



The Meir Amit Intelligence and
Terrorism Information Center

January 26, 2011

The Turkish IHH, which has a record of supporting terrorist groups, has close relations with Turkey's AKP government. The Turkish regime gave it governmental support, including logistic and political propaganda assistance for the Mavi Marmara flotilla.



Turkish prime minister Erdogan visits the wounded aboard the *Mavi Marmara*.¹

¹ <http://www.kanalturk.com.tr/haber-detay/27756-erdogan-i-alnindan-optu-haberi.aspx>.

Overview

1. **The Turkish IHH, the moving spirit behind the flotilla which ended in the violent confrontation aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, has close relations with the upper echelons of the Turkish regime, sharing a similar radical Islamic ideology. The contacts are manifested in three areas:**

1) **In the political-strategic realm, the Erdogan regime collaborates closely with IHH.**² Their collaboration is based on a common Islamic worldview, the concept that IHH can be used as a tool to implement Turkish foreign policy and IHH's readiness to serve the current government's strategy of **turning Turkey into an influential regional power**, including at the expense of its relations with Israel. That strategy **was manifested by the political and practical support received by Hamas** (the transfer of funds and other aid to Hamas, support for convoys and flotillas, and hosting Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood activities on Turkish soil³).

2) **In the realm of internal Turkish politics, IHH is a socio-political powerbase for the AKP**, Turkey's ruling party and, according to several reports, helped it get elected. Their close relations have led to the **AKP's appointing senior members of IHH to government positions**, (about a quarter of the IHH senior leadership holds or held positions or were candidates for AKP positions!). The AKP gave the flotilla propaganda and moral support and the Turkish media also reported that AKP parliament members intended to board the *Mavi Marmara*. However their participation was canceled at the last minute.

3) **On the personal level, IHH leader Bülent Yıldırım maintains close relations with the heads of the Turkish regime** and is warmly supported by Turkish Prime Minister Erdogan. According to statements from passengers aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, corroborated by ITIC information, **the flotilla set out with Erdogan's full knowledge and agreement**, despite the fact that it was clear Israel would not allow the flotilla to reach the Gaza Strip.

2. The close collaboration between the Turkish administration and IHH was also manifested **by the support given by the Turkish government to the flotilla**. According to the minutes of a meeting held by the representatives of the coalition which organized the flotilla two weeks

² On June 8, 2010, the popular Turkish opposition newspaper Hürriyet wrote that despite the fact that IHH is classified as an NGO, it is really a GNGO, that is, a governmental non-governmental organization. <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=much-to-ponder-for-turkey-and-israel-once-the-dust-settles-2010-06-07>.

³ For further information, see the July 11, 2010 bulletin "[Internal Turkish criticism of the Islamic regime for enabling Hamas and the Muslim Brotherhood to conduct political-propaganda activity on Turkish soil and sway public opinion against Israel and the West.](#)"

before it sailed, **IHH vice president Yavuz Dede expressly stated that the flotilla had received support directly from the prime minister and several ministers**, and that the support was given openly and not behind the scenes, as opposed to that given during the initial planning stages. **The Turkish administration's support included placing governmental capabilities** at IHH disposal (logistics, funds, satellite communications, the use of the Istanbul and Antalya harbors). The Turkish government also **provided it with political propaganda support** internally and internationally.

3. So far the Turkish government has given its full political and propaganda support to the IHH in the United Nations and toward the United States and Israel. It has done so despite the fact that the IHH has a record of supporting terrorism, which has caused the United States to examine the possibility of designating it as a terrorist organization (Germany has already designated the local IHH as a terrorist organization). **Behind the United States' examination are the IHH's past support for global jihad, its involvement in the foiled Year 2000 terrorist attack on Los Angeles International Airport**, its extremist anti-Western anti-Israeli Islamist character and the support it gives Hamas, which is designated as a terrorist organization by the United States.⁴

4. This document is based on information, collected since the last flotilla, regarding the close connections between IHH and the highest echelons of the Turkish regime. It includes reports from the Turkish and American media both before and after the flotilla, documents seized aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, statements from passengers questioned in Israel, additional information received from reliable security sources, and a book written by a Turkish journalist who was aboard the *Mavi Marmara* and published in Turkey.

