



June 4, 2012

The pro-Hamas British organization Viva Palestina recently failed in its latest attempt to send an aid convoy to Hamas in the Gaza Strip. The Egyptian authorities refused to grant it entrance to Egypt and its activists argued about its passage through Syria, which was eventually exploited by the Syrian regime's propaganda.



George Galloway collects donations in Bradford, England, for Hamas in the Gaza Strip before the convoy sets out (YouTube). The money collected for some of the previous convoys was transferred to the de-facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip.

Overview

- The British pro-Hamas organization Viva Palestina **recently failed** it in its latest attempt to send a convoy its sixth convoy to the Gaza Strip. The **Egyptian authorities refused to allow the convoy to enter Egyptian territory**, in our assessment because of the violent behavior of the activists participating in the January 2010 convoy. At that time they confronted the Egyptian security forces in a kind of rehearsal for the events aboard the *Mavi Marmara* a few months later. (Viva Palestina head George Galloway was declared persona non grata by Egypt because of the January 2010 confrontation.)
- 2. In addition, disagreements broke about among the activists participating in the convoy over its passage through Syria, a country loathsome to Western public opinion.

In the end Galloway decided to send the convoy through Syria anyway, and its passage was in fact exploited by Bashar Assad's regime for propaganda.

- Viva Palestina specializes in sending overland convoys with material and financial aid to Hamas and its de-facto administration in the Gaza Strip. George Galloway, an extreme left British MP who is hostile to Israel, **often makes public statements defaming Israel and identifying with Hamas ideology** (including support for the Palestinian refugees' so-called "right of return" and the establishment of a Palestinian fundamentalist, Islamic, Hamas greater Palestinian state [i.e., on the territory of the State of Israel]).

- The organization collaborates closely with the Muslim Brotherhood in Britain and with the Hamas operatives living there (what the media call the anti-Israel "red-green coalition"), the most prominent of whom is **Zaher Birawi**, a Hamas activist who although living in Britain he serves as Hamas' Judea and Samaria representative in the movement's institutions and conferences which take place outside the Palestinian territories.¹ He has been deeply involved in dispatching Viva Palestina convoys, and while his formal role is that of organization spokesman, in our assessment he actually liaises between Viva Palestina and Hamas.

¹ For further information see the March 8, 2011 bulletin about the Palestinian Return Centre in London, "The Palestinian Return Centre: London-based center for anti-Israeli propaganda, affiliated with Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood, outlawed in Israel. It promotes the demand of the Palestinian refugees to return as a way of destroying Israel..."

The Troubles Plaguing the Sixth Viva Palestina Convoy



The Viva Palestina logo

The Passage through Syria

- The Viva Palestina 6 convoy began organizing in February 2012, intending to leave London in April and arrive in the Gaza Strip for Nakba Day (May 15, 2012). According to the organizers, **its arrival was supposed to symbolize the so-called "return" to Palestine, the "right of return" and the realigning of the Palestinian cause in the center of public attention.**
- The convoy set out from **Bradford** (the district George Galloway has represented in Parliament since the beginning of 2012) in the last week of April, going to Bulgaria. From there it went to Turkey and from Turkey to Syria. George Galloway did not go with the convoy, he flew directly to Cairo to join the convoy.
- **During the trip the convoy participants disagreed about the proposed passage through Syria.** As a result, several aid groups left, claiming they were not willing to go through Syria and would instead fly to Cairo. **They said they did not want to give the Syrian regime the opportunity to make political capital at the expense of a humanitarian delegation to the Gaza Strip.** George Galloway, on the other hand, had no objection, saying that go through Syria did not indicate support for the regime (Blogs of convoy participants, Twitter, May 2, 2012).
- After having been delayed by the Turks, **on May 9 the convoy entered Syria,** where the Assad regime continues massacring Syrians. As expected, **its presence**

was exploited for purposes of Syrian propaganda. It was received by the governor of Latakia and the local Baath Party secretary. **The members of the convoy** thanked the Syrians for their hospitality **and denounced the pressure exerted and sanctions imposed on Syria by Western and other countries** (Syrian News Agency, May 9, 2012).



