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EXCLUSIVE: New Video Smuggled Out from Mavi Marmara of Israel's Deadly Assault on Gaza Aid Flotilla

In a *Democracy Now!* exclusive, we bring you a sneak preview of previously unseen raw footage from the *Mavi Marmara* that will be formally released at a press conference at the United Nations later in the day. The footage shows the mood and the activities onboard the *Mavi Marmara* in the time leading up to the attack, and the immediate reaction of the passengers during the attack. We are joined by filmmaker and activist Iara Lee, one of the few Americans on the *Mavi Marmara* ship. Her equipment was confiscated, but she managed to smuggle out an hour's worth of footage. [includes rush transcript]



Filed under [Gaza](#), [Israel Palestine](#)

Guest:

Iara Lee, filmmaker and director of the [Cultures of Resistance](#) network that brings together artists and activists from around the world.

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RUSH TRANSCRIPT

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JUAN GONZALEZ: Over a week after Israel's deadly assault on the Gaza-bound humanitarian aid flotilla that left nine Turks dead, questions remain about exactly what happened on the *Mavi Marmara* or on the other boats that fateful Monday morning.

President Obama addressed the incident during a joint press conference with Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas on Wednesday. He expressed his support for an investigation that, quote, "met international standards" and said it was, quote, "in Israel's interest to make sure that everybody knows exactly how this happened so that we don't see these kinds of events occurring again." Obama also described the situation in Gaza as "unsustainable."

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA: We saw the tragedy with the flotillas, something that I think has drawn attention all around the world to the ongoing problems in Gaza. As part of the United Nations Security Council, we were very clear in condemning the acts that led to this crisis and have called for a full investigation. And it is important that we get all the facts out. But what we also know is that the situation in Gaza is unsustainable.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, Israel has refused to agree to an international investigation, has also tightly controlled the images of its naval raid on the flotilla, seized almost all of the photographic and video equipment of the passengers aboard the ship, also jammed all communications as they were raiding the ships.

But a handful of people were successful in smuggling out some of their video and photographs. Yesterday we brought you the Australian reporters with the *Sydney Morning Herald*. Kate Geraghty had managed to get out some of her photos. We showed them, and you can go to our website online at democracynow.org.

Today, in a *Democracy Now!* global exclusive, we bring you a sneak preview of

previously unseen raw footage from the *Mavi Marmara* that will be formally released at a news conference today at the United Nations. The footage shows the mood and the activities onboard the *Mavi Marmara* in the time leading up to the attack, and the immediate reaction of the passengers during the attack, as well as a number of the injured passengers, a number of the passengers who were shot.

For more, we're joined here in New York by filmmaker and activist Iara Lee. She directs the Cultures of Resistance network and was one of the few Americans on the *Mavi Marmara* ship. Her equipment was confiscated, but she did manage to have smuggled out an hour's worth of footage.

Iara Lee, welcome to *Democracy Now!* Describe that day.

IARA LEE: We were prepared for a confrontation, but we never thought it was going to be this kind of violent, disproportional violence, confrontation. So the women were going to scream, the men were going to push and kick. But when we saw commandos coming down the helicopter and all these Zodiacs full of navy soldiers coming just around, it was just—we had no words.

And it started at 11:00. We noticed the two navy Israeli ships.

JUAN GONZALEZ: That's 11:00 p.m., right?

IARA LEE: Yeah, it's 11:00 p.m. We were in the middle of international waters. And then, around 4:00 a.m., the assault started. And apparently their trademark is silence, so they came—

AMY GOODMAN: As you're talking, we're going to be playing some of the video. And for our radio listeners, you can go to our website at democracynow.org.

Continue, Iara.

IARA LEE: And so, the Zodiacs came and surrounded, and the helicopters had their commandos coming down. And it was chaos, total chaos. The women were told to go downstairs and stay quiet and calm. And, you know, I was very concerned about my cameraman, my friends, so I went up. And by the time I went up just to see what was going on, I already saw many injured and dead bodies. It was terrifying. In the media room, the journalists were trying to hide there. But at the end of the operation, we had all our equipment confiscated. During the raid, all the people had their cameras and videos, but unfortunately everything got confiscated.