The Governmental Sphere



Bülent Arınç, Turkish vice prime minister, greets the flotilla participants on the plane returning them to Turkey (Photo from the haberler.com website). Other senior administration figures, such as Ahmet Davutoğlu, the foreign minister, were among those who welcomed the wounded Turks.

⁴ At the beginning of December, IHH leader Bülent Yıldırım was interviewed by the Islamic Turkish newspaper Star, which dealt with the United States' intention to declare IHH a terrorist organization. **In the interview, which had clearly anti-Semitic overtones, he claimed that the "Zionists" (a term used by IHH to mean Jewish) controlled the United States and its president, Congress, administration and media.**

5. Under AKP leadership, Turkey adopted a regional foreign policy which is active and assertive, and reflects great self-assurance and a sense of power and worth.

The policy strives to strengthen Turkey's relations with its regional neighbors (including Iran, Syria, Iraq and Sudan) to provide it with strategic depth and turn it into an influential regional power.⁵ The policy also reflects a sense of historical importance, which, in the eyes of the AKP, integrates into its Islamist identity.

6. Turkey's foreign policy makes use of NGOs to advance its influence and objectives, and IHH is a clear example of that use. IHH is linked to a Turkish governmental body called the Center for International Cooperation and Development (TIKA). Established in 1992, it is subordinate to the prime minister's office and is an arm of the Turkish administration in the Muslim world in general and throughout Turkish-speaking Muslim world in particular. The head of TIKA in recent years, Hakan Fidan was appointed in May 2010 as chief of the Turkish intelligence and security service (MIT). In the past TIKA used IHH to strengthen the Turkish position in Iraq by distributing aid to the local population⁶ (similar to IHH modus operandi in many Muslim countries, **meant to further political and ideological goals through humanitarian assistance**).

7. IHH views itself as supporting Turkey's foreign policy. That was made evident in an interview with Bülent Yildirim printed in the Islamist journal *Anlayis* on February 11, 2010, in which he said that "...in the past, Turkey's foreign policy was based on an ethnic [Turkish] construct, while today it is based on diverse activities. **Everyone admits that we [IHH] have made a great contribution.** During the last term [of the government in office], **everyone expressed their esteem for our activities, which were beneficial and were our contribution to [Turkish] foreign policy. We think alike on many issues and point out the same things. There are many matters in which we work together.**"⁷

8. For that reason, IHH has often been praised by Erdogan's administration. In 2005 and 2007 it received awards for excellence of service from Bülent Arınç, currently Turkish vice prime minister, when he was speaker of the parliament.⁸ IHH leader Bülent Yildirim maintains a close relationship with senior government

⁵ Erdogan emphasized the themes of Turkey's centrality and importance in two articles written by him and published by Newsweek Magazine (January 17, 2011) and the Turkish newspaper *Zaman* (November 14, 2010). In addition, see Svante E. Cornell's article, "Turkish Hubris: Has the AKP Government Overreached in its Foreign Policy?" (<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/turkey/2010/100607A.html>.) The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and the Silk Road Studies Program constitute a joint Transatlantic Research and Policy Center. The Center is affiliated with the Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies of Johns Hopkins University. The joint Center strives to promote study and policy-related work on the region through five main channels: Impartial research; publications and dissemination; forums and conferences; teaching; and acting as a "switchboard" for knowledge and information (<http://www.silkroadstudies.org/new/inside/mission/index.htm>). Head of research and author of the article is the Swedish Dr. Svante E. Cornell, an expert in the policy and security of the Caucasus, Turkey and Central Asia.

⁶ Svante E. Cornell, "Turkish Hubris."

⁷ <http://www.odatv.com/n.php?n=ihh-mit-listesine-girdi-mi-1507101200>, July 15, 2010.

⁸ <http://www.odatv.com/n.php?n=ihh-mit-listesine-girdi-mi-1507101200>, July 15, 2010

leaders, including Prime Minister Erdogan. According to statements from passengers aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, the flotilla set sail with the full knowledge and agreement of Erdogan, who **regarded it as a way of advancing his status in Turkey as well as in the Arab-Muslim world.** In addition to IHH, other Islamist organizations connected to the Turkish administration participated in the flotilla.