Left: One of the convoy activists. In the background is one of the military vehicles which accompanied the convoy during its stay in Syria. Right: The convoy leaves Turkey and enters Syria (Kiaoragaza.net website, May 11, 2012).

■ **On May 11 the convoy reached Jordan.** After negotiations with the Jordanian authorities, 22 activists received permission to spend the night in Amman. From Amman the convoy participants went to the port of Aqaba where they waited for permission to enter Egypt (Khabrani, May 11; and Al-Dustour, May 13, 2012). While the convoy was en route, George Galloway himself visited Lebanon, where he met with Nabih Berri, chairman of the Lebanese parliament, and former Lebanese presidents Emile Lahoud and Salim al-Hoss. George Galloway told them that the Palestinian cause was the most important of all the Arab causes, and called on the people of Syria to allow the convoy to pass through their country on its way to the Gaza Strip (Al-Safir, May 9, 2012).

Entry to Egypt Denied

- **After having waited in vain in Aqaba for three weeks for permission to enter the Gaza Strip, the Viva Palestina 6 activists had no choice but to return to Britain** (a convoy from Jordan which set out at about the same time entered without difficulty).
- **Kevin Ovenden**, a British far left activist, the convoy's general coordinator and a participant of the Mavi Marmara flotilla, held a press conference in Jordan. He said that the convoy had invested great efforts during the three weeks to acquire the necessary authorization to enter the Gaza Strip, but without success. However, he said, "the reasons were unclear." He said the activists had received promises from the Egyptian authorities that even George Galloway, who in the past² had been denied entry into Egypt, would receive permission to stay in Egypt for 14 days. George Galloway reached Cairo but the **necessary permits did not arrive at the Egyptian consulate in Aqaba** (Al-Quds, May 29, 2012).
- Ovenden reported that the humanitarian aid the convoy was planning to bring to the Gaza Strip would be sent via the Jordanian Hashemite Charity Organization in coordination with the Jordanian trade unions. Some of it would be distributed in the refugee camps in Jordan. He added that they intended to organize additional convoys (Al-Dustour, May 29, 2012).

Appendices

- Two appendices follow:

Appendix I: Viva Palestina and the convoys it sends to the Gaza Strip

Appendix II: Portrait of George Galloway

² His entry (and that of others) into Egypt was forbidden because he had been declared persona non grata by virtue of his involvement in **the violent confrontation between activists of the third Viva Palestina convoy, which he headed, and the Egyptian security forces in January 2010.**

Appendix I

Viva Palestina and the Convoys It Sends to the Gaza Strip



Logo of Viva Palestina's most recent convoy

Overview

1. **Viva Palestina is an anti-Israel, pro-Hamas British organization headed by George Galloway**, an MP affiliated with the far left in Britain. It was established in April 2009 after Operation Cast Lead with the stated objective of delivering humanitarian aid to the Gazans. However, **in reality**, like similar organizations and networks, **it works to promote anti-Israeli political and propaganda goals, the principal ones of which are conducting a campaign to defame Israel and exert international pressure on it, strengthening Hamas and its de-facto administration, and disrupting the [legitimate] Israeli closure of the Gaza Strip.**
2. **Viva Palestina operates from Britain.** It works in close collaboration with organizations affiliated with **radical Islam and Hamas**, as well as with umbrella networks and other organizations around the globe participating in **the campaign to delegitimize Israel.** Over the years **Viva Palestina has sent six aid convoys to the Gaza Strip** and its activists participated in the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla.
3. **The entrance of former convoys into the Gaza Strip was exploited to bring financial support from Viva Palestina and other British organizations affiliated with Hamas.** The British "Civil Society" website reported that Viva Palestina "had not

submitted a financial statement to the British Charity Commission (which supervises the affairs of charitable societies). It also reported that the organization "has never submitted financial accounts to the Charity Commission, and is nearly a year overdue in providing required financial information to the regulator" (Civil Society website, April 18, 2012)

Sending Overland Convoys to the Gaza Strip

4. During the three years of its existence, Viva Palestina's activities have focused on sending overland convoys to the Gaza Strip with slogans like "Lifeline for Gaza."³

5. The latest Viva Palestina convoy was its sixth. Previous convoys also went through Europe to Turkey and from there to Syria, Jordan and Egypt. En route they were joined by **activists from Jordan, Turkey, the Persian Gulf and North Africa, some of them radical Islamists, including members of the Muslim Brotherhood.** The radical left and radical Islam have united in previous events, such as the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla, a common occurrence among organizations and activists of the international coalition waging the campaign to delegitimize Israel.

