



The Meir Amit Intelligence and
Terrorism Information Center

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IHH and its leader, Bülent Yildirim, conduct a propaganda campaign to prepare the ground for the flotilla planned for the end of June. The campaign's sometimes contradictory themes are aimed at glorifying IHH and its determination, and deterring Israel from acting against it, while presenting a moderate image to the West.



Bülent Yildirim (center) holds a press conference at the IHH headquarters in an Istanbul suburb: "If Israel is smart it won't interfere in the second flotilla" (IHH website, May 20, 2011).

Overview

1. **In recent weeks the Turkish IHH has been conducting a propaganda campaign to prepare the ground for the flotilla expected to sail at the end of June 2011.** The campaign themes are the glorification of the flotilla and IHH, which plays a central role in its organization. Other – occasionally contradictory – themes are aimed at deterring Israel from stopping the flotilla while allaying the fears of the international community regarding the possible repetition of the violence evinced aboard the *Mavi Marmara*.

2. Senior IHH figures Bülent Yildirim and Hüseyin Oruç provided statistical data for the upcoming flotilla. They claim that **there will be 1500 passengers from more than 100 countries and 22 international organizations. The flotilla will consist of 15 vessels, two of them Turkish** (the *Mavi Marmara*, the flotilla's flagship, and a cargo ship). The *Mavi Marmara* will carry 500 passengers, 100 of them Turkish, half of those media personnel. **In our assessment the data do not accurately reflect the flotilla's present state of preparations but rather the goals IHH and the other organizations seek to reach.**

3. IHH is also using the campaign to foster and glamorize the memory of the nine shaheeds, the operatives killed aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, and instill hatred for Israel. IHH also participated in the Nakba Day events (with its Islamist confederates, a Turkish delegation was sent to Jordan. The delegation carried a banner bearing pictures of the dead operatives and its members were involved in violent confrontations with the Jordanian security forces.¹). In addition, **IHH and its confederates** (the Turkish Islamist organizations participating in the flotilla) **carried out a series of demonstrations and media events in Turkey between May 22 and 31 to mark the anniversary of the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla.**

4. The IHH propaganda campaign has the following themes:

1) **Deterring Israel: In incendiary speeches, IHH stressed its readiness to sacrifice "shaheeds" to achieve its goals and warned Israel to be prepared for a "surprise"** [possibly a hint the organization was planning to send a plane to the Gaza Strip]. By "deterrence," his remark was made in the context of an Israeli attempt to stop the flotilla, in which case **it will stay on the high seas for an extended period of time** (participants were told to take a trip of at least three weeks into consideration). During that time, according to Bülent Yildirim, the flotilla organizers will be able to put into motion protest demonstrations which will isolate Israel throughout the world. **The Turkish foreign minister supported the IHH deterrence, saying**

¹ A bulletin about the Turkish delegation to Jordan is currently being translated. Readers of Hebrew can find it now at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/Hebrew/heb_n/pdf/ipc_195.pdf.

that Turkey would "give the necessary response to any repeated act of provocation by Israel on the high seas."

2) **Allaying the international community's fears of a repetition of the *Mavi Marmara* violence:** The campaign stresses that **the passengers will not have weapons** ("Not even one penknife," an expression used by Bülent Yildirim when interviewed during preparations for the confrontation aboard the *Mavi Marmara*). One senior IHH figure said the organization was willing to have the flotilla's cargo inspected by UN or European observers (during the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla Turkish authorities stressed that the passengers' luggage had been inspected as they boarded the ship in Istanbul, while in reality large quantities of weapons and military equipment were brought aboard).

3) **IHH "independence" and the non-involvement of the Turkish government in the flotilla:** On May 20 Bülent Yildirim held a press conference where he again claimed IHH was an "independent" organization, and that **the Turkish government was not involved in its affairs**. Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish foreign minister, repeated the claim. **In reality, IHH and the flotilla project receive political, propaganda and logistical support from the Turkish government**, although it is not publicly acknowledged. That support was made clear in **an NTV interview Davutoglu, where he warned Israel that "...Turkey will give the necessary response to any repeated act of provocation by Israel on the high seas."**

5. Despite the propaganda efforts of the flotilla's organizers in general and IHH in particular, **central institutions in the international community, among them the UN, the European Union, and the United States, have called for the flotilla not to be sent**, describing it as an unnecessary provocation, and stressing the need to transfer humanitarian assistance through the appropriate channels. In addition, Lloyds of London announced it would not insure the flotilla's ships.