9. The involvement of the Turkish administration gradually increased as preparations were made for the flotilla, changing from its initial behind-the-scenes involvement to overt involvement during the later stages of preparation and after the violent confrontation aboard the *Mavi Marmara*. Evidence can be found in the minutes (seized aboard the *Mavi Marmara*) of the meeting held by representatives of the coalition which organized the flotilla. At the meeting held on May 16, two weeks before the flotilla set sail, Yavuz Dede, IHH vice president, who chaired the meeting, said that **"Government did to announce openly support for mission at first; but last few days, getting direct support from PM and other ministers. During f2f discussions, openly said that if we have any difficulties, gov [sic] will extend what support they can."**

10. Some expressions of the support the Turkish administration gave the flotilla:

1) Providing IHH with governmental capabilities, expressed by logistical support: Logistical support included allowing the *Mavi Marmara* to use Turkish satellite communications, allowing the flotilla to use the harbors in Istanbul and Antalya, **and in our assessment, also giving them financial aid.** The Turkish administration also provided **political-propaganda protection**, which included defaming Israel and exerting pressure on it. It is also **possible that the administration helped IHH purchase the *Mavi Marmara*. In April 2010 the *Mavi Marmara* was sold to IHH by a company called IDO (Istanbul Sea Bus Company), which is owned by the Istanbul municipality⁹ and run by a member of the AKP (Prime Minister Erdogan was mayor of Istanbul between 1994 and 1998). On June 6, according to the Turkish newspaper *Aydinlik*, IDO insisted on selling the ship at a loss.** It is reasonable to assume that purchasing the *Mavi Marmara* and two cargo ships would be extremely expensive and involve sums of money human rights organizations would have a hard time raising, and thus it is possible that at least some of the funds were covered by the Turkish administration, directly or indirectly.¹⁰

⁹ In one of the computers seized aboard the *Mavi Marmara* **there was note that IHH had bought the vessel from the Turkish company IDO.** The IDO, the Istanbul Deniz Otobusleri, was founded by the Istanbul municipality in 1987 to provide fast, convenient, safe transportation for the residents of the city. In 1995 the company, the largest of its kind in the world, merged with the City Line Ferry Services, and is currently the main provider of water transportation in Istanbul and the Sea of Marmara.

¹⁰ It is also possible that in addition to the help IHH received from the Turkish administration, it received funds from pro-Palestinian pro-Hamas organizations in Britain. **According to the Turkish website *odatv.com*, Muhammad**

2) **Providing moral and propaganda support before the *Mavi Marmara* set sail for the Gaza Strip:** A short time before the *Mavi Marmara* set sail on May 15, 2010, at a conference held for the "sake of Palestine" AKP minister without portfolio Faruk Çelik expressed support for "the ships IHH intends to send to the Gaza Strip." He also strongly attacked Israeli threats regarding its intention to harm the flotilla.¹¹

3) **From the outset, Istanbul was the nerve center of the intensive preparations for the flotilla** led by IHH, which began several months before it set sail. **The *Mavi Marmara* left the Istanbul harbor after a well-attended ceremony which received extensive media coverage.** A similar ceremony was held in Antalya.

4) **The official governmental welcome for the flotilla participants:** According to an article published in the New York Times on July 16, 2010, when leaders of the charity returned home after nine Turks died in the Israeli raid, **"they were warmly embraced by top Turkish officials** [i.e., senior AKP figures], said Huseyin Oruc, deputy director of [IHH], who was aboard the flotilla."¹² According to Oruc, "'When we flew back to Turkey, I was afraid we would be in trouble for what happened, **but the first thing we saw when the plane's door opened in Istanbul was Bülent Arınç, the deputy prime minister, in tears, he said in an interview. 'We have good coordination with Mr. Erdogan,' he added.**"¹³ However, the Turkish government, in an effort to lower its media profile, did not participate in the recent events for the relaunching of the *Mavi Marmara* on the anniversary of Operation Cast Lead.



Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoğlu greets one of the wounded operatives (Photo from the haberler.com website).

Sawalha, a Hamas activist in Britain who was involved in organizing the flotilla, was present at the purchase of the *Mavi Marmara* (which suggests that money from Britain may have helped pay for the vessel).

¹¹ <http://www.odatv.com/n.php?n=ihh-mit-listesine-girdi-mi-1507101200>, July 15, 2010.

