

The Flotilla

On May 31, 2010, after numerous warnings, IDF naval forces intercepted six ships en route to Gaza which intended to break the Israeli blockade of Hamas-controlled Gaza. The flotilla was sponsored by the [Free Gaza Movement](#) (FGM), several European Palestinian solidarity organizations and [Insani Yardim Vakfi](#) (IHH), an Istanbul-based Islamic charity with ties to Hamas. During the operation, flotilla members on one ship, the Mavi Mamara, violently attacked the IDF personnel with weapons, including knives, metal rods, clubs, and reportedly with live gunfire. In the resulting confrontation, nine flotilla members were killed and more were wounded. Seven Israeli soldiers were wounded.

The Government of Israel and the IDF made repeated attempts to avoid confrontation with the flotilla. Weeks prior to the launching of the flotilla, Israel repeatedly offered the Government of Turkey the opportunity to send humanitarian aid to Gaza via established overland routes. Turkey refused, and continued to support the flotilla effort. As the Flotilla neared Israel's maritime border, the IDF repeatedly radioed the ships and appealed to the group's organizers to redirect the flotilla to an Israeli port, where the goods and humanitarian aid onboard would be delivered to Gaza by established routes. The flotilla organizers, intent on sensationalist publicity and confrontation with Israel, refused these entreaties.

People on the other five ships in the flotilla did not react with violence to Israeli naval personnel. Their ships sailed to the Israeli port city of Ashdod and they were all deported to their home countries.

The incident aboard the Mavi Mamara resulted in extremely heightened tensions between Turkey and Israel.

In the aftermath of the incident, Israel established an investigatory commission under the leadership of former Supreme Court Justice Jacob Turkel along with other esteemed Israeli figures from legal and academic circles. The so-called Turkel Commission concluded that Israel's naval blockade of Gaza was legal under international law, and that while "the actions carried out by Israel on May 31, 2010, to enforce the naval blockade had the regrettable consequences of the loss of human life and physical injuries...Nonetheless, and despite the limited number of uses of force for which we could not reach a conclusion, the actions taken were found to be legal pursuant to the rules of international law."

In addition, U.N. Secretary General Ban Ki-moon established a four-person panel chaired by former Prime Minister of New Zealand, Geoffrey Palmer to investigate the incident. The resulting "Palmer Report," released in September 2011, found that Israel's naval blockade of Gaza is both legal and appropriate, and that Israeli forces encountered "organized and violent resistance from a group of passengers" aboard the Mavi Mamara, but called Israel's action onboard "excessive and unreasonable."

The report recommended the resumption of diplomatic relations between Israel and Turkey. Israel accepted the report, with some "reservations."

In March 2013, in a phone call facilitated by U.S. President Barack Obama, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu told Turkish Prime Minister Recep Erdogan that Israel "regrets" the loss of life. The two leaders announced they were beginning a process of reconciliation with the intention of eventually resuming diplomatic relations although tensions remain.