Bülent Yildirim's May 20 press conference

6. **On May 20, IHH leader Bülent Yildirim held a press conference at IHH headquarters in the Istanbul suburb of Fatih.** He gave a speech about the flotilla expected to set sail during the last week of June, in which **IHH would again play an important role**. He made the following points (according to the IHH website in Turkish²):

1) Regarding the flotilla participants: **About 1,500 people are expected to participate in the flotilla from more than 100 countries and 22 international organizations. They will sail aboard 15 vessels.**³ According to Bülent Yildirim,

² IHH website. The main points were also reported by Agence France-Presse from Istanbul, May 20, 2011.

³ The Jordanian flotilla committee announced there would be 13 ships. According to the announcement, deliberations were being held regarding the purchase of another ship with Arab funds. It also stated that the Jordanian

"We are not increasing the number of ships participating because **there will be more flotillas in the future.**"

2) **The passengers will not have weapons in their possession:** Bülent Yildirim emphasized that the passengers would be unarmed and that "**we will not even have a penknife** [a statement repeated twice], so that the entire world will support the flotilla."



Bülent Yildirim during the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla: "We won't even have little penknives in our pockets." The picture shows new knives, still in their wrappings, found aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, some of the weapons prepared for the violent confrontation.

3) **Response to an Israeli attempt to halt the flotilla:** Bülent Yildirim called on the Israeli authorities **not to interfere with the flotilla** and to allow it to reach the Gaza Strip. He said if Israel halted the flotilla and did not allow it to reach the Gaza Strip **the ships would continue sailing on the high seas** ("We will remain on the high seas for many days.") **with much publicizing and raising of international awareness:** "The streets will be filled with demonstrators rising up against Israel if the ships are harmed, lovers of freedom around the world will again fill the squares and hatred for Israel will increase."

4) **A "surprise" is being planned:** Bülent Yildirim said that the flotilla is only part of a larger action, and that **a surprise is being planned for Israel:** "This flotilla is part of a much larger action. We are still at work preparing the surprise."

5) **Praise for the Turkish government:** Bülent Yildirim said that a representative of the American administration had asked the Turkish government to prevent the flotilla from sailing. However, he claimed, **IHH was a civilian organization which made its decisions independently.** He said Israel was exerting pressure on many countries and that Israel's supporters were using force against IHH activists, but that "**Turkey has already passed the test on that issue.**" He thanked the Turkish government for not having acted like certain leaders around the world and **had not**

committee would contribute 20% of the cost of the vessel, estimated at €1,600,000 (Al-Sabil, May 23, 2011). An IHH spokesman told Reuters that the ships would depart from European ports during the third week of June and would be joined by IHH during the voyage (Reuters, May 17, quoted from the Jerusalem Post, May 18, 2011).

agreed to interfere with the affairs of a civilian body. He said it showed Turkey was a more advanced country than the United States when it came to the struggle for freedom.

Remarks made by senior IHH figure Hüseyin Oruç

7. **Hüseyin Oruç**, responsible for IHH's public relations (who was also aboard the *Mavi Marmara*), was interviewed by the Turkish paper *Hürriyet* on May 19 about the **planned flotilla**. He said the *Mavi Marmara* would carry **500 passengers, 400 of whom would not be Turkish, and 100 Turks, 50 of whom would be media correspondents**. He also said **IHH was willing to have the ships inspected by UN or European Parliament observers**.⁴



The renovated Mavi Marmara, again the flotilla flagship (IHH website, May 22, 2011). About 500 participants are expected.

The significance of the remarks made by Bülent Yildirim and Hüseyin Oruç

Deterring Israel and allaying the fears of the international community

8. To deter Israel from interfering with the flotilla, **Bülent Yildirim has made various incendiary speeches** in which he stressed IHH's determination to proceed with the flotilla, **even at the price of additional shaheeds**⁵ (a hint at his readiness to confront Israel, even it means sacrificing lives). In addition, he has warned that should Israel try to stop the flotilla, **the organizers intended to keep the ships on the high seas for a**

⁴ Hüseyin Oruç's call and the entire flotilla idea were rejected by a senior UN figure. On May 19 Robert Serry, UN special envoy to the Middle East, said that **all assistance and legitimate merchandise** meant for the Gaza Strip had to **enter through official crossings and proper, established channels**, in accordance with the International Quartet and the committee for contributors to the Palestinian Authority (the Ad Hoc Liaison Committee, AHLC). Serry emphasized the importance of the **struggle against the smuggling of weapons** into the Gaza Strip, saying that the UN Secretary General was following with concern reports about additional potential flotillas to the Gaza Strip, and that **as far as Ban-ki Moon was concerned, another flotilla would be "provocative and unnecessary."** He also said that **the Secretary General called on all the relevant governments to exert their influence to prevent more flotillas, which had the potential for escalation.**

