



## Intelligence and Terrorism Information Center

7.7.2010

# The Jihadist "Istanbul Declaration" and the Gaza Flotilla

---

Jonathan Fighel<sup>1</sup>

1. The violent nature of the flotilla and the events on board the Turkish ship Mavi Marmara would not have been a surprise if someone had connected the dots before the takeover of the ship by the Israeli Navy.

2. The Gaza flotilla initiative was a step in implementing the jihadist "Istanbul Declaration," issued at a conference called "Gaza Victory" and held in Istanbul on February 14-15, 2009. The conference was attended by 200 Arab and European Sunni sheikhs and clerics as well as members of Hamas, and bore the signatures of 90 participants (See Appendix). According to a BBC reporter who attended the event, "speaker after speaker called for jihad against Israel in support of Hamas."<sup>2</sup> The Istanbul Declaration provided the ideological background for the future violent implementation of its decisions, as demonstrated by the flotilla to Gaza. The events have to be understood within a radical pan-Islamic context and the mindset of their proponents, and in light of the Istanbul Declaration and the 90 radical Muslim scholars and clerics who publicly sanctioned the legitimacy of Hamas and their support for its military actions.

---

<sup>1</sup> Col.(Ret) Jonathan Fighel is a senior researcher at the International Counter Terrorism Institute (ICT), specialized in radical Islam movements and global jihad terror organizations. The study was originally published on ICT website.

<sup>2</sup> [http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle\\_east/7895485.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/middle_east/7895485.stm) . See also posting of the declaration in Arabic on a Hamas forum, dated February 15 2009 <http://paldf.net/forum/showthread.php?p=5470014>

3. The Istanbul Declaration affirmed "the obligation of the Islamic Nation to find a just reconciliation formula for the Palestinian people, who will be responsible for forming a legitimate authority that will fix norms and attend to legitimate and national rights, **and will continue with jihad and resistance against the occupation until the liberation of all Palestine.**" It also affirmed "the obligation of the Islamic Nation to open permanently the crossings—all crossings—in and out of Palestine to allow all the Palestinians to satisfy their needs for money, clothing, food, medicine, weapons and other essentials, **so that they can live and carry out jihad in the path of Almighty Allah.**" The Declaration also noted that "We affirm that the victory Allah accomplished by means of our brothers the Mujahidin, our defiant and steadfast kinsfolk in Gaza, was indeed achieved through His favor and help -- exalted be He! **It was also achieved through fulfilling the religious obligation of jihad in His path.**"

4. According to the Istanbul Declaration, there is an obligation for **"the Islamic Nation to regard sending foreign warships into Muslim waters, claiming to control the borders and preventing the smuggling of arms to Gaza as a declaration of war, a new occupation, sinful aggression and a clear violation of the sovereignty of the Nation."** It continues, **"This must be rejected and fought by all means and ways."**<sup>3</sup>

## **The Istanbul Declaration Signers and Their Involvement in the Flotilla**

5. The list of passengers on board the Mavi Marmara revealed the names of two conference participants who had signed the Istanbul Declaration. Their personal involvement in the flotilla demonstrated their commitment to the jihadist cause and their desire to represent themselves as models.

6. **Muhammad Kazem Sawalha** -- a fugitive, high-ranking former Hamas Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades commander in Judea and Samaria, currently residing and active in the UK (signature number 72).<sup>4</sup> He was involved in launching the previous aid flotilla (Lifeline 3). At the time he noted that the next aid convoy would avoid an "unwanted confrontation" with the Egyptian authorities and that **"the confrontation will be directly with the Zionist enemy itself on the high seas"** (Al-Intiqad, Hezbollah's website, January 17, 2010). Sawalha, one of the prominent organizers of the flotilla, did not board the ship. Known to Israeli security services and wanted for his notorious Izz al-Din al-Qassam Brigades

---

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/mar/08/daud-abdullah-gaza-middle-east>

<sup>4</sup> One of the signatories of the Jihadi Istanbul Declaration.

activities in Judea and Samaria in the past, it can be assumed he feared being arrested and tried in Israel.

