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Mexican Navy Ship Collides with Brooklyn Bridge, Killing Two and Injuring Nineteen in Mechanical Failure

The Cuauhtémoc, a Mexican Navy training ship on a goodwill tour, lost power and struck the Brooklyn Bridge on Saturday night, snapping its masts and sending sailors hurtling to the deck. The NTSB is investigating as tributes pour in from officials.

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The Mexican Navy training ship ARM Cuauhtémoc colliding into the Brooklyn Bridge in New York City Saturday night.

A tragic accident unfolded on Saturday evening when the Mexican Navy training ship ARM Cuauhtémoc collided with the iconic Brooklyn Bridge in New York City, resulting in the deaths of two crew members and injuries to 19 others. The incident, attributed to a mechanical failure,

has prompted an investigation by the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) and drawn condolences from officials in both the United States and Mexico.

At approximately 8:20 p.m. ET, the Cuauhtémoc, a 297-foot, three-masted sailing vessel, was navigating the East River after departing from Pier 17 in Manhattan's South Street Seaport. The ship, carrying 277 passengers—primarily naval cadets, officers, and crew—was part of a global goodwill tour and had been docked in New York since May 13 for public viewing as part of the Sail4th 250 events celebrating America's 250th anniversary.

According to New York Police Department Special Operations Chief Wilson Arambales, the vessel suffered a mechanical failure, causing it to lose power and veer uncontrollably toward the Brooklyn Bridge. The ship's masts, which stood at 147 feet, exceeded the bridge's 135-foot clearance at its center, leading to a catastrophic collision. All three masts were sheared off upon impact, sending debris crashing onto the deck and leaving several sailors dangling from harnesses.

New York City Mayor Eric Adams confirmed that two crew members perished, and 19 others were injured, with two in critical condition as of early Sunday morning. The critically injured were transported to Bellevue Hospital in Manhattan. No injuries were reported among pedestrians or motorists on the bridge, and no one fell into the East River.

The New York Fire Department (FDNY) and NYPD responded swiftly, deploying marine units and rescue teams to evacuate and treat the injured. FDNY marine units transported Rescue 2 and Rescue 4 teams to the vessel, removing 27 people for medical treatment. "The police, fire, and EMS did a tremendous job of working together to get everyone off that ship safely," said an FDNY spokesperson.

The Brooklyn Bridge, a 142-year-old landmark, was temporarily closed to traffic for a preliminary inspection by the New York City Department of Transportation. Inspectors found no significant structural damage, and the bridge was reopened to traffic later that night.

The damaged Cuauhtémoc drifted toward a nearby pier on the Brooklyn side of the East River before being stabilized. By midnight, tugboats assisted in moving the vessel up the East River, past the Manhattan Bridge, to a docking pier for further assessment.

The ARM Cuauhtémoc, built in Bilbao, Spain, in 1981 and commissioned by the Mexican Navy in 1982, is a barque used primarily for training naval cadets, officers, and sailors. Known as the "Ambassador and Knight of the Seas," the ship has a storied history of international goodwill voyages, visiting ports worldwide to promote Mexican culture and naval tradition. This year, the vessel departed Acapulco, Mexico, on April 6 for a 254-day journey to 22 ports across 15 nations, with Iceland as its final destination.

At the time of the crash, the Cuauhtémoc was adorned with festive lights and a large Mexican flag, creating a striking visual as it sailed through New York Harbor. Videos captured by onlookers showed the ship's ominous approach to the bridge, with one witness exclaiming, "It crashed!" as the masts struck the structure.

The National Transportation Safety Board has taken over the investigation to determine the precise cause of the mechanical failure and evaluate any contributing factors, such as navigational errors or environmental conditions. Preliminary reports suggest that the ship's captain attempted a sailing maneuver when the power loss occurred, forcing the vessel toward the bridge. A tugboat was observed near the Cuauhtémoc at the time of the crash, but its role remains unclear.

The collision stunned onlookers and sparked a wave of reactions on social media. Videos of the crash, showing the masts snapping and debris falling, went viral, with witnesses describing a festive atmosphere turning to horror. One bystander, Elijah West, told the New York Post, “The boat was coming under the bridge, and there were sailors on top of the masts. The sails hit the bridge, and then people were falling off the boat sails.”

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