

The Cyprus- Gaza humanitarian aid maritime corridor that wasn't¹

Ever since the 7th of October attack by Hamas and the beginning of the current Gaza war, the need to deliver humanitarian aid to the Palestinians has been constantly highlighted. Over the last 290 plus days, over 42,000 Palestinians have been killed and thousands injured predominantly women and children and for those still alive, the situation has become 'apocalyptic'. On the 17th of October 2024, UNSG Guterres wrote, in an X post, that **"people in Gaza are facing catastrophic level of hunger. Famine looms. This is intolerable. Crossing points must open immediately, bureaucratic impediments must be removed."**²

The purpose of this article is to inform on the achievements and shortcomings of this maritime corridor between Cyprus and Gaza, which was supposed to deliver the much needed aid, and to highlight some of the unanswered relevant questions arising from the endeavour.

According to The Jerusalem Post³, the maritime corridor, was the idea of PM Netanyahu, within two weeks of the 7th of October 2023. By the end of October 2023, he had discussed this idea with President Biden and Cypriot President Christodoulides⁴.

A major milestone in the unfolding events in the Gaza war was the ruling of International Court of Justice (ICJ). On 26th of January 2024, in its 'Application of the convention on the prevention and punishment of the crime of genocide in the Gaza strip – the case of South Africa vs Israel, the court stated, among other things the following: 'The Court further considers that **Israel must take immediate and effective measures to enable the provision of urgently needed basic services and humanitarian assistance** to address the adverse conditions of life faced by Palestinians in the Gaza Strip'.⁵

In the first few months of 2024, the idea of a maritime corridor gained momentum. Pres. Christodoulides, lobbied intensely and presented the maritime corridor as a Cypriot initiative. On the 7th of March 2024, Pres. Biden announced the maritime corridor in his State of the Union address. The day after, European Commission President Ursula von den Leyen visits Cyprus and the maritime corridor was officially launched.

The maritime corridor in fact takes more than 2 months to be functional and it was declared operational on the 17th of May 2024. It is named Amalthea by the Cypriots and by the US as JLOTS (Joint Logistics Over-the-Shore maritime corridor).

Very little data has been made public on what was achieved by the maritime corridor, but a report published on the 27th of August 2024, by the Office of the Inspector General of the U.S

¹ [Η Αμάλθεια και τι έχει πετύχει και τι όχι](#), ΑΝΔΡΟΥΛΛΑ ΚΑΜΙΝΑΡΑ 20 Nov 2023

² <https://x.com/antonioguterres/status/1846919011818524932>

³ <https://www.jpost.com/international/article-791239>

⁴ <https://www.gov.il/en/pages/pm-netanyahu-speaks-to-world-leaders-1-nov-2023>

⁵ <https://www.icj-cij.org/sites/default/files/case-related/192/192-20240126-ord-01-00-en.pdf>

Agency for International Aid (USAID) has shed some light on the results and shortcomings of this initiative.⁶

We learn from the report, that the maritime corridor was designed as follows:

- Aid would be gathered, registered, inspected and coded in Cyprus, by the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) and then DoD (US Department of Defence) would load them onto cargo ships in the port of Larnaca. This meant that on Cypriot soil, Israeli and US forces were carrying out operations.
- Aid would be transported by cargo ships from Larnaca to Gaza and uploaded onto the floating platform and moved to a temporary pier. To be noted that there is a fully functioning port just 25 km to the north - the port of Ashdod. However, the Israelis refused to allow aid to be delivered there.
- Aid would be delivered from the temporary pier to the staging area on the beach from where humanitarian organisations would load it onto trucks for delivery to the people of Gaza.

The initial declared goal was for JLOTS to function for about 90 days and feed about half million people. Throughout the preliminary discussions and during its operation, unanimously humanitarian agencies, the UN and USAID highlighted that a maritime corridor is not typically recommended in humanitarian response operations since it is a much more expensive, time consuming and risky delivery method. In addition, the existence of the maritime corridor would ***“distract from ... advocacy to open land crossings in Israel and Egypt which were seen as more efficient and proven avenues of delivering aid to Gaza”***. For example, the EU clarified that ***“The maritime corridor is complementary to, and not intended to replace, existing land routes to Gaza.”***⁷

It is important to note that, throughout the war, thousands of trucks loaded with humanitarian aid, were blocked by Israel at the borders and were not allowed to deliver the much needed humanitarian aid.