⁵ For further information, see the May 18, 2011 ITIC bulletin, "IHH, which plays a central role in organizing the upcoming flotilla to the Gaza Strip, joined Turkish Islamist organizations in denouncing Osama bin Laden's killing by America " at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ipc_e190.pdf.

long period of time, which they would use to initiate protest actions to isolate Israel throughout the world. He used similar themes in a speech made to supporters in Istanbul two months before the previous flotilla.⁶ **An indication of the practical preparations for such a scenario is that volunteers from NGOs around the world who plan to join IHH's upcoming flotilla were asked to allocate at least three weeks to it.**

9. On the other hand, Bülent Yildirim and Hüseyin Oruç are trying **to allay the international community's fears of a potentially violent confrontation**, claiming that the passengers will not be carrying weapons and that **IHH is willing to have the cargo inspected by European or UN observers.** They also claimed there would be fewer Turks than participated in the previous flotilla, and that half of them would represent the media. **In our assessment, based on past experience, skepticism is in order for the following reasons:**

1) Before the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla IHH leader Bülent Yildirim and other spokesmen also made contradictory remarks: **On the one hand**, they represented themselves as peace and human rights activists throughout, including during the flotilla. For example, Turkish correspondent Şefik Dinç, in his book *The Bloodstained Mavi Marmara*, wrote that Bülent Yildirim had declared at a press conference that "we will not even have a penknife, we are a civilian, humane movement" (p. 39) [when in fact aboard the *Mavi Marmara* there was a wide variety of weapons prepared for fighting the IDF]. **On the other hand**, speaking before an audience of Islamist supporters two months before the flotilla set sail, Bülent Yildirim emphasized IHH's determination to reach the Gaza Strip, no matter how, even if Israel employed force against one of the ships.

2) **Regarding IHH's agreement regarding an inspection of the passengers' luggage**, for the previous flotilla IHH also claimed that the luggage of the passengers aboard the *Mavi Marmara* had been inspected by the Turkish authorities as they boarded the ship in Istanbul. In reality, the "inspection," if it was indeed carried out, **was meaningless, because many weapons were loaded aboard the ship, as was military equipment and tools for making improvised weapons.** In addition, based on familiarity with the violent modus operandi of IHH operatives, as evidenced by their past confrontations with Egyptian and Jordanian security forces, **it can be assumed that operatives belonging to IHH and their Islamist**

⁶ On March 31, 2010, Bülent Yildirim presented three possible scenarios: that the ship would be attacked, that it would be allowed to enter the Gaza Strip and that it would be prevented from proceeding. If it were prevented from proceeding, the passengers would remain aboard for a long period of time (a number of weeks). In such a case, "all the civilian organizations of the countries [involved] will demonstrate and protest. The issue will be raised in the various parliaments...**The longer we stay at sea the more time we will gain. All the officials of the countries [involved] will go into action. After that the countries friendly to Israel will separate themselves from it.**" At the launching of the *Mavi Marmara* in Istanbul on May 23, 2010, Bülent Yildirim gave another incendiary speech in which he called on Israel to manage the crisis carefully, otherwise, he warned, "you will be isolated in the world and harm yourselves."

confederates, some of whom have experience from previous confrontations, will be able to confront IDF soldiers with improvised weapons or even without previously preparing weapons, if they are instructed to do so.

The "surprise" IHH is preparing for Israel

10. Bülent Yildirim did not specifically mention what the "surprise" would be. In our assessment it may possibly mean **sending a plane to the Gaza Strip**. In a speech he gave on April 7, 2011, at a memorial service for the operatives killed aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, he said that **the Gaza Strip would also be reached by air**. He said the organization was in the process of acquiring a plane, which would also depart for the Gaza Strip. The status of activating the plan is so far unknown.