6. **Viva Palestina has a history of violent behavior manifested by the confrontation with the Egyptian security forces.** During the Lifeline 3 convoy (December 2009-January 2010) the activists refused to obey the Egyptian authorities and acted in an undisciplined, confrontational manner because they had not been given permission to drive their trucks through the Rafah crossing and would have to bring some of them in through Israel. Thus **the convoy's activists engaged in a violent confrontation with the Egyptian security forces, taking seven Egyptian soldiers as "captives."** About 50 activists and soldiers were wounded.⁴ In retrospect, this incident may be viewed as a kind of rehearsal for the more violent conflict initiated and conducted by the IHH operatives aboard the *Mavi Marmara*.

³ The latest was called "Convoy of the return" [i.e., the return of the Palestinian refugees to Israel] because it was supposed to arrive in the Gaza Strip on Nakba Day.

⁴ For further information see the July 19, 2010 bulletin "A comparison of IHH violence directed against the IDF during the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla (June 2010) and the violence employed by the Lifeline 3 activists against the Egyptian security forces (January 2010)."



Egyptian security forces in a confrontation with the Lifeline 3 convoy in El Arish, caused by the refusal of the Egyptian authorities to allow some of the trucks to enter the Gaza Strip through the Rafah crossing (IHH.org.tr website, January 2010).

7. In the wake of the violent confrontation, Egypt said it would not allow a similar convoy to enter its territory and **declared George Galloway persona non grata**. Since then the Egyptians have been careful when issuing entrance permits to activists and do not issue them to activists who were previously involved in violent confrontations. Under Mubarak, entry was also denied to activists affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood and radical Islam, as well as to British activists affiliated with the far left.⁵ **Their refusal to allow the Lifeline 6 convoy to enter the Gaza Strip indicates that the Egyptian policy is still in place despite the overthrow of Mubarak.**

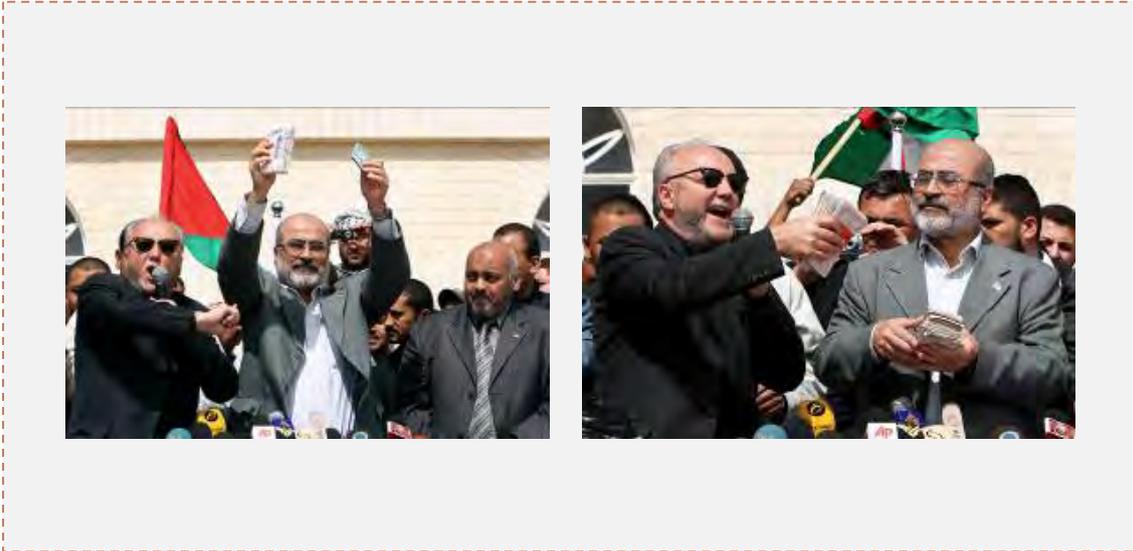
Material and Financial Support

8. Viva Palestina convoys bring Hamas **material and financial aid**, which is used to strengthen the de-facto Hamas administration and indirectly the Hamas movement, for example:

