

2010 Flotilla Newspaper Excerpts *with Factual Explanation*

Read excerpts A-K below, and answer the questions that follow.

- A. “A nine-ship flotilla of peace activists and humanitarian aid is steaming toward the blockaded Gaza Strip, and while Israel said it will intercept them, senior officials here said they fear a potential public-relations debacle.” (*Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 2010)
- B. “The vessels are carrying around 800 pro-Palestinian activists from various countries, as well as 10,000 tons of construction material, medical equipment and school supplies, according to organizers.” (*Wall Street Journal*, May 27, 2010)
- C. “Turkey withdrew its ambassador to Israel and called for an emergency session of the U.N. Security Council as criticism and condemnations arose across Europe and the Arab world Monday over Israel’s deadly commando raid on ships taking humanitarian aid to the blockaded Gaza Strip.” (*Associated Press*, May 31, 2010)
- D. “Israel says the activists attacked its commandos as they boarded the six ships taking tons of supplies to Gaza, while the flotilla’s organizers say the Israeli forces opened fire first.” (*Associated Press*, May 31, 2010)
- E. “The raid also brought heightened attention to Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip, imposed after the Palestinian militant group Hamas seized control of the tiny Mediterranean territory in 2007. The blockade — along with Israel’s fierce offensive against Gaza in the winter of 2008-2009 to stop Hamas rocket fire — has fueled anti-Israeli sentiment around the Arab world.” (*Associated Press*, May 31, 2010)
- F. “Now the Israelis are saying of course that *they* were attacked, but the protesters are saying, well, that it was a bit of a one-sided fight.... How fair a fight is this, that the Israelis are saying that they were attacked, but it’s far from certain what they were attacked with at the moment.” (*CNN Broadcast*, May 31, 2010)
- G. “The IDF released a video shot from above the ship that it said showed soldiers being attacked, though the distance from which it was shot precluded immediate confirmation.” (*CNN Wire Staff*, May 31, 2010)
- H. “I think the sharp international criticism is the result of the use of armed force against unarmed civilians who were engaging in a nonviolent peaceful resistance.” (*Voice of America* quoting former diplomat Phil Wilcox, June 1, 2010)
- I. “Video of the raid released by the Israeli military, Turkish television and other media sources depicted a dramatic high-seas brawl in which Israeli commandos rappelled from helicopters onto a ship and immediately clashed with activists on board.” (*Los Angeles Times*, June 1, 2010)

- J. "Israel admitted errors in planning the raid but justified the use of lethal force saying its marines came under attack from activists wielding knives and clubs. Activists deny this." (*Reuters*, July 30, 2010)
- K. "Israeli naval commandos raided the Turkish passenger vessel, the *Mavi Marmara*, in international waters in May 2010. The boat, part of an international flotilla challenging Israel's naval blockade of Gaza, was carrying pro-Palestinian activists. By Israel's account, the Israeli soldiers met with violent resistance as they landed on the deck; nine passengers were fatally shot in the melee, eight of them Turks and one an American citizen of Turkish descent." (*New York Times*, August 17, 2011)

1. **Assume you know nothing about the May 2010 flotilla and *Mavi Marmara* incident except what you just read. Based only on excerpts A-K, how would you summarize what occurred?**

In May of 2010, a flotilla of peace activists set off to the Gaza Strip to deliver humanitarian aid to Palestinian Arabs. Israel had illegally blockaded the Gaza Strip, preventing Palestinian Arabs in Gaza access to humanitarian and essential supplies. Israeli soldiers descended onto one of the flotilla's ships from helicopters and either scuffled with or attacked the innocent passengers, who engaged in peaceful resistance. The raid on the *Mavi Marmara* resulted in Israelis killing nine passengers. Later news media accounts mentioned Israel's claim that the *Mavi Marmara* passengers attacked first. The IDF had released a video of the raid, but it was accorded little news value.