**A. Walid Al-Tabtabai** -- a prominent Kuwaiti activist who is known to support armed resistance in Palestine and Iraq (signature number 88). At a press conference in Antalya the flotilla organizers asked all the participants to "write their wills." Following the press conference, Walid Al-Tabtabai reportedly "did not hesitate to write his will, in defiance of Israeli threats."<sup>5</sup>

**B. Sheikh Muhammad al-Hazimi** -- a member of the Yemeni Parliament and Al-Islah (the Yemeni reform bloc) was photographed on the deck of the Mavi Marmara brandishing his large curved dagger (signature number 66).

## Other prominent radical Islamic flotilla participants

7. The Arab-Israeli Sheikh Ra'ed Salah, head of the northern branch of the Islamic Movement in Israel, is a radical Islamist whose presence on board the Mavi Marmara was not coincidental, as he is one of the founders and a board member of the Union of Good. He also maintains close ties with the Hamas leadership and provides material support for its activities and funding for Hamas' "charitable societies" in Judea and Samaria.<sup>6</sup>

8. The Yemeni Al-Islah party sent three members as passengers aboard the Mavi Marmara. The party runs the radical Islamic Al-Islah charitable society which belongs to the Union of Good and is known to be committed to the Hamas jihad struggle, and has been designated as a terrorist organization by Israel and the United States. Al-Islah is led by sheikh Abd Al Majid Zindani, a radical Islamist with ties to Al Qaeda and Bin Laden, designated in 1995 by the United States as a terrorist. In 2004 he was accused of supplying arms to Al-Qaeda, and was known to be involved in the preparations made by Omar Farouk Abdulmutallab for the unsuccessful bombing attempt of a Detroit-bound plane, Christmas 2009.

## Possible Involvement of the Union of Good

9. An analysis of open source materials, some of which were published before the flotilla events, shows that the Union of Good, a global coalition of radical Islamic charities, was assigned to implement the Istanbul Declaration's decision to break the so-called Israeli blockade of the Gaza Strip. The Union of Good is run by the Muslim Brotherhood's spiritual leader Sheikh Yusuf al-Qaradawi, who in 2002 sanctioned the legitimacy of suicide bombing attacks against Israeli civilians and

---

<sup>5</sup> Al-Rai (Kuwait), May 30, 2010.

<sup>6</sup> Sentenced by Israeli court to 3.5 years in prison.

issued numerous anti-Semitic, anti-Israeli *fatwas*. The Union of Good was outlawed by Israel and was designated as a terrorism-supporting entity by the U.S. Treasury Department, a result of its fund-raising activities on behalf of Hamas and its "charitable societies" in the Gaza Strip, Judea and Samaria.

10. The Union of Good has a network of international connections in the Arab-Muslim world and in Muslim communities in the West, enabling it to set up a logistic infrastructure and procure funds and recruits in a relatively short time. The Turkish IHH, which is part of the Union of Good, was the leading organization in the coalition participating in the Gaza aid flotilla. IHH (**Insani Yardım Vakfı**, "humanitarian relief fund") is a radical Islamic organization established in 1992 and formally registered in Istanbul in 1995. Outlawed by Israel in 2008, it is part of the Union of Good, and seems to have been chosen to lead the jihadist flotilla to Gaza.

11. Organizing the flotilla to Gaza required lengthy preparations and a vast mobilization network which maintained contact with hundreds of organizations and operatives around the globe, most of them affiliated with radical Islam and the Muslim Brotherhood, and some of them from pro-Palestinian Western relief organizations. It is possible that as a pan-Islamic organization, some of the Union of Good members who participated in the Istanbul conference were commissioned to make logistic preparations and mobilize recruits.

# Appendix

---

## Text of the Istanbul Declaration and Names of Signers<sup>7</sup>

In the name of Allah the Most-merciful the All-merciful

A statement by the religious scholars and proselytizers (*du'a*) of the Islamic Nation (*ummah*) to all rulers and peoples concerning events in Gaza

Praise to Allah who strengthened His troops, aided His servants and alone routed the Zionist Jews, who says,

"It was incumbent on Us to aid the believers." [Qur'an 30:47]

And blessing and peace be on the Imam of the mujahidin who says,

'There will remain a group of my Ummah adhering to the truth, and those who oppose them will not harm them until Allah's command comes.' [Hadith]

(And now to our topic).