- 1) **The first convoy** entered the Gaza Strip in March 2009. Its participants met with Ismail Haniya, head of the de-facto Hamas administration, and delivered equipment and money to him. The convoy was accompanied by **several representatives from Interpal**, a British foundation affiliated with Hamas. Among them were Sheikh **Majdi Aqil**, a **Hamis activist**, member of the

⁵ For further information see the October 27, 2010 bulletin "Egyptian authorities refuse to allow 17 activists from the Viva Palestina convoy to enter the Gaza Strip."

Palestinian Return Centre's board of trustees and the Interpal representative from Manchester.



George Galloway gives a stack of banknotes to Ziyad al-Zaza, minister of national economy in the Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip, when the first convoy arrived (Photo by Muhammad Salem for Reuters, March 9, 2009). A little over one year later, on April 13, 2010, George Galloway held a press conference at the City Hall in Kensington, London, where he reported having given £1.4 million to Ismail Haniya, whom he referred to as "the elected prime minister of Palestine" (YouTube, Aljazeera.net website).

2) **The fourth convoy** was one of the organization's largest, arriving in the Gaza Strip on October 21, 2010. It was composed of 150 vehicles and 350 participants, most of whom flew to El Arish, and **brought equipment worth \$5 million**. The convoy activists spend three days in the Gaza Strip, during which they were hosted at various events and ceremonies organized by the Hamas administration.

9. The fourth convoy was delayed at the Syrian port of Latakia for more than two weeks while it waited for the Egyptian authorities to authorize its arrival in El Arish. Authorization was eventually forthcoming but 17 activists, **with George Galloway heading the list**, were forbidden entry to Egypt. **Hamas activist in Britain and spokesman convoy Zaher Birawi**, who was also forbidden entry, strongly criticized Egypt for its refusal to allow the activists to enter its territory. He also claimed that the Egyptian authorities had not provided clarifications for their refusal.

Supporting Hamas' Ideology

10. The de-facto Hamas administration in the Gaza Strip and the Hamas movement use the arrival of the convoys to improve its image in world (and Arabic) public opinion and to defame Israel. Convoy activists customarily meet with the heads of Hamas and **participate in ceremonies and events, even those which are clearly and overtly Hamas-Muslim in nature.** Thus they are exposed to **Hamas' radical Islamic ideology and manifestations of its military-terrorist activity,** for example:

1) The members of the fourth convoy (October 2010) met with senior Hamas figures, most importantly with Ismail Haniya, head of the de-facto administration. They were present at a sermon he delivered in which Ismail Haniya referred to the State of Israel as "**a cancerous growth in the living body of the Arab nation,**" and emphasized that "**Palestine**" would remain **Palestinian, Arab and Muslim.**

2) Activists of the Turkish delegation which joined the fourth convoy⁶ were taken on a tour accompanied by **field commanders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad.** The website of the Jerusalem Brigades, the PIJ's military-terrorist wing, posted pictures of the Turkish activists posing with armed, masked PIJ operatives wearing PIJ headbands and using PIJ insignia. After a short time the pictures were removed.

