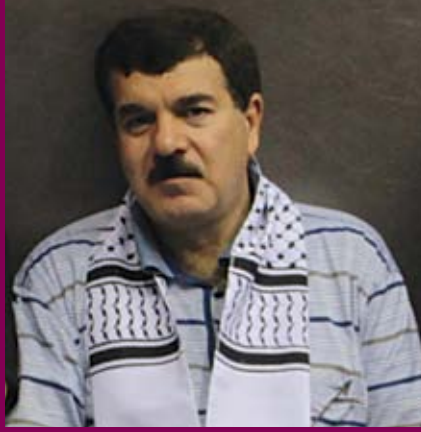


**ISRAEL'S INTENTION WAS TO KILL;
THE WAY THE MARTYRS AND THE WOUNDED
WERE TARGETED WAS SURELY PROOF OF THAT**

Hamdi Osmanoglu

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Doctor Hamdi Osmanoglu (1960) is a Hama/Syrian-born Turkish citizen who moved to Istanbul after his high school education in Syria. Osmanoglu completed his undergraduate degree at Çapa Medicine School of Istanbul University. He has been living in Turkey for thirty years. Osmanoglu is a specialist in dermatology, and works as a chief physician in a private hospital in Istanbul. He is married, and has four children.

Why did you join the Gaza Freedom Flotilla? What was your motivation?

I had learnt about the Flotilla from my doctor friends, and decided to join. I had been to Gaza before, and witnessed the destruction there. Also, I knew the works of the IHH in the region. I wanted to contribute to the efforts of reopening a medical centre that was completely destroyed in Gaza. My only intention was to help the people of Gaza.

Did you expect an Israeli attack before setting off? As you know, the Israeli authorities state that they warned in advance that they would not allow the Flotilla to go through.

I expected that Israel would prevent our entering Gaza. They might have fired rubber bullets, used gas grenades, and tried to stop us with these kinds of things. However, it had never crossed my mind that they would attempt such a massacre. Israel, if it had wanted, could have taken over the ship in a different way; for example, by damaging the ship's engine, or causing technical problems, or surrounding the ship and keeping us waiting in the middle of the sea. But Israel had fully intended to kill; that much was obvious from the way they targeted the wounded. Some sustained fatal injuries to their heads, and some were shot in the heart. Furkan [Doğan], Necdet [Yıldırım], Cevdet [Kılıçlar].... The way all of them were targeted and how they were wounded were surely proof of that intention.

How was the atmosphere on the *Mavi Marmara* before the attack?

I joined the ship as a doctor. The atmosphere was wonderful on board. The medical team was composed of two nurses, two medical personnel and about nine doctors. We had planned to help in case of a health problem. Some passengers did fall sick during the voyage. For instance, one of the passengers had a facial paralysis. I stepped in at once, and gave the patient the necessary treatment. We were treating those with minor ailments such as sea sickness and nausea.

Could you please tell us what happened during the Israeli attack? How was the atmosphere? I would like to learn your personal experiences and what you witnessed.

We were praying when they started to attack. We quickly prayed the *salah*. The helicopter was just above us, and we were surrounded by zodiac boats. They immediately began to throw various grenades; the sound of gunfire was coming from top decks. Our friends were yelling help for the wounded. We immediately took the wounded to



Alexandra Lort Phillips, Doctor Mevlüt Yurtseven, Abdullah Keskin, Murat Yıldırım, Fahri Yıldız (martyr) and Hamdi Osmanoglu

the lower decks. Within ten minutes, ten to fifteen wounded, and three *shaheeds* (martyrs) were brought in. We immediately began to treat the wounded. We did what we could for the *shaheeds*. We performed CPR, and opened their respiratory tract by intubation. One of them had swallowed his tongue entirely, and we took it out. We provided respiratory support, but unfortunately we failed to save him. And within thirty to forty-five minutes, thirty-five wounded and four dead were already brought in. There were *shaheeds* and wounded on the upper decks, too.

How serious were the wounded?

They were extremely serious. I thought at least thirty people might have died. It was obvious that the attack was very violent. One wounded man was shot by a bullet right at his lungs. We couldn't lay him down. A friend came up, and we had him sit back to back with the wounded; they had to remain in that position for hours. A lot of people were in a coma. We administered intravenous fluid therapy to the wounded, and stopped bleeding; yet, it was only by the will of Allah that some wounded survived. They were in a very critical condition.

When the ship was taken over by the Israelis, and we told the wounded, "Brothers, we have to hand over the seriously wounded for treatment in Israel," the wounded pleaded, "Brother, don't let us go, don't give us to them; let us die here." All the wounded were saying just the same. At that moment we were in a very difficult situation.