JUAN GONZALEZ: And when you say you went up, that means that you were down in a lower deck before the—as the attack unfolded, and your cameraman was on an upper deck?

IARA LEE: Yes. Everybody was roaming around, and everybody has their cameras and their video cameras, so everybody was documenting. It's just that nobody was able to bring the footage out or the photographs out.

AMY GOODMAN: When you show the video of the helicopters above—and we're showing that now—we see that there is—and we can hear below the sound of an explosion. What was happening there?

IARA LEE: I can't give you all the technical information about what is rubber bullet

sound, what is, you know, live ammunition. But obviously, they came with live ammunition. And minutes afterwards, we had the megaphone in our rooms, in every room on the ship, saying, "Stay quiet and calm. They're using live ammunition. There is no way we can resist. They are taking over the ship. Just stay calm and don't resist at all." You know? The other boats, they used rubber bullets and tear gas; they didn't kill people. But in our ship, they came to kill.

JUAN GONZALEZ: The issue of these explosions, several people have said, have told us, that the explosions occurred, and even some shooting, before any soldier landed on the boat. Is that your recollection, or do you know for sure?

IARA LEE: We didn't have guns. We were, you know, grabbing chairs. And, you know, the boys were taking like whatever they could get hold of, like broomsticks and so forth. And it was just completely disproportionate. And the injuries and the dead people started happening very quickly, to the point that—you know, you can see here in the footage. They managed to get hold of some Israeli soldiers, but obviously we were so brainwashed about nonviolence as our methodology that we didn't kill any of the Israeli soldiers. Actually, when they got injured with the commotion, they actually got treated by our passengers. But the megaphone kept saying, "We are civilians. Don't use violence. And we have extremely injured people. We need medical help," because we were not prepared medically to take care of, like, dead people. But we were ignored, and a lot of people who were injured actually ended up bleeding to death and died.

AMY GOODMAN: Describe that, because this is the footage, as the narrative was laid out over the days, we of course did not see, although the Israeli military has all of it in their possession. This footage that you have shows one person after another being dragged out and attempts at treating them. Describe the injuries that you saw.

IARA LEE: As I said, I was going up and down, just trying to get an overview and making sure some of the people I knew were OK. And, you know, like, it was very chaotic. I just know that when they call us like a hate boat, this is insane, because obviously we were there to bring humanitarian aid to Gaza, and they were the ones using live ammunition, to the point when they did the autopsy, the people who are found dead, they had like thirty bullets. So, can we say the Israeli navy and the commandos, they came to play ball with us? No, they came to kill. They wanted to take over the ship. And we were actually—according to some research, the ship was even fleeing, because we didn't want this kind of like heavy confrontation. But they came in the middle of international waters and overpowered us.

AMY GOODMAN: We're showing some footage now, which I want to describe for our radio listeners, of a clearly wounded man. He's on the ground. He's been wounded in the chest, and they are trying to treat him on the ground of the ship.

Let's listen to this. What was that?

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: All the passengers are sitting down!

AMY GOODMAN: And now we see a woman speaking.

UNIDENTIFIED WOMAN: We are not [inaudible]. We are civilians taking care of injured people! Don't use violence! We need help for the people! Don't use violence against the civilians!

AMY GOODMAN: The woman is saying, "Don't use violence against the civilians. People are sitting. We have many injured people. Please don't attack." And that is the video footage.

IARA LEE: Yes, I think the miscalculation was that the Israelis thought, by jamming our satellite system, the world would not have any access to information. And they didn't know that we had a backup system that was able to transmit live some of the events. And obviously it was dark in the middle of the ocean, so they thought they had it all taken care, as far as like no information would come out. They would be the only ones holding the information, because they were obviously filming. And we were hundreds of people, so some of us did manage to get, you know, photographs and video footage out. And today we are showing raw, uncensored footage, and everybody can take the clue. And we'll make it available to the world for investigations.