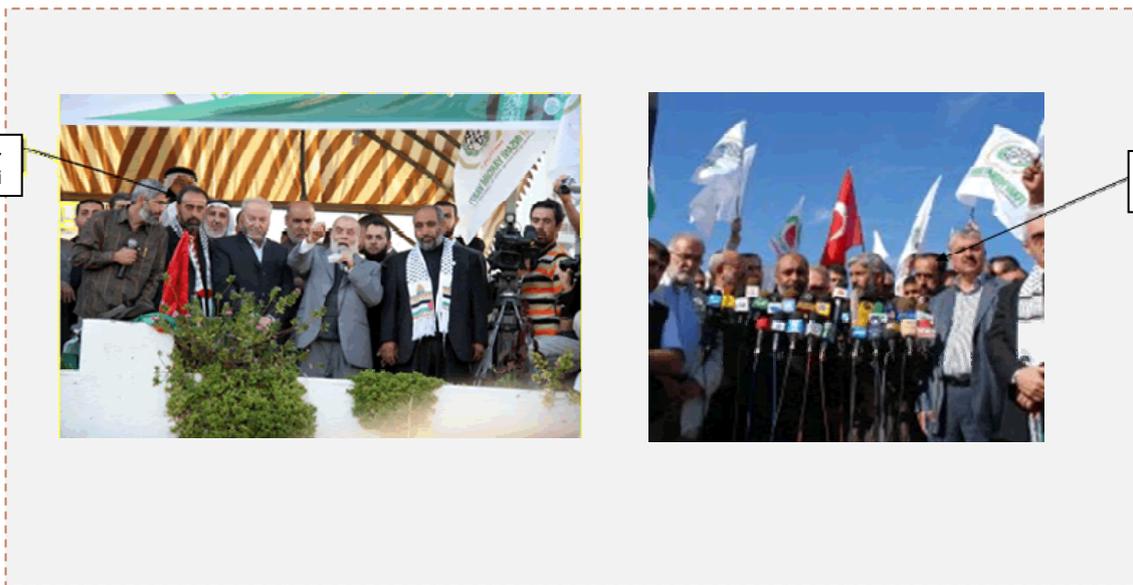


Turkish delegation members of the fourth Viva Palestina convoy visit PIJ Jerusalem Brigades operatives (Jerusalem Brigades website, October 26, 2010).

⁶ In our assessment they were IHH operatives who hid their organizational affiliation.

Involvement of Hamas Activist Zaher Birawi in Viva Palestina Activities

11. Viva Palestina uses the services of **Zaher Birawi**, a Hamas activist who lives in Britain and is chairman of the Palestinian Return Centre board of trustees. For the past two years he has been deeply involved in dispatching Viva Palestina Lifeline convoys to the Gaza Strip. His formal position is Viva Palestina spokesman, **but in effect, in our assessment, he liaises between Viva Palestina and Hamas.**



The Viva Palestina delegation at a reception in the Gaza Strip (January 2010). Left to right: Zaher Birawi, George Galloway, Ahmed Bahar (first deputy chairman of the Hamas faction in the Palestinian Legislative Council), Bülent Yildirim (Hurryupharry.org website)

The Viva Palestina delegation in the Gaza Strip, January 2010, with Turkish and IHH flags in the background (IHH website, January 7, 2010).

Appendix II

Portrait of George Galloway

1. George Galloway is a British MP of Scottish heritage affiliated with the far left. He is a controversial figure in British politics. He was expelled from the Labour Party following his objection to British participation in the war in Iraq. He established a one-man faction and as its representative was elected to Parliament from a London district with a large Muslim population. In the 2012 elections he was elected to Parliament to represent the district of West Bradford.

2. Galloway, who defines himself as anti-Zionist, heads Viva Palestina, a pro-Hamas organization whose **main activity is organizing convoys to the Gaza Strip. Their objective is to support and strengthen Hamas and its de-facto administration.** Canada denied him entry to the country for a pro-Palestinian convention which met there in March 2009. Following the violent confrontation in January 2010 between the members of the convoy and the Egyptian security forces, Egypt declared him persona non grata.

3. Galloway is a frequent visitor to Arab countries and **often expresses support for and solidarity with Hamas' extremist ideology**, including the realization of the so-called "right of return" and the establishment of a Palestinian state on all the territory of the State of Israel. He has also justified terrorist organizations, including the Lebanese Hezbollah. In 2010 he visited Tripoli and later reported that Muammar Qaddafi's son had contributed to an aid convoy he was sending to the Gaza Strip and had even doubled the number of trucks from 120 to 240 (Al-Jazeera TV, July 15, 2010).

