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Gaza aid ship bombed, echoing 2010 flotilla attack

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The 'Conscience' after organizers of the Freedom Flotilla Coalition say drones attacked it overnight. Photo: Freedom Flotilla Coalition

May 2 — Early Friday morning, a ship carrying aid and humanitarian volunteers seeking to challenge Israel's genocidal siege on Gaza was attacked in international waters near Malta, organizers say.

"Armed drones attacked the front of an unarmed civilian vessel twice, causing a fire and a substantial breach in the hull," the Freedom Flotilla Coalition wrote in a statement early Friday morning. The group suspects the Israeli government was behind the attack.

Israeli officials have not commented on involvement. An Israeli Air Force plane reportedly [flew over](#) Malta at a low altitude hours before the boat was attacked. It returned to Israel hours later. The Israeli military did not respond to a request for comment.

The “Conscience,” the vessel the Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC) group was aboard, was carrying 18 people. It was set to take dozens more volunteers from at least 21 countries from Malta to Gaza, including Zeteo contributor Greta Thunberg and retired US Army Colonel Mary Ann Wright.

The group sought to bring desperately-needed aid to Gaza, as Israel maintains its two-month-long siege of Gaza, leaving 2 million people at risk of starvation.

A nearby tugboat responded to an SOS call from the ship and helped put the fire out. The stranded volunteers are appealing to enter Maltese territory because of the danger to the vessel and to avoid another attack upon nightfall, according to Tighe Barry, an organizer with the coalition, who added that the group had received no help from Turkey, Greece, or Tunisia.



Damage on the 'Conscience' after Friday's attack. Photo: Freedom Flotilla Coalition

The FFC had been operating in a media blackout to avoid exactly this type of incident from occurring, according to the coalition. Two months ago, Israeli Defense Minister Israel Katz issued a [directive](#) instructing the Israeli military "to allow the protest flotillas to reach the Gaza coast, disembark the protesters in Gaza, and seize the ships and transfer them to the port of Ashdod so that they can be used to evacuate Gaza residents who are interested in leaving Gaza," his office [said](#) in a statement.

2010 Flotilla Attack

Volunteers have for years attempted to use flotillas to break Israel's nearly two-decade-long blockade of Gaza and support Palestinians inside the occupied territory.

In 2010, Israeli forces attacked six ships of a flotilla headed to Gaza, killing nine passengers and wounding 30 (one of whom later died of his wounds). The flotilla was organized by the Free Gaza Movement and the Turkish Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief.



The Turkish ship Mavi Marmara, which was part of the “Freedom Flotilla,” in 2010. Photo by Free Gaza Movement/AFP via Getty Images

The ships were carrying thousands of pounds of humanitarian aid and construction

equipment. The Israeli Navy had warned the flotilla to steer away from the blockade, but the activists continued on course. Mounting their attack from speedboats and helicopters, soldiers [reportedly](#) fired on the ships and then raided the flagship vessel, the Mavi Marmara, and began attacking those on board.

Behesti Ismail Songur, one of the passengers of the ship attacked Friday, is the son of Cengiz Songur – who was killed on the 2010 Freedom Flotilla.

Human rights groups worldwide called for an investigation into the attack of the civilian boat on international waters, claiming it violated international law.

In the aftermath of the attack, the Obama administration blocked efforts at the UN Security Council for an international inquiry into the incident, instead [vying](#) for a “prompt, impartial, credible and transparent investigation” led by Israel. The US also blocked criticism of Israel for violating international law by attacking a ship on international waters. Instead, the US pushed a broader statement that condemned “those acts which resulted in the loss” of life.

Then-Vice President Joe Biden, meanwhile, sought to [actively defend the raid](#).

“Well, it’s legitimate for Israel to say, ‘I don’t know what’s on that ship. These guys are dropping eight – 3,000 rockets on my people,’” Biden said.

No weapons were on the ship.

Also at the time, Democratic Chuck Schumer [joined](#) 86 other senators to affirm Israel’s right to defend itself, assert that Israel’s blockade is legal, condemn the United Nations Human Rights Council “which, once again, singled out Israel,” and claim that Israel “made every effort to ensure that the humanitarian aid reached Gaza without needlessly precipitating a confrontation,” and only attacked the ship after being attacked (Israeli soldiers were only resisted because they raided the ships *and* shot at them before doing so).

In 2014, the International Criminal Court found there was a “reasonable basis to believe that war crimes were committed” but [chose not to prosecute](#) because the crimes were not of “‘sufficient gravity’ to justify further action by the ICC.”

‘Global Complicity’

Organizers of today’s flotilla say they’re focused on getting the ship and volunteers to safety. But they also don’t want people to lose sight of what prompted the mission in the first place.

“The only reason civilians like us are compelled to sail life-saving aid to Gaza is because governments around the world have utterly failed to stop Israel’s campaign of extermination. Today’s attack on our flotilla off the coast of Malta is not just an act of piracy—it’s a consequence of global complicity,” Huwaida Arraf, an organizer with the group and survivor of the 2010 flotilla attack, told Zeteo.

“As a survivor of the 2010 Gaza Freedom Flotilla, when Israel murdered 10 of our colleagues aboard the Mavi Marmara, I see the only thing that has changed is that Israel has become more brazen in its disregard for international law and for human life. The blood spilled then – and ever since – is on the hands of every state that has enabled Israel with silence, weapons, and impunity,” Arraf said.

Source: [Zeteo](#)