The Turkish regime's involvement in the flotilla

11. In his May 20 speech, Bülent Yildirim **again claimed that IHH was an "independent" organization**, and the Turkey did not interfere in its affairs. A similar claim was made by the organizers of the *Mavi Marmara* flotilla, who represented it as the fruit of a network of NGOs around the world with no governmental support. However, in reality, **the flotilla project has received support from the government of Turkey** (as stated in a document found aboard the *Mavi Marmara*), **although the Turks prefer a low media profile**. The support is expressed in the logistical and financial support given to IHH, and by the political and propaganda defense it receives.⁷

12. A clear indication of the political-propaganda support given the flotilla by the Turkish government can be found in the **NTV interview of Ahmet Davutoglu, the Turkish foreign minister** (according to *Hürriyet*, May 21), **which hinted at a threat to Israel**. He said "It should be known that Turkey will give the necessary response to any repeated act of provocation by Israel on the high seas. Those who believe Turkey should take certain steps to stop [the new flotilla] must first warn Israel not to repeat the human tragedy it caused last year."

13. **He also claimed that the Turkish government did not encourage convoys, but that Turkey could not give orders to civilian organizations**. He said the international community should support the internal Palestinian reconciliation, because it would remove the conditions used by Israel to justify the "siege," and there would no longer be a need for assistance convoys to the Gaza Strip. On another occasion he said that "the flotilla is not the root of the problem," but rather **"the root of the problem is the embargo [sic] [of the**

⁷ For further information see the May 18, 2011 ITIC bulletin, "IHH, which plays a central role in organizing the upcoming flotilla to the Gaza Strip, joined Turkish Islamist organizations in denouncing Osama bin Laden's killing by America. IHH leader Bülent Yildirim again expressed readiness to sacrifice shaheeds to achieve the flotilla's objective, calling on Israel not to attack the ships." at http://www.terrorism-info.org.il/malam_multimedia/English/eng_n/pdf/ipc_e190.pdf

Gaza Strip]." Sending a message to Israel, he said that it had to obey international law in international waters. He also called on Israel to support Palestinian unity and thus make it possible to remove the "embargo" of the Gaza Strip immediately (Todayszaman website, May 20, 2011).

Propaganda displays in Turkey for the anniversary of the events aboard the Mavi Marmara

14. As part of the propaganda campaign intended to pave the way for the new flotilla, **IHH and its confederates are planning a series of propaganda events** leading up to May 31, the anniversary of the *Mavi Marmara*.⁸ Special emphasis will be put on **fostering and glorifying the memory of the nine IHH operatives killed aboard the *Mavi Marmara*, and inculcating hatred for Israel within the Turkish public**. The events culminated in a mass rally in Istanbul's Taksim Square on May 30, and a press conference held by IHH and its confederates on May 31. IHH asked the NGOs connected to it to hold similar events around the globe.



As the Freedom Flotilla Family we did not forget our nine brothers who were killed last year by Zionist soldiers. We are going to organize the following programs in Turkey:

- 22 May 2011 -Raising Banners in Football Matches**
- 23 May 2011 -Starting the photo exhibitions in schools and public places.**
- 23 May 2011 -Starting the memorial programs in schools and public places.**
- 25 May 2011 -Starting the memorial programs in the cities of martyrs of Mavi Marmara.**
- 26 May 2011 -Memorial program in Blue Mosque, in Istanbul.**
- 28 May 2011 -Kite flying program in the point where Mavi Marmara left to Gaza last year.**
- 30 May 2011 -Mass rally in Taksim square. We expect tens of thousands.**
- 31 May 2011 -Memorial programs in the early morning in the graveyards of the martyrs.**
- 31 May 2011 -Press conference by IHH and other NGOs in Turkey.**

Events marking the sailing of the *Mavi Marmara* and the operatives killed

15. The planned events have been attended by radical Islamic networks, which have threatened to settle accounts with Israel because of the nine operatives who were killed. Nur al-Din Shirin, leader of a Turkish Islamist group (which participated in Nakba Day events in

⁸ The events in Turkey are planned to take place on or about events in other areas, such as the 11th anniversary of the Israeli withdrawal from Lebanon and Nakba Day events, to commemorate the Arab defeat of the Six Day War (June 5-7).

Jordan and confronted the Jordanian security forces), told the Islamist newspaper *Velfecr* on May 20 that "...On the anniversary of the killing of the shaheeds aboard the *Mavi Marmara* and the barbaric conduct of the Israelis, we will show them that we have not forgotten the blood spilled there, and we will settle accounts..."



The Turkish delegation to the Nakba Day events in Jordan leads a Palestinian-Jordanian march to the Allenby Bridge. The banner bears the pictures of the nine operatives killed aboard the *Mavi Marmara*. When the march met Jordanian security forces at a roadblock a violent confrontation broke out (*Velfecr.com* website, May 19, 2011). The banner reads "The flag of our shaheeds flies all over the world."