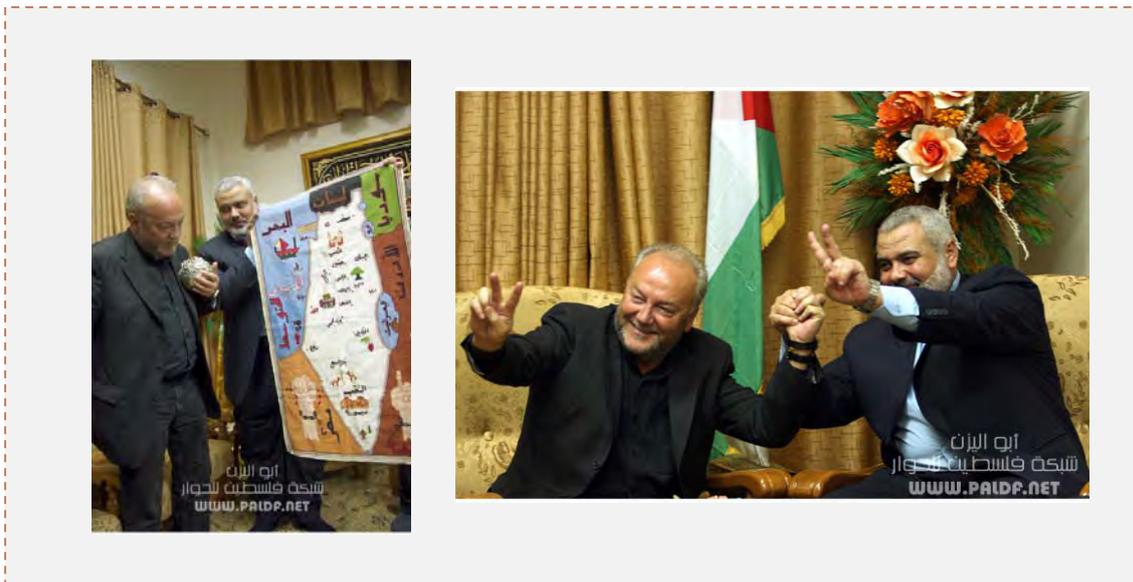
4. In addition to his intensive support for Hamas in the Gaza Strip, Galloway often discusses the issue of Lebanon and often appears in the Lebanese media:

1) In an article written in July 2006 during the Second Lebanon War, Galloway said that **Hezbollah was not and had never been a terrorist organization**, and that it had the right to fight "Zionist terrorism" (Socialist Worker Online, July 29, 2006).

2) In November 2010 he told a correspondent that he believed **Hezbollah was "free of any suspicion" of Rafiq Hariri's assassination.** Interviewed by Hezbollah's Al-Manar TV, (whose broadcasts are generally outlawed in Europe),

he accused Israel of the assassination, saying Israel was the only country which would have an interest in killing him (Al-Manar TV, July 26, 2011).

3) Interviewed by Al-Safir during a visit to Lebanon, Galloway said that his struggle for Palestine had begun long before his election to Parliament. He said it was hard for him to influence Parliament regarding the Palestinian cause because "most of the MPs are pro-Israeli." However, he thought he would succeed in exploiting the stage to "wave the flag of Palestine and raise the Palestinian issue more strongly (Al-Safir, May 9, 2012).



George Galloway and Ismail Haniya. The map of "Palestine" does not include Israel (PALDF, March 11, 2009).

5. Meeting with Ismail Haniya in February 2009, Galloway said that the Muslim and European delegations to the Gaza Strip prove that "the future does not belong to the occupation." He said to Haniya, "You are not just the prime minister of Palestine, you are our prime minister as well." **Ismail Haniya then presented him with a Palestinian passport.** Interviewed by Palestine Today TV in July 2011, Galloway said that when President Obama talked about a smaller Palestine they had to be persistent, **because there was only one Palestine, from the [Jordan] river to the [Mediterranean] sea,** an echo of Hamas ideology.



Ismail Haniya presents George Galloway with a Palestinian passport (PALDF, March 11, 2009).