



MIDNIGHT ON THE MAVI MARMARA

THE ATTACK ON THE
GAZA FREEDOM FLOTILLA
AND HOW IT CHANGED
THE COURSE OF THE
ISRAEL/PALESTINE CONFLICT

EDITED BY

MOUSTAFA BAYOUMI

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The Attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla and
How It Changed the Course of the
Israel/Palestine Conflict

Edited by
Moustafa Bayoumi



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INTRODUCTION

Moustafa Bayoumi

There were 581 passengers on the *Mavi Marmara*. The Turkish vessel named for the blue waters of the Sea of Marmara was by far the largest ship in the Freedom Flotilla, a convoy of ships full of volunteer humanitarian workers and aid for the beleaguered people of Gaza. Although this was not the first attempt to break the siege of Gaza by the sea, it was easily the biggest. In fact, there had already been eight voyages before. The first endeavour was in August 2008, and it had been successful, as were the four following it. The sixth mission was launched at the end of December 2008, during Israel's punishing war on Gaza, and the small boat carrying medical supplies and three volunteer surgeons was in the high seas when it was rammed by the Israeli Navy. Taking on water, the boat crawled to the coast of Lebanon and, after a second attempt, eventually reached Gaza. The seventh mission was menaced by Israel. The eighth was boarded by the Israeli Navy. Neither reached Gaza.

All of these previous missions, however, were dwarfed in size by this, the ninth attempt. The Freedom Flotilla consisted of the *Mavi Marmara*, along with two other vessels from Turkey, two from Greece, and individual ships from Ireland and Algeria. (Some of the ships flew different nations' flags. The Irish Ship was the *Rachel Corrie*, which sailed to Gaza later, and an eighth Greek ship, which was American-flagged, failed to launch due either to technical difficulties or possibly Israeli sabotage.) On board the flotilla was 10,000 tons of

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**"We have been attacked
while in international waters ...
the Israelis have behaved like pirates."**

—Henning Mankell, aboard the Gaza Freedom Flotilla

Eastern Mediterranean, Monday, May 31, 2010, 4:30 AM

Israeli commandos, boarding from sea and air, attack the six boats of the Gaza Freedom Flotilla as it attempts to bring humanitarian relief to the Palestinians of Gaza. Within minutes, nine peace activists are dead. Scores of others are injured. The seven hundred people on board the ships are arrested before being transported to Israel and then deported.

In the following days, outrage at Israel's action echoes around the world. Spontaneous demonstrations denounce the attack. Turkey's prime minister calls it "state terrorism". Even Israel's traditional supporters in the United States are dismayed. *The New Republic* describes the action as "Operation Make the World Hate Us".

In these pages, a range of activists, journalists, and scholars piece together the events that occurred that May night, examining their implications for Israel's illegal, three-year-long blockade of Gaza and the decades-long Israel/Palestine conflict. Mixing riveting first-hand testimony with hard-hitting analysis, *Midnight on the Mavi Marmara* reveals why the attack on the Gaza Freedom Flotilla may just turn out to be Israel's Sharpeville or Selma: the beginning of the end for an apartheid system.

Moustafa Bayomi is the author of *How Does It Feel to Be a Problem? Being Young and Arab in America*, which won an American Book Award and an Arab American Book Award. His writing has appeared in *The New York Times*, *The Guardian*, *The Nation*, and the *London Review of Books*. He teaches at Brooklyn College, City University of New York.



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