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# 'Flotilla's aim was to open sea corridor for Hamas'

## Top security analyst says Turkish group was 'real force' behind ships

• By YAAKOV LAPPIN

A key strategic interest that motivated a Turkish Islamist organization to launch the Gaza flotilla effort was to provide Hamas with access to a sea route, ultimately enabling it to import long-range missiles to target Israel, a senior security analyst said on Tuesday.

Ely Karmon of the Institute for Counterterrorism at the Interdisciplinary Center, Herzliya, said that "the real force behind" the flotilla was "several Hamas front organizations and especially the Turkish IHH (Insani Yardim Vakfi, IHH, 'humanitarian relief fund'), a radical Islamic organization close to the Muslim Brotherhood. IHH supports Hamas materially and its strategy of armed struggle, and [was] outlawed by Israel in 2008."

The flotilla's aim was to break the Israeli blockade on Gaza, thereby allowing Hamas free access to the Gaza harbor and enabling it to import long-range projectiles, as Hizbullah has been doing in recent years in Lebanon, Karmon said.

"Since the 2006 Second Lebanon War... Hizbullah has rearmed itself with more than 40,000 missiles and rockets, which cover all of Israel... Israel cannot permit itself to have a Hizbullah-like entity in its southern border, 60 km. from its

heavily populated central region," Karmon added.

Hamas also requires access to the port "to provide the Palestinian population the necessary economic benefits it promised when it took control of the Strip in June 2007 by a bloody military coup. It also needs construction materials for rebuilding the houses and infrastructure destroyed during the Israeli Cast Lead operation triggered by the Hamas rocket attacks against Israel," he added.

Karmon said an alliance of Muslim Brotherhood-affiliated organizations had worked together to create the flotilla and received vital backing from the pro-Hamas government of Turkey.

Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, headed by Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan, "are the new important players in this drama," Karmon added.

"In its second term in power, the AKP, the Islamist self-styled 'conservative' party, has retreated significantly from its 'moderate image and democratic ideals,' has turned into an increasingly semi-authoritarian force and has accelerated its internal anti-secularism agenda on all fronts," he said.

"The AKP and its leaders feel very close to Hamas, a fellow Muslim Brotherhood movement, at the expense of the Palestinian Authority," Karmon added.