The report explains that from the design phase, there were disagreements between, on the one hand, US DoD and the Israelis, and on the other hand, the aid agencies on the ground and predominantly WFP (UN World Food Programme) who led the logistics among the humanitarian organisations. The main points of disagreement were:

- Location of pier: The agencies wanted the pier to be constructed in the north of Gaza, where most of the people in need lived. This was refused by the Israelis and in the end the pier was constructed in the middle of Gaza.
- Security: ensuring the security of humanitarian operations and that there should be a clear distinction between military and humanitarian actors.
- Duration: transitioning the response to civilian operations after the initial 90 days.

⁶ <https://oig.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2024-08/OIG%20Final%20Report%20-%20JLOTS%20Maritime%20Corridor%20Evaluation.pdf>

⁷ https://civil-protection-humanitarian-aid.ec.europa.eu/news-stories/news/eu-mobilises-assistance-gaza-cyprus-maritime-corridor-2024-05-17_en

In addition, incidents such as the one on June 8, when the IDF conducted a military operation in the refugee camps in Nuserait, which resulted in the release of 4 Israeli captives and the killing of, according to the Israelis of less than 100 Palestinians, but according to the Gazan health ministry, 274 Palestinians being killed. The media at the time reported that the pier was used by the IDF in this military operation. The US had denied that this was the case. Following this event, the WFP paused its operation at the pier. However, the DoD continued to deliver aid via the corridor, even though for three weeks WFP had paused its operations, which resulted in about 9,000 pallets of desperately needed aid being piled up on the beach!

The JLOT cost in financial terms \$230 million to the USA. JLOT was functional from the 17th of May 2024 until the 17th of July, when it was finally dismantled. The US dedicated 1,000 US soldiers and sailors as well as 16 ships of various sizes to the execution of this mission exclusively⁸. In fact, the maritime corridor **only really functioned for 20 days during that period**. According to the report the total humanitarian assistance through JLOTS/Amalthea over its whole existence was **8,100 metric tons**. To put this in perspective, before October 7th there were on average 500 trucks delivering aid per day into Gaza. The average truck of aid for Gaza was then carrying 15 tonnes of aid – so what was delivered through JLOTS was the equivalent of about 540 trucks of aid, which is about one day's aid delivery to Gaza before the war.⁹ It is difficult to determine the average cost of a truck of humanitarian aid into Gaza, but it could easily be that the aid delivered through the maritime corridor was at least 30 times more expensive than aid delivered by truck through the land routes¹⁰.

What we do not know is how much of the 'delivered' aid actually, reached the people in most need. Some anecdotal information exists, for example, "in the first 2 days of the maritime corridor's operation crowds improperly removed humanitarian aid from 12 of the 26 WFP trucks attempting to make the trip from the temporary pier to the UN's warehouse in Gaza.

Although any delivery of aid to Gaza can only be welcomed, however inefficient and costly it was, it is important that a number of questions are answered:

- Did the announcement of the maritime corridor distract and reduce the pressure on Israel to open the land routes, particularly in view of the of ICJ ruling? Did this allow it to more freely continue its operations?
- If the delivery of aid was the objective of the pier, why was it put in central Gaza and not in the north Gaza where most of the people in need were?

⁸ <https://www.usaid.gov/news-information/speeches/may-24-2024-press-briefing-update-humanitarian-maritime-corridor-gaza>

⁹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/10/30/readout-of-president-joe-bidens-meeting-with-president-nikos-christodoulides-of-the-republic-of-cyprus/>

¹⁰ <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/interactive/2024/gaza-aid-truck-sea-airdrop/>

- In the recent visit of Pres. Christodoulides to the White House on the 30th of October¹¹, Pres. Biden expressed his gratitude to Cyprus for the role it played in the endeavour of the maritime corridor even though it only marginally helped to deliver aid. Could this be due to standard diplomatic courtesy or could other objective were met? If yes, which ones?

The urgency of delivering humanitarian aid to Gaza is spiralling and the situation on the ground being described as ‘apocalyptic’. In addition, the decision of the Kneset on the 31st of October to ban UNWRA (United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East) caused the reaction of the UN Palestinian Rights committee which talked about “the unprecedented illegal action by Israel, the occupying Power, contravenes the Charter of the United Nations, the Convention on Privileges and Immunities of the United Nations, and countless relevant General Assembly and Security Council resolutions and directly violates Israel’s obligations as the occupying Power under international humanitarian law.”¹²

Finally, we need to question ourselves, with this analysis of the Cyprus-Gaza maritime corridor that wasn’t, how will history judge those that made it possible ?

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<https://www.qatar.georgetown.edu/ambassador-androulla-kaminara/>

¹¹ <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2024/10/30/readout-of-president-joe-bidens-meeting-with-president-nikos-christodoulides-of-the-republic-of-cyprus/>

¹² <https://press.un.org/en/2024/gapal1474.doc.htm>