This statement is addressed to the Islamic Nation, its religious scholars, its rulers and its peoples. In it we congratulate the whole family of Islam on the manifest victory which Allah has granted us in the land of Gaza, a land of pride and dignity, over the **Zionist Jewish** occupiers. Allah has appointed it as the first step in the complete victory for all of Palestine and the holy places of the Muslims. Furthermore, we herein emphatically affirm various resolutions and judgments.

I. Affirmation of the following unequivocal resolutions:

1. We affirm that the victory that Allah accomplished by means of our brothers the *mujahidin*, our defiant and steadfast kinsfolk in Gaza, was indeed achieved through His favor and help -- exalted be He! It was also achieved through **fulfilling the religious obligation of jihad** in His way. This is a confirmation of His statement -- sublime is He! -- "How often a small party overcame a large party, by Allah's leave." [Qur'an, 2:249]

---

<sup>7</sup> [http://www.standcampaign.org/wiki/index.php?title=Istanbul\\_Declaration](http://www.standcampaign.org/wiki/index.php?title=Istanbul_Declaration)

2. We affirm that this manifest victory has clearly disclosed the volume of international and local military and political conspiracy against the jihad and the *mujahidin* in Gaza, as represented by the following:

- Military co-operation in tightening the blockade and closing the crossings to the people of Gaza, especially the Rafah crossing.

- Public or quasi-public support for the enemy.

- The prevention of demonstrations and popular events held in support of the mujahidin; the arrest, trial and severe punishments of those who instigate them.

- The aggressive pressure put on the mujahidin to break their will and force them to agree to their [the conspirators] terms and the stipulations of the Zionist enemy.

- The attempt to present the Hamas government as the cause of this malicious Jewish Zionist war over Gaza.

- The absence of any official and effective Arab and Islamic stance and its weakness in reflecting the will of the Arab and Islamic peoples to help our brothers in Gaza win. This indicates the width of the gap between the Nation and those rulers who lead it.

- The use of funds for reconstruction and aid to those hurt as a negative pressure card on the mujahidin to abandon their legitimate demands, or some of them.

- The prevention of delivery of aid and reconstruction funds to the Hamas government and the reliable authorities in Gaza; deeming the Palestinian Authority, represented by the presidency of Abbas and the Fayyad government, the sole representative of the Palestinian people, without the Hamas government; and the delivery of such funds and aid to increase their grip on the legitimate elected government of Hamas. This redoubles the suffering of the people of Gaza at the time they mostly need those funds and aid.

3. **We affirm in full conviction that the Palestinian Authority, whose mandate is coming to an end, is not eligible to represent the Palestinian people.** It stands outside the will of its people, and has given up the choice of jihad in the way of Allah Almighty as an effective means in defeating the occupation and the liberation of the Islamic holy places. It adopts the wishes of the Nation's enemies in exchange for the illusions of false peace.

4. We affirm in full conviction that the so-called Arab peace initiative is a proven betrayal of the Islamic Nation and the Palestinian cause, and a blatant betrayal of the Palestinian people. It aims to criminalize the Resistance [*muqawama*] against the Zionist occupying entity in perpetuity through its de facto recognition of it, as well as the confiscation of the right of refugees to return to their homes and their property.

II. Affirmation of the following legal judgments:

1. The obligation of the Islamic Nation to rush to the aid of the people in Gaza; to rebuild what the Zionist aggression destroyed; to compensate the injured and support the widows, orphans, those suffering permanent disabilities, and the old and infirm.

2. The obligation of the Islamic Nation to restrict itself to dealing only with the legitimate elected Palestinian government (Hamas) in the delivery of aid and reconstruction of dwellings. It is the sole government authorized to do that by reason of its official legitimacy as well as its **maintaining the Resistance against the Jewish Zionist occupation**, its integrity, and its solidarity with the people in all circumstances.

3. The obligation of the Islamic Nation not to recognize the Palestinian Authority, whose mandate is ending, as representative of the Palestinian people. It must not elect it again, in view of its proven financial and administrative corruption as well as its squandering of time and assets behind the false peace process. It is also necessary to work seriously to choose a new authority that will guard the Palestinian ranks, respect their will and their right to resist the occupation, and work for the complete liberation of its land and holy places.

