

will never abandon, is the cause of liberating the territory, protecting Lebanon, and confronting the Zionist project, which constitutes a threat to Lebanon and all states, all peoples, and all governments of the region. . . . If a political Arab regime exists in this or that country, it is of no concern to us if it is democratic, dictatorial, monarchical, hereditary, legitimate, or illegitimate, whatever its descriptions or theories on which it is based. Even in Iraq, many asked us to adopt a stand on the political process and what it produced . . . [W]e do not take a stand against any Arab government, not in Iraq and not elsewhere. We take a stand on occupation. We denounce the U.S. occupation of Iraq and support the Iraqi resistance to the U.S. occupation, but we do not support Iraqis who fight each other. . . .

Concerning the Israeli issue, we consider our confrontation of Israel and the Zionist project to be our duty. Helping the brothers in Palestine is our duty, exactly as it was the duty of the whole world to help us during the resistance in Lebanon, to help Lebanon in liberating what is left of its occupied territory, and to help Lebanon in confronting the Israeli attacks, ambitions, and threats. . . .

I would like to close this subject by telling the Arab world, the Arab governments, and the Arab peoples the following: Brothers, do not overburden Hizballah. I know that many want to place on our shoulders responsibilities that are bigger than our country, greater than our resources and capabilities, greater than what our country can accommodate given our circumstances. Even concerning assistance to the