

Israeli Navy Intercepts Aid Vessel Attempting to Breach Gaza Blockade

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On Saturday night, the Israeli navy intercepted the Handala, a vessel operated by the Freedom Flotilla Coalition (FFC), approximately 70 nautical miles from Gaza. The ship, which was reportedly transporting humanitarian supplies and international activists, was stopped for attempting to breach Israel's longstanding and legally enforced naval blockade on the Gaza Strip.

A livestream briefly broadcast the boarding, showing armed Israeli personnel boarding the deck as passengers, many wearing life vests, raised their hands in surrender. The footage ended abruptly after one of the Israeli forces appeared to disable the ship's camera feed.

According to a statement released by Israel's Ministry of Foreign Affairs via X (formerly Twitter), the vessel referred to by its original name, Navarn, was "illegally attempting to enter the maritime zone of Gaza." The ministry confirmed that the ship was redirected safely to Israel's coast, with no injuries reported among those on board. The statement emphasised that "unauthorised attempts to breach the blockade are dangerous, unlawful, and undermine ongoing humanitarian efforts."

The Handala was carrying essential aid such as baby formula, food, diapers, and medicine, according to the FFC. The coalition labelled the operation an "abduction" and accused Israel of confiscating humanitarian cargo. In a statement, the FFC said, "The unarmed boat was carrying life-saving supplies when it was boarded by Israeli forces, its passengers abducted, and its cargo seized."

Among the ship's passengers were two members of the European and French U.S. trade unionist Christian Smalls,parliaments and several citizens from countries including Australia, the United Kingdom, Italy, Norway, and the United States. The FFC reported that four U.S. citizens were aboard, though the U.S. State Department has yet to confirm those details.

In a recorded voice note to CNN earlier that day, Australian volunteer Tania Safi said, "Everyone here has prepared for almost every possible scenario that Israel could put us through." Safi also mentioned Israeli Heron drones reportedly circling the vessel. CNN noted it was unable to independently verify that claim.

Israel's blockade on Gaza has been in place since 2007, aimed at preventing weapons and materials from reaching terrorist organisations such as Hamas. While critics frequently label the policy as overly restrictive, Israeli authorities and many Western security analysts argue it is a necessary measure to ensure regional stability and civilian safety on both sides of the border.

A U.S. State Department spokesperson commented on the operation, describing the *Handala* and its mission as a "selfie flotilla," characterising it as a publicity stunt rather than a serious aid effort. "The real story is the serious people who put their lives on the line to get

food and aid to the people of Gaza without it falling into the hands of terrorists,” the spokesperson added. The department reiterated that the safety of American citizens remains its top priority and deferred further comment to the Israeli government.

This interception follows a similar event in June when the Israeli navy stopped the *Madleen*, another FFC ship, before it could reach Gaza. That vessel included Swedish climate activist Greta Thunberg among its crew. The ship was towed to the Israeli port of Ashdod, and all its passengers were subsequently deported.

Despite the repeated efforts by activists to bypass Israel’s blockade, the Israeli government has remained clear: unauthorised sea access to Gaza will not be tolerated. Humanitarian aid, it maintains, must be coordinated through approved and secure channels to avoid enabling terrorist activity in the region.