JUAN GONZALEZ: Interestingly, in the video that you've been showing here, obviously, in the outdoors, it's very dark, and unless you have a light, it's kind of hard to make out what's going on, unless you have a flood lamp on. But the footage that the Israelis posted on YouTube, it looked like it was daylight. And could you talk about how they managed to do that? Because it looked like this was occurring in the middle of the day, not, as it was, at 4:00 in the morning.

IARA LEE: Yeah, it'd be the technology. I think once people start using our footage for investigation, they would always—they will always be able to brighten out and analyze, frame by frame, you know? But it was 4:00 a.m. It was dark, you know?

AMY GOODMAN: In an interview with the *New York Times*, Dr. Hasan Huseyin Uysal, a Turkish doctor, said he treated Israeli commandos who were captured and briefly detained during initial stages of the raid on the ship challenging the blockade. And then the soldiers were given back to the Israeli commandos.

IARA LEE: Which basically proves that we were not there to lynch anybody, because we had the opportunity of killing or really like mistreating these soldiers, and we didn't, you know, because we are humanitarian. Despite the chaos, we knew we were supposed to stay nonviolent.

JUAN GONZALEZ: One of the amazing things to me is that given the number of people that were on that boat, the lack of any attempt by the—especially the US media, including this account in the *New York Times*, which is the only attempt to, quote, "reconstruct" what happened, are not really saying—giving details, how were these people shot. Where were they at the time they were shot? What were their wounds like? What was happening around them? There is really no attempt to reconstruct an incident, where there were hundreds, literally, of witnesses to what actually happened.

IARA LEE: That's why we demand our footage back, because they confiscated all our hard drives and camera equipment. We could reconstruct the events, if we were

given our footage back, and not the idea of using a manipulative fashion. They are extracting things for their stories and putting on the YouTube by their channel. This is like complete violation of respect for media. And, you know?

AMY GOODMAN: Yesterday we interviewed two reporters from the *Sydney Morning Herald*, reporter and photographer Paul McGeough and Kate Geraghty, and she managed to secrete one—a few of her disks out. They found others. But they kept all of their equipment, \$60,000 to \$80,000 of equipment and hard drives. They repeatedly said they would return it, but on the Turkish dock there was none of it. People can go online and see her photographs on our website.

Interestingly, also, a group of top Israeli Naval reserve officers Sunday, this was in, I believe—

JUAN GONZALEZ: In *Ha'aretz*.

AMY GOODMAN: In *Ha'aretz*—"publicly called on Israel to allow an external probe into its commando raid of a Gaza-bound humanitarian aid flotilla." They wrote a letter to Netanyahu and the Israeli Defense Forces chief. "The Navy officers denounced the commando raid as having 'ended in tragedy [both at] the military and diplomatic levels.'"

They said, "We disagree with the widespread claims that this was the result of an intelligence rift. 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." They said, "First and foremost, we protest the fact that responsibility for the tragic results was immediately thrust onto the organizers of the flotilla." That's Israeli Navy reserve officers demanding an independent investigation.

IARA LEE: Yeah, I read this article, and I think the international community must keep putting pressure for an independent, unbiased investigation. And we must get all our footage back to reconstruct what happened. I will make my footage available. That's why it's uncensored, it's raw. And people can bring the international lawyers, who need to apply international law to investigate those crimes.

JUAN GONZALEZ: I want to read here just from the *Guardian's* coverage in England on Friday, which I think is one of the few that actually attempts to explain what happened. And they're reporting the forensic report of the Turkish authorities, where they say that, as you were mentioning, a total of—the people, the nine people who are so far identified as dead, thirty times they were shot. Five were killed by gunshot wounds to the head. And interestingly, it says the nineteen-year-old, Furkan Dogan, who also has US citizenship, "was shot five times from less than 45 cm [...], in the face, the back of the head, twice in the leg and once in the back." At less than forty-five centimeters, you're talking at almost point-blank range that he was shot five times.