¹² http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/16/world/middleeast/16turkey.html?_r=1

¹³ http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/16/world/middleeast/16turkey.html?_r=1

At the Internal Turkish Political Level



Senior IHH figure Zeyad Aslan, who also serves as an AKP member of the Turkish parliament, speaks from a podium in front of an AKP banner.¹⁴

11. IHH has its roots in the conservative Islamic Mili Görüş movement, the parent of the Islamic Welfare Party which the AKP and the extremist Islamist Saadet party splintered from in 2001. Given its provenance, IHH is a clearly Islamist movement, which in the past was considered suspect and investigated by the Turkish authorities because of its involvement in providing support for Islamist groups (including those with ties to the global jihad) in combat zones such as Bosnia, Chechnya and Afghanistan. Ideologically IHH is or was originally based on the worldview of a central order of the Sufi tradition of Islamic. The order, called Naqshbandiyya, has millions of adherents, including senior figures of the Turkish government.

12. IHH maintains close relations with the AKP, relations which rest on a firm socio-political base. According to statements from a correspondent aboard the *Mavi Marmara* who has good relations with Bülent Yildirim and the senior figures in the Turkish administration, Prime Minister Erdogan's power base is founded on IHH activists, and without their help he could not have been elected. According to the New York Times, "[m]any of the 60,000 people the charity claims as members come from the religious merchant class that helped Mr. Erdogan sweep to power."¹⁵

13. The close AKP-IHH relations are also expressed by the official positions to which the AKP has appointed senior IHH figures. According to an ITIC examination of the 21 members of the IHH leadership, five hold or held official positions to which they were appointed by the AKP:¹⁶

- 1) Zeyid Aslan: AKP member of the Turkish parliament and one of IHH's founders. He was born in Erbaa, a city in central Turkey, in 1965. He practiced law and

¹⁴ <http://www.zeyidaslan.com>, September 27, 2010

¹⁵ http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/16/world/middleeast/16turkey.html?_r=1

¹⁶ According to a list appearing on the IHH website.

participated in establishing various civilian organizations.¹⁷ **In 2007 he was chosen by the AKP to serve as chairman of the (pro-Hamas) Turkey-Palestine Interparliamentary Friendship Group**, and in that capacity became known as a leader in defying Israel.



Senior IHH figure Zeyid Aslan shakes hands with Turkish President Abdullah Gül¹⁸

2) **Mehmet Emin Sen: A former AKP mayor** in the central Anatolian township of Mihalgazi.¹⁹

3) **Ahmet Faruk Unsal: Was an AKP member of Parliament from 2002 to 2007.**²⁰ He is currently head of an Islamist organization called **Mazlumder**,²¹ whose activists were aboard the *Mavi Marmara*. In early 2010 the organization tried to have arrest warrants issued for Israeli Chief of Staff Gabi Ashkenazi and Defense Minister Ehud Barak before a scheduled visit to Turkey.



Ahmet Faruk Unsal speaks at a demonstration for the release of Izzet Shahin, IHH representative in Judea and Samaria who was detained by Israel.²²

¹⁷ <http://www.zeyidaslan.com>, September 2010.

¹⁸ <http://www.zeyidaslan.com>, September 27, 2010.

¹⁹ http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/16/world/middleeast/16turkey.html?_r=1

²⁰ http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/16/world/middleeast/16turkey.html?_r=1

²¹ <http://www.haberler.com/mazlumder-baskani-unsal-darbecilerin-uzerindeki-2233877-haberi>, September 13, 2010.

²² <http://www.birikimhaber.com/Haber/Gundem/11052010-IHHli-Sahine-Ozgurluk-Yuruyusu-.php>, May 11, 2010.

4) **Ali Yandir**: An IHH trustee and a senior manager at the Istanbul City Municipality Transportation Corporation, which sold the *Mavi Marmara* to IHH. **In 2004 he was an AKP candidate for the mayor in Istanbul's Esenler District**²³ (the municipality of Istanbul, with its 14 million residents, is divided into regional sub-municipalities).

5) **Ahmet Selim Koroglu**: One of IHH's directors. **He is chairman of the AKP branch in the Basaksehir district of Istanbul.**²⁴

14. Another senior IHH figure is **Eyup Fatsa**, an AKP member of parliament from the Ordu district. Until at least 1999 he was the IHH chairman.²⁵ He is **considered responsible for the connection between IHH and the AKP, and is the IHH person responsible for Europe.**²⁶ We have no information about whether or not he currently holds the same positions.



