

Israel Navy Reserves Officers Call for External Gaza Flotilla Investigation

Officers denounce operation as 'military and diplomatic failure', slam government for placing blame on the activists.

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Global Research, June 08, 2010

[Haaretz](#) 6 June 2010

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A group of top Israel Navy reserves officers on Sunday publicly called on Israel to allow an external probe into its commando raid of a Gaza-bound humanitarian aid flotilla last week, which left nine people dead and several more wounded.

In a letter to Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israel Defense Forces Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi, the Navy officers denounced the commando raid as having “ended in tragedy both at the military and diplomatic levels.”

“We disagree with the widespread claims that this was the result of an intelligence rift,” said the officers. “In addition, we do not accept claims that this was a ‘public relations failure’ and we think that the plan was doomed to failure from the beginning.”

“First and foremost, we protest the fact that responsibility for the tragic results was immediately thrust onto the organizers of the flotilla,” wrote the officers. “This demonstrates contempt for the responsibility that belongs principally to the hierarchy of commanders and those who approved the mission. This shows contempt for the values of professionalism, the purity of weapons and for human lives.”

The Navy officers’ letter came as Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was convening his top ministers to deliberate a United Nations proposal to create a joint international committee alongside Turkey and the United States to investigate the circumstances of the deadly raid.

The cabinet was also to discuss the creation of an internal committee to look into the incident. Netanyahu earlier Sunday rejected the idea of an international panel, and reiterated that Israel had the right to conduct its own investigation.

Netanyahu discussed the proposal for a multinational panel with United Nations Secretary General Ban Ki-moon in a telephone call on Saturday but told cabinet ministers on Sunday that Israel was exploring other options, political sources said.

“I told [Ban] that the investigation of the facts must be carried out responsibly and objectively,” Netanyahu told ministers. “We need to consider the issue carefully and level-headedly, while maintaining Israel’s national interests as well as those of the Israel Defense Forces.”

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