When we began sending out the wounded one by one to the Israelis, the doctors who accompanied them did not return, since those who were out were taken captive. We did not go out but, together with

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the nurses, stayed inside with the wounded. We were about fifteen-eighteen people including the wounded; one of them got hit right at his carotid artery. The Israeli soldiers got in with their dogs. We were worried, because the dogs could have attacked the wounded.

At that moment we were trying to treat of the wounded. The Israelis wanted to take them without stretcher. We told them that none of the wounded would be able to stand up on their own, and stretchers were needed since they were bleeding severely. We expected that the Israelis would not immediately take the wounded to the hospital, but it would take two or three hours for them to start treating the wounded. Thus, we did not hand over any of the wounded until their bleeding had been stopped. I, for example, reopened the wound of a Turkish man, Musa, right at the moment and stopped his bleeding; fortunately we had the necessary medicines for this. They dropped Musa while carrying in stretcher; they didn't care at all. When I saw this, I stepped in and tied Musa tightly up to the stretcher. Again there was another wounded, an Australian young man, Ahmed Luqman Talib; his sister was with him, too. He didn't want us to hand him over to the Israelis. Just as we persuaded him, he fainted again. We stopped his bleeding and gave three litres intravenous fluid for the blood he had lost. The Israelis wanted to make Ahmed walk himself, and again an argument began when we objected. They kept yelling at us, they could have shot us at that moment as well. But I didn't listen to them. I didn't hand over Ahmed to the Israeli soldiers until his immediate medical treatment was over. I tied him up with my own hands to a thin stretcher that was brought in, and then I handed him over to the Israelis. Later when we were taken out, I saw Ahmed again; he was still kept waiting on board, and was not taken to the hospital though they knew well that his life was in danger.

You said that you had seen four *shaheeds* in the hall. Did you have any information at that time about the *shaheeds* and the wounded at upper decks?



Archbishop Hilarion Capucci and Hamdi Osmanoglu in Kepez Sport Hall in Antalya, Turkey

No, I didn't. The only thing we had heard was that there were fifteen wounded on upper decks.

You are a first-hand witness of the Israeli aggression. What do you think about Israel?

Israel claims that the people on board were terrorists; but actually they themselves are the terrorists. I am a doctor, and have tried to help people throughout my life. On the other hand, Israel has been committing massacres since the day it was established. They also attacked us in international waters.

You were all taken captive on the ship, and then forced to sail to Ashdod Port. Could you please tell us your story about what happened during that time, both on board and in the Israeli prison? Did you experience or witness any torture or abuse, either psychological or physical?

We were kept waiting on the deck for hours. During that time, the helicopter constantly hovered above us; the roar it made, and the water it splashed were insufferable. We were getting wet and cold. We faced much difficulty on the deck. We were not allowed to go to the toilets for thirteen hours. We wanted to pray *salah*, but not permitted to do so, and were hardly able to pray with only two or three people.

When we arrived at the port, two people immediately took me by my arms, and brought me to the tent where we were searched. I told them that I was a doctor, and they didn't have the right to treat me this way. They made body searches in a very insulting manner. They

kept doing body searches again and again. They took away my small handbag which had things like the Qur'an and phone in it. They left us nothing. I was asked at the port, "Is this your first time in Israel?" and I replied, "I have never been here. I am not here, at any rate, by my own free will. You brought us here by force; you kidnapped us. We were sailing to Gaza."

Later they made us get into a prison van. The transportation to the prison took three or four hours, and the van was freezing cold inside. I made them turn the air-conditioner off by hitting on the side-panel of the van. When we arrived at the prison, they did a few more body searches. We were around eighty people, and were put in groups to the cells. The pressure continued in the prison as well; they did not want us to pray, but we prayed our *salah* in *jama'ah* (congregation). They brought in water and food, but I ate almost nothing except for a slice of bread and a fruit, and drank a little water out of necessity.

We were worried about what was happening outside when we were in prison. I wasn't able to let my family know how I was. I somehow learnt that my name was mentioned among the *shaheeds* in the media. So I wanted to call my family. I told the prison officers, "I want to call my family, that's our right"; however I wasn't allowed to do so. Until the officials of the Turkish Embassy showed up, we weren't able to get any information from the outside world.

They announced our names when we were about to be removed from the prison. Those announced were asked to leave immediately without even giving them a chance to change their pyjamas. When my name was announced, I immediately headed for the cell and closed the door, performed *wudu* (ablution), changed my clothes and prayed *salah*, because we did not know where we would be taken. They put us again in a prison van; we might have been driven to another prison. We had no idea what would happen next. We realised that we were going to be sent back to Turkey only when we arrived at the airport. Our friends were beaten, tortured and were subjected to ill-treatment again at the airport.

Could you please share with us the most striking events, tragic or surprising, that you experienced or witnessed on this journey, and will never forget throughout your life?

If only you could see the blood at the hall where the wounded were brought in... Çetin Topçuoğlu died as a martyr; his wife was just beside him. I can never forget that scene.