IARA LEE: Our main internet person in our media room also got shot in the head. You know, this was not like a non-premeditated—

AMY GOODMAN: Was he killed?

IARA LEE: No, no. The only people killed were the Turkish people and this one US citizen, yeah. But people were getting—

AMY GOODMAN: And how was he shot in the head?

IARA LEE: I don't have the details, but I know, since we were always with the media department, that I heard that he was the one that got shot.

JUAN GONZALEZ: The *Guardian* report also says that forty-eight other people suffered gunshot wounds and that six activists remain missing.

IARA LEE: Yes. And—

JUAN GONZALEZ: Have you unidentified who those missing are?

IARA LEE: Obviously, we cannot jump to conclusions, but they are not hurt, they are not injured, they are not killed. They disappeared. I don't know. It's something that must be investigated. I mean, some people even speculate that we had spies, so maybe some of these missing people were, you know, Mossad agents. We don't know. We need to investigate. Were they thrown off the boat?

AMY GOODMAN: What happened to you after?

IARA LEE: Everybody got handcuffed and taken—basically kidnapped from international waters to Israel. And when we arrived there, they said, "Sign here," that you're going to be deported because you're illegally in Israel. And we were, like, shocked. We didn't want to be in Israel. We were kidnapped from international waters and brought to Israel. And we were completely *incommunicado*. All the questions—

AMY GOODMAN: Did you agree to sign?

IARA LEE: No. At the beginning, we didn't sign. We didn't answer questions. I mean, most people. Myself, I said, "Listen, I need my embassy. I need a lawyer. I'm not going to be submitting myself to this kind of interrogation." But we were *incommunicado*, you know? And I think the embassies put a lot of pressure. And then, a couple of days later, or even three days later—I can't even remember, because it was just so chaotic—the embassies were able to start talking to us, and we were able to make one phone call to our families. Not everybody even managed to make one phone call to their family to say that we were alive.

AMY GOODMAN: How long could you speak?

IARA LEE: Hmm?

AMY GOODMAN: How long could you speak on the phone?

IARA LEE: Oh, no, it was just like, you know, one minute. And me, I had to call my office, because people are working. And the girl, the security girl, she hangs up, saying, "I told you, you can only call home." I said, "But my sister is at the office. I can't call her at home. She's working." She didn't allow me to say not even two words. I just said, "Are you at the office?" And then she hangs up.

AMY GOODMAN: Where were you deported to?

IARA LEE: We were—the ship was brought to Ashdod port, and apparently they had organized already, a few months earlier or a few weeks earlier, a whole prison facility

to accommodate us. It was a new facility that was ready to keep hundreds of people, innocent people.

AMY GOODMAN: So you were held there for a number of days. And then where were you deported to?

IARA LEE: At the very end, we didn't know. We thought we were going home. And when we got to Tel Aviv airport, they told us that we were all going to Istanbul. And then I found out that the prime minister of Turkey had sent Turkish Airlines airplanes to evacuate us all. That was another like huge drama, because the Turkish prime minister said that we would not depart until everybody was returned, and especially the president of IHH, the IHH, the main humanitarian organization. So we sat at the Tel Aviv airstrip on these planes for many, many hours in complete agony, because there was some sort of declaration that if they didn't release the president of IHH, this would be considered a declaration of war. And I was just like, my god, this is getting more and more surreal by the minute. But finally, very late—I think it was like in the middle of the night—they released the president of IHH. We took off, and we landed around 4:00 a.m. in Istanbul, all of us.

AMY GOODMAN: Well, Iara Lee, I want to thank you for being with us. When are you releasing this at the United Nations today?

IARA LEE: So it's today at 4:00 p.m. for the United Nations press people. And also outside media people, they can just go to our Facebook or <a href="http://www.culturesofresistance.org/"culturesofresistance.org to get information.

AMY GOODMAN: Thank you very much for being with us, Iara Lee, filmmaker and director of the Cultures of Resistance network that brings together artists and activists from around the world. On the *Mavi Marmara*, she got this footage smuggled out that we aired today. And there is a full hour that they will be releasing later today.



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