4. The obligation of the Islamic Nation to circulate a declaration to withhold aid funds from the undeserving or placing them in the hands of those who are not trustworthy. It must regard this as a legal betrayal that should be prosecuted, and punish those who cause mayhem, negligence and waste of these moneys.

5. The obligation of the Islamic Nation to find a fair formula of reconciliation between the sons of the Palestinian people, under whose responsibility a legitimate authority will be formed that will attend to the fixed norms and the legitimate and national rights; and will carry on with the **jihad and Resistance** against the occupier until the liberation of all Palestine.

6. The obligation of the Islamic Nation to open the crossings -- all crossings -- in and out of Palestine permanently, in order to allow access to all the needs of the Palestinians -- money, clothing, food, medicine, **weapons** and other essentials,

so that they are able to live and **perform the jihad in the way of Allah Almighty**. The closure of the crossings or the prevention of the entry of weapons through them should be regarded as high treason in the Islamic Nation, and clear support for the Zionist enemy.

7. The obligation of the Islamic Nation to regard everyone standing with the Zionist entity, whether countries, institutions or individuals, as providing a substantial contribution to the crimes and brutality of this entity; the position towards him is the same as towards this usurping entity.

**8. The obligation of the Islamic Nation to regard the sending of foreign warships into Muslim waters, claiming to control the borders and prevent the smuggling of arms to Gaza, as a declaration of war, a new occupation, sinful aggression, and a clear violation of the sovereignty of the Nation.** This must be rejected and fought by all means and ways. To conclude: the Nation's scholars and proselytizers remind the Islamic Nation, rulers and ruled alike, of the necessity of returning to its religion, adhering to the book of its Lord and the sunna of his Prophet, working for its unity, and seizing control of the instruments of power that will make possible its supremacy and the preservation of its holy places and provisions

'Allah prevails in his purpose, but most people know not.' [Quran, 12: 21]).

## **The Signatories**

As presented in the Declaration:

- 1) Sheikh Ahmad Sulaiman Ahif, Yemen
- 2) Dr. Ahmad al-Ghamidi, Saudi Arabia
- 3) Dr. Ahmad al-Misbahi, Yemen
- 4) Sheikh Ahmad Abdul Razzaq al-Raqihi, Yemen
- 5) Proselytizer [da'iyah] Ahmad Muhammad Abdullah, Egypt
- 6) Sheikh Isma'il Abdul Bari, Yemen
- 7) Sheikh Isma'il Uthman Muhammad, Sudan
- 8) Dr. Amin Ali Muqbil, Yemen
- 9) Proselytizer Al-Amin Karkush, Algeria
- 10) Sheikh Bilal Baroudi, Lebanon
- 11) Proselytizer Tawarim Kishlakci, Turkey

- 12) Dr. Harith Sulaiman al-Dhari [Iraq]
- 13) Dr. Hakim al-Matiri, Kuwait
- 14) Proselytizer Hasan Salem Hasan, Qatar
- 15) Proselytizer Khalid al-Dhahir, Lebanon
- 16) Proselytizer Khalil Asi, Denmark
- 17) Proselytizer Daud Abdullah, Britain
- 18) Sheikh Raed al-Jabouri, Iraq
- 19) Sheikh Rachid al-Ghannouchi, Tunisia [resides in Britain]
- 20) Proselytizer Ribhi Subhi al-Atiwi, Jordan
- 21) Proselytizer Rabi Haddad, Lebanon
- 22) Dr. Sami Muhammad Saleh
- 23) Proselytizer Sami Najid Sa'id, Jordan
- 24) Dr. Shafi al-Hajiri, Qatar
- 25) Dr. Shaker Tawfiq al-Adouri, Jordan
- 26) Proselytizer Shah Jahan Abdul Qayyum, Britain
- 27) Dr. Shawkat Karashji, Kosovo
- 28) Sheikh Safwan Murshid, Yemen
- 29) Sheikh Salah Nasr al-Bahr, Yemen
- 30) Dr. Adel Hasan Yusuf al-Hamad, Bahrain
- 31) Sheikh Arif bin Ahmad al-Sabri, Yemen
- 32) Sheikh Abbas Ahmad al-Nahari
- 33) Sheikh Abdul Hai Yusuf, Sudan
- 34) Sheikh Abdul Rahman al-Khamisi, Yemen
- 35) Proselytizer Abdul Rahman Abdullah Jami'an, Kuwait
- 36) Dr. Abdul Salam Daud al-Kubaisi, Iraq
- 37) Dr. Abdul Samid al-Radhi, Morocco
- 38) Dr. Abdul Aziz Kamel, Egypt
- 39) Dr. Abdul Ali Masul, Morocco
- 40) Proselytizer Abdul Fattah Hamdash, Algeria