Eyup Fatsa, AKP member of parliament,²⁷ IHH chairman until at least 1999.

AKP Involvement in the Viva Palestina Convoy and the IHH-Led Flotilla

15. **AKP members participated in the Viva Palestina** convoy led by George Galloway (December 2009-January 2010); 250 of the convoy's participants, about half the total number, were Turks. The IHH operatives who participated in the convoy were involved in the confrontation with the Egyptian security forces. The Turkish media reported that **several senior AKP members had joined the convoy, including Murat Marjan**, an important figure in the party and **chairman of the Turkish parliament's foreign affairs committee.**²⁸ They also reported that several AKP ministers participated in the convoy.²⁹

²³ http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/16/world/middleeast/16turkey.html?_r=1.

²⁴ http://www.belediyebulleteni.com/basaksehir-ak-parti-ilce-baskanligi-bahcesehir-siv_haberi_2306.html, January 3, 2009.

²⁵ <http://www.odatv.com/n.php?n=ihh-mit-listesine-girdi-mi-1507101200>, July 15, 2010.

²⁶ <http://haber.sol.org.tr/devlet-ve-siyaset/akp-yardim-konvoyundan-ne-umuyordu-haberi-29067>.

²⁷ http://www.tbmm.gov.tr/develop/owa/haber_portal_aciklama?p1=23942, May 2, 2005.

²⁸ <http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/n.php?n=much-to-ponder-for-turkey-and-israel-once-the-dust-settles-2010-06-07>, Hürriyet, June 8, 2010.

16. Senior members of the administration and of the AKP gave their blessings to the Viva Palestina convoy. Senior IHH figures, including Bülent Yildirim (who took an active part in the convoy) attended the ceremony held Istanbul when the convoy arrived. During the ceremony senior IHH figures met with parliament speaker **Mehmet Ali Sahin and deputy secretary general Abdulkadir Aksu**. Sahin gave his blessing to the members of the convoy and wished them a good journey. Aksu also showered praise on them.³⁰

17. **The AKP gave moral and propaganda support to IHH during and after the flotilla.** During the ceremony organized for the *Mavi Marmara* before it sailed on May 15, 2010, IHH leader Bülent Yildirim thanked the **AKP and the Saadet and BBP parties (all of them Islamist) for aiding the flotilla**. Seracettin Karayağiz, an AKP member of parliament from the Mush district said, "[t]he Israeli weapons cannot be more powerful than human determination. Israel kills a thousand people, and after that they stand up and claim there is Islamic terrorism. We can't accept that."³¹

18. The Turkish media and a book published about the *Mavi Marmara* reported that **AKP Parliament members intended to board the Mavi Marmara** but changed their minds at the last minute. They were warned by the Turkish government not to join lest there be a confrontation.³² According to an article by the Turkish journalist Şefik Dinç, who wrote *The Bloodstained Mavi Marmara*, the MIT (the central Turkish intelligence agency) issued a warning to the government, and based on the warning the members of the Turkish Parliament changed their minds about boarding the ship.³³

²⁹ <http://haber.sol.org.tr/devlet-ve-siyaset/akp-yardim-konvoyundan-ne-umuyordu-haberi-29067>

³⁰ <http://www.odatv.com/n.php?n=ihh-mit-listesine-girdi-mi-1507101200>, July 15, 2010.

³¹ <http://www.odatv.com/n.php?n=ihh-mit-listesine-girdi-mi-1507101200>, July 15, 2010.

³² <http://www.odatv.com/n.php?n=ihh-mit-listesine-girdi-mi-1507101200>, July 15, 2010. According to a New York Times article published on July 16, 2010, an official source who insisted on anonymity said that some ten Turkish parliamentarians were supposed to be aboard the *Mavi Marmara* but decided not to sail at the last minute, following a warning, http://www.nytimes.com/2010/07/16/world/middleeast/16turkey.html?_r=1

³³ Şefik Dinç, *The Bloodstained Mavi Marmara*, p. 78. He says that Huseyin Oruc, Bülent Yildirim's deputy, denied that the MIT warned either IHH or the AKP (pp. 73-74).