative and a baseless, counterproductive effort to undermine President Trump’s Peace Plan.”

He added that the US expected its allies “to take decisive action against this meaningless political stunt by denying port access, docking, departure, and refuelling to vessels participating in the flotilla,” as well as by ensuring participants face “any applicable legal consequences.” The US would “explore using available tools to impose” its own “consequences on those who provide support to this pro-Hamas flotilla”.

European governments are doubly guilty: firstly, for allowing Israel to carry out its illegal operation in international waters, with Greece’s direct involvement, and secondly for abandoning their citizens to this criminal regime.

Britain’s Labour government has remained silent, despite two British nationals being among those wounded by Israeli forces. It has ignored a letter from a small group of MPs demanding it “immediately ascertain” the condition of individuals involved, issue a statement “condemning any unlawful interference with civilian shipping” and “insist upon the immediate cessation” of such interference by Israel.

The German and Italian governments issued an anodyne joint statement noting “with great concern developments regarding the Global Sumud Flotilla”, calling “for a full respect of international applicable law” and claiming “Our common utmost priority is to ensure the security of our citizens” while avoiding any direct criticism of Israel.

A call “for restraint from irresponsible actions” is outrageously directed at the protesters, while the recommitment to “the international community to provide humanitarian aid to Gaza” continues the

official whitewash of Israel’s imperialist-backed ethnic cleansing.

Italy went marginally further by stating separately that it “condemns the seizure of the Global Sumud Flotilla vessels” and calling “on Israel to immediately release all the unlawfully detained Italians”.

The Spanish government has been the most outspoken, with Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez declaring, “We demand the release of the Spanish citizen [Abu Keshek] who has been unlawfully detained by Netanyahu’s government,” adding that “Israel is once again violating international law by attacking a civilian flotilla in waters that do not belong to it”.

Foreign Minister Jose Manuel Albares criticised the “illegal detention” of Abu Keshek, saying, “Of course, it is a kidnapping” and demanding he be “released immediately”. Israel’s chargé d’affaires Dana Erlich was formally summoned by the foreign ministry.

Rome and Madrid will have particular concern over the popular response to this latest Israeli outrage, after the raids last October prompted mass protests, as well as strikes and blockades of ports.

In Italy, this led within days to a general strike and million-strong demonstration in Rome, plus tens of thousands more in other cities. In Spain, hundreds of thousands marched in Barcelona and in Madrid, followed by a wave of protest strikes.

Rallies have already been held across the two counties, plus Greece, Türkiye and elsewhere, protesting Israel’s actions and local government complicity.



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