- 41) Dr. Abdul Karim al-Sheikh, Sudan
- 42) Sheikh Abdullah Ahmad al-Adini, Yemen
- 43) Sheikh Abdullah Hasan Khayrat, Yemen
- 44) Sheikh Abdullah Faysal al-Ahdal, Yemen
- 45) Sheikh Abdul Majid bin Muhammad al-Rimi, Yemen
- 46) Sheikh Abdul Malik al-Wazir, Yemen
- 47) Sheikh Abdil Wahid al-Khamisi, Yemen
- 48) Sheikh Abdul Wahhab al-Hamiqani, Yemen
- 49) Dr. Abdul Wahhab bin Lutf al-Dulaimi, Yemen
- 50) Proselytizer Izz al-Din Jarafa bin Muhammad, Algeria
- 51) Proselytizer Azzam al-Ayyubi, Lebanon
- 52) Dr. Ali Muhammad Maqboul al-Ahdal
- 53) Proselytiser Imad al-Din Bakri, Sudan
- 54) Proselytiser Imad Sa'ad, Iraq
- 55) Sheikh Omar Sulaiman al-Ashqar, Palestine
- 56) Proselytiser Faris Muhammad, Denmark
- 57) Sheikh Latif al-Sa'idi, Britain
- 58) Dr. Muhsin al-Awaji, Saudi Arabia
- 59) Proselytizer Muhammad al-Khalid, Denmark
- 60) Sheikh Muhammd al-Sadiq Mughlas, Yemen
- 61) Prof. Muhammad al-Ani, Britain
- 62) Proselytizer Muhammad al-Ghanim, Saudi Arabia
- 63) Proselytizer Muhammad al-Mufrih, Saudi Arabia
- 64) Sheikh Muhammad Ahmad al-Wazir, Yemen
- 65) Sheikh Muhammad bin Musa al-Amiri, Yemen
- 66) **Sheikh Muhammad bin Nasr al-Hazmi, Yemen**
- 67) Dr. Muhammad Juhaid Bu Aynain
- 68) Dr. Muhammad Ahmad Abdullah, Bahrain
- 69) Proselytizer Muhammad Khalid Muwasi, Palestine

- 70) Proselytizer Muhammad Salem al-Ali
- 71) Sheikh Muhammad Sa'ad al-Hatami, Yemen
- 72) **Proselytizer Muhammad Sawalha, Palestine** [resides in Britain]
- 73) Sheikh Muhammad Abdul Karim al-Da'is, Yemen
- 74) Sheikh Muhammad Abdul Karim Abu Faris
- 75) Sheikh Muhammad Abdullah al-Ghubaisi, Yemen
- 76) Sheikh Muhammad Ali al-Anasi, Yemen
- 77) Sheikh Muhammad Ali Mir'i, Yemen
- 78) Dr. Muhammad Magdi Krekar, Egypt
- 79) Sheikh Mudashir Ahmad Isma'il, Sudan
- 80) Sheikh Murad Ahmad al-Qudsi, Yemen
- 81) Dr. Mustafa al-Rif, Morocco
- 82) Proselytizer Nasser al-Fadhala, Bahrain
- 83) Dr. Nasser Jasim al-Sani, Kuwait
- 84) Proselytizer Nasif Nasser, Palestine
- 85) Proselytizer Nadhir Alan, Turkey
- 86) Sheikh Huza bin Sa'ad al-Asouri, Yemen
- 87) Dr. Hamam Sa'id, Jordan
- 88) **Dr. Walid Musa'id al-Tabatibai, Kuwait**
- 89) Proselytizer Yusuf al-Jababali, Tunisia
- 90) Proselytizer Yusuf Muhammad al-Barahimi