2. **Based on your knowledge of current events, how would you summarize what actually occurred?**

Summary: In May 2010, Israeli forces intercepted six ships attempting to break the naval blockade of the Gaza Strip. These ships were said to be an international "humanitarian aid" flotilla but actually were chartered by the anti-Israel Free Gaza Movement and IHH, a Turkish Islamic charity thought to have ties to Hamas, al-Qaeda and other terrorist organizations. During the boarding of the lead vessel, the Turkish *Mavi Marmara*, by Israeli commandos, flotilla participants attacked Israeli personnel with knives and metal bars, and wrested firearms from the troops. After seven Israeli soldiers were wounded, others opened fire and killed nine Turks. This led to an international outcry against Israel and increased existing tensions between Jerusalem and Turkey's Islamist-leaning government. No humanitarian supplies were found on the *Mavi Marmara*. The other ships in the flotilla were stopped without casualties and brought to the Israeli port of Ashdod, where the participants were held and then released. Goods that could be used for humanitarian purposes, such as food and medicine were sent overland to Gaza, as they could have been without the flotilla's attempt to break Israel's legal blockade and generate anti-Israeli publicity through confrontation. Items of potential use by Hamas, such as building materials for fortifications were not sent to Gaza.

In detail: While some flotilla passengers thought they were involved in a peace mission, the most prominent organizers had backed violence. Photographic and video evidence show weapons and *Mavi Marmara* passengers engaged in violence. *The Wall Street Journal* was virtually alone among mainstream media outlets in initially describing passengers as “peace activists.” It subsequently avoided using this false terminology.

Organizers of the flotilla made it clear that their mission was “not about delivering humanitarian supplies.” Instead, organizer and anti-Israel activist Greta Berlin said it was about ending Israel's blockade in order to allow unfettered shipments to the Hamas-ruled territory.

Israel’s blockade of the Gaza Strip (legal under international law, per the 1994 San Remo Manual on International Law Applicable to Armed Conflicts at Sea) is to prevent weapons (or material that can be used in making weapons or fortifications) from getting into the hands of Gaza terrorists, not to prevent supplies from reaching noncombatants there. In fact, Israel was delivering roughly 15,000 tons of humanitarian supplies each week to Gaza. (According to *The Financial Times* article, “Gaza looks beyond the tunnel economy” (May 24, 2010), “shops all over Gaza are bursting with goods”). Israel repeatedly offered to receive the flotilla’s cargo at Ashdod’s port after which the supplies, minus cement and other proscribed goods, would have been transferred to the Gaza Strip. The flotilla organizers rejected Israel’s offer.

Video clearly demonstrates that the Israelis were the ones who were attacked quite brutally, not the other way around. (See “Close-Up Footage of *Mavi Marmara* Passengers Attacking IDF Soldiers” (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gYjkLUcbJWo>)). The footage shows Israeli soldiers landing on the ship being immediately assaulted by gangs of passengers awaiting them on deck. The attack on the Israeli soldiers began, as retired British Marine Officer Peter Cook acknowledged on British television, while the first Israeli soldier still had both of his hands on the rope being used to lower him onto the ship. Cook also said the large Israeli weapon seen in video footage appeared to be a paintball gun, which corresponds with Israel's assertion that these were the primary weapons soldiers brought onto the ship.

Video footage also shows, among other acts of violence, a passenger stabbing an Israeli soldier, gangs of passengers pummeling soldiers with metal rods and other objects, and a soldier being thrown off a high deck. Testimony from both Israeli soldiers and passengers describes pistols being taken from injured soldiers. The ship's captain reportedly told Israeli soldiers that violent passengers threw overboard guns seized from the commandos before Israeli forces gained complete control of the ship. The picture that follows shows weapons found aboard the *Mavi Marmara*.



Many news media failed to acknowledge what the videos clearly showed. One egregious example, *Voice of America*, quoted a source who said Israel was guilty of using “armed forces against unarmed civilians who were engaging in a nonviolent peaceful resistance.” In a surreal segment broadcast by CNN, a reporter and an analyst pored over video filmed by the Israeli army but discounted if not ignored the images playing before them, which clearly showed Israeli troops being attacked by gangs of passengers. *Reuters*, two months after the flotilla interception, and *The New York Times* a year later, denied video proof of passenger violence against the Israeli soldiers, instead presenting the information as Israeli hearsay.

Reuters used the photograph below on the left to show a wounded Israeli soldier. However, notice that in the photo on the right, published by the high-circulation Turkish newspaper *Hürriyet*, the hand at the bottom right is holding a knife. Reuters cropped this photo, resulting in the image on the left, which shows the same scene without the knife. Reuters cropped the photo in a manner to avoid showing weapons carried by the “unarmed peace activists.”



The Associated Press appeared to provide context by publishing a timeline of events (May 31, 2010) summarizing the recent history of the Gaza Strip, “Gaza Strip scene of decades of unrest, conflict.”

A look at dates and events in the recent history of the Gaza Strip, home today to 1.5 million Palestinians:

- 1967: Israel seizes control of the Gaza Strip from Egypt during the 1967 Mideast war and begins to establish settlements there.
- 1971: Israel's military conducts harsh campaign to pacify Gaza and defeat armed militants.
- 1987: The first Palestinian uprising against Israeli occupation, known as the intifada, erupts.
- 1994: Under the interim Israel-Palestinian peace accords, Israel transfers some power in Gaza to the newly formed Palestinian Authority. The Israeli military withdraws from population centers but retains control of borders and settlements.
- 2000: The second Palestinian uprising erupts. Palestinian militants begin firing rockets from Gaza into Israel.
- 2005: Israel evacuates all its settlements in Gaza and unilaterally withdraws its forces.
- 2006: The Islamic militant group Hamas wins Palestinian parliamentary elections. Western powers declare Hamas a terrorist group. Internal Palestinian violence worsens and rocket fire into Israel increases.
- 2007: Hamas wrests control of Gaza from the Western-backed Fatah movement in bloody street battles. Israel closes its border with Gaza and, along with Egypt, imposes a blockade.
- August 2008: The first boat sponsored by a pro-Palestinian group called Free Gaza reaches the territory. Five more boats follow before Israeli forces began to intervene.
- December 2008: Israel invades Gaza to try to halt years of rocket fire at Israeli towns. About 1,400 Palestinians are killed, many of them civilians.
- April 2009: An Israeli navy vessel collides with a Free Gaza boat steaming toward Gaza, then tows the boat to an Israeli port. Two more flotillas fail to reach Gaza in 2009.
- May 30, 2010: Israel intercepts six boats sponsored by Free Gaza and a Turkish NGO in an attempt to break the Israeli blockade. Clashes between naval commandos and activists result in dozens of casualties.

The Associated Press timeline repeatedly errs by omission, failing to uphold journalistic standards of context, comprehensiveness and balance. Contrary to the implication of the

timeline, the "decades of unrest" in Gaza began well before 1967. For example, Jews living in Gaza prior to 1929 were forced to flee the territory that year in the face of anti-Jewish Arab rioting. And after 1948, Arabs, often organized by the Egyptian army, which occupied the Strip, frequently infiltrated Israel from Gaza to attack and murder Jews. Israel didn't "seize control" of the Strip from Egypt until after that country drove the region to war by massing its troops on Israel's border and threatening to annihilate the Jewish state. The timeline refers to a "harsh" Israeli campaign against "armed militants" in 1971. This was retaliation for recurrent terrorism from Gaza. The timeline notes the outbreak of the first intifada in 1987. It does not mention that between Israel's takeover of Gaza in 1967 and 1987, the standard of living in the Strip—including declining infant mortality, electrification and the opening of health clinics and schools—improved markedly over what it had been under Egyptian control. Further, Western powers did not designate Hamas a terrorist group after its 2006 victory in the Palestinian legislative council elections. A number of them had done so previously; the United States government declared Hamas a terrorist organization in 1997, recognizing the group's strategy of threatening and using violence against noncombatants. Intentionally or not, these omissions skew the AP's Gaza chronology in a way that supports "the Palestinian narrative" and dismisses Israeli claims and grievances.

Newspaper Excerpts Sources

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- D. Ibid.
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- F. *CNN Broadcast*. 31 May 2010.
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- H. "Israel Finds Little International Sympathy for Its Justification to Stage Raid." *Voice of America*. 1 June 2010. <http://www.voanews.com/content/israel-finds-little-international-sympathy-for-its-justification-to-stage-raid-95460654/118740.html>
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