

Obama Inspired Ship to Join IHH Gaza Flotilla

by Gavriel Queenann

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A ship flying US colors and carrying 34 passengers is set to joint this year's Gaza-bound, IHH-sponsored ["Freedom Flotilla 2"](#) in June, the *New York Times* reported.

So-called "peace activists" on the first IHH flotilla in May 2010 [ambushed Israeli naval commandos](#) who boarded the ship in accordance with international law, [attempted to take them captive](#), and seriously injuring several. The commandos were forced to kill nine aggressors in order to rescue their [imperiled comrades](#).

This year's American vessel, named The Audacity of Hope after US President Barack Obama's best-selling book, is being organized by an American group called "US Boat to Gaza."

Obama links to the Audacity do not end there, however. Prof. Rashid Khalidi, director of the Middle East Institute at Columbia University's School of International and Public Affairs, and a friend from Obama's time in Chicago, is among the supporters of an appeal launched by the group last week.

"We must raise at least \$370,000 in the next month," a statement on US Boat to Gaza's Web site read indicating it doesn't have the money needed to sail yet.

"These funds will be used to purchase a boat large enough for 40-60 people, secure a crew, and cover the licensing and registering of the boat. Together we will contribute to the great effort to end the blockade of Gaza and the illegal occupation of Palestine."

Khalidi, an outspoken critic of Israel, garnered attention in 2008 when his friendship with Obama became a point of controversy during the US presidential campaign.

Sen. John McCain, Obama's opponent during the campaign, portrayed Khalidi as a Hamas sympathizer.

Khalidi's involvement in organizing a US boat for the flotilla project has gained significant attention from conservative bloggers and media personalities in America.

While Khalidi will help raise money for the initiative, he said he does not plan to sail on the ship.

Khalidi wrote in an e-mail over the weekend that while he had not known that Obama's book would be the inspiration for the ship's name when he signed on as a sponsor, he does not view it as a potential embarrassment for Obama.

"If the name is a problem for the administration it can simply insist publicly that Israel lift the siege: end of problem, end of embarrassment," Khalidi wrote in the e-mail .

"That of course would require it to respond to the systematic mendacity of those in Congress and elsewhere who support the siege, and indeed whatever else the Israeli government does," Khalidi said.

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