

BAY AREA WOMEN IN BLACK

OUTRAGE OVER MASSACRE ON THE HIGH SEAS

Israel is facing a firestorm over its attack on the unarmed flotilla carrying humanitarian aid to Gaza. Israeli commandos boarded the six ships and killed nine passengers, injuring dozens and arresting all the survivors. The May 31st raid occurred in the middle of the night in international waters seventy miles from shore.

Exactly what happened before the commandos descended from helicopters firing live ammunition at the civilian passengers cannot be determined yet since all the passengers' belongings, including cameras, cell phones and communication equipment were confiscated. Israeli film footage shows the boarding commandos being attacked with sticks and metal bars. The Israeli version, which claims that passenger resistance occurred prior to any gunfire, was given wide coverage in U.S. media. Contrary witness accounts are now emerging as the flotilla passengers taken into custody are released.

It is beyond dispute that 1) the ships were boarded by armed personnel in international waters; 2) international law accords the right of self defense to those resisting piracy on the high seas; and 3) the 19-year-old U.S. citizen killed by the commandos had four bullet wounds to his head and one to his chest. This suggests an execution rather than heavily armed invaders defending themselves against metal bars.

The U.N. Security Council met in an emergency session the day after the attack. All member states, except the United States, initially demanded an immediate international, United-Nations-controlled investigation of the incident, and an end to the Israeli blockade of Gaza. Under U.S. pressure, the Council agreed only that an impartial investigation should take place, not even ruling out the possibility of an investigation by Israel alone. However, two days later, the U.N. Human Rights Commission frustrated Israeli and U.S. efforts to settle for a watered down probe by voting 32 to 3 in favor of a resolution calling for a fact-finding mission on the raid of the Gaza-bound convoy and also condemning "in the strongest terms the outrageous attack by Israel against the humanitarian flotilla of ships" which was trying to break Israel's blockade of Gaza.

Reaction to the attack has focused international attention on two separate Israeli violations of international law: the attack itself and the three-year-long siege of Gaza.

Former U.S. Congresswoman Cynthia McKinney said, the raid "is an outrageous violation of international law against us. Our boat was not in Israeli waters, and we were on a human-rights mission to the Gaza Strip. President Obama just told Israel to let in humanitarian and reconstruction supplies, and that's exactly what we tried to do." *The London Guardian* editorialized that a NATO Task Force would be heading toward the coast of Somalia today if an armed group of Somali pirates had yesterday boarded six vessels on the high seas killing and injuring unarmed passengers.

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Passenger Mairead Maguire, winner of the Nobel Peace Prize for her work in northern Ireland, said, "The aid we were carrying is a symbol of hope for the people of Gaza, hope that the sea route would open for them, and they would be able to transport their own materials to begin to reconstruct schools, hospitals and thousands of homes destroyed during the onslaught of 'Cast Lead.' Our mission is a gesture to the people of Gaza that we stand by them and that they are not alone."

The Israeli government is now attempting to justify the flotilla attack by insisting that it was only defending itself against rockets launched from Gaza, in the same way that it attempted to justify "Operation Cast Lead," its assault on Gaza in the winter of 2008-09. Highly respected political analyst, Noam Chomsky, has explained the connection between the rockets and Israel's blockade of Gaza as follows:

If Israel were interested in stopping Hamas' rockets, it knows exactly how to proceed: accept Hamas' offers for a cease fire. In June 2008, Israel and Hamas reached a cease-fire agreement. The Israeli government formally acknowledges that Israel broke the agreement on November 4, invading Gaza and killing half a dozen Hamas activists. Hamas did not fire a single rocket. Hamas offered to renew the cease fire. The Israeli cabinet considered the offer and rejected it, preferring to launch its murderous and destructive Operation Cast Lead..... The siege [blockade] of Gaza itself does not have the slightest credible pretext. It was imposed by the U.S. and Israel in January 2006 to punish Palestinians because they voted "the wrong way" in a free election, and was sharply intensified in July 2007 when Hamas blocked a U.S.-Israeli attempt to overthrow the elected government in a military coup.[The siege] is the latest stage of long standing Israeli plans, backed by the U.S., to separate Gaza from the West Bank....

TAKE ACTION

Call on President Obama to turn this tragedy into an opportunity to demand that Israel lift the blockade of Gaza immediately as a first step toward ending the 43-year-long Israel occupation of Palestinian land. You can call him at 202-456-1111.

Bay Area Women in Black are Jews and allies who stand against militaristic and fundamental leadership in all countries including our own. We wear black as a sign of mourning for all the Israeli, Palestinian, Iraqi and Afghan lives lost as a result of war, militarism and violence. As part of the international movement of Women in Black, we seek to transform women's mourning for the dead into a powerful refusal of the inevitability of war.

Join us at the Grand Lake Theater every Saturday at noon to register your protest and your presence as we continue to urge an end to the U.S. military and financial support for Israel's disastrous occupation.

The group with flags and signs supporting Israel is San Francisco Voice for Israel, a local group which opposes Bay Area Women in Black (BAWIB) criticism of the policies of the Israeli government and military. BAWiB is not anti-Israel. BAWIB believes Israel's occupation is wrong and deprives the Palestinians of basic human rights. BAWIB calls for the end of the occupation and its violent effects on Israelis and Palestinians. The fliers distributed by San Francisco Voice For Israel do not accurately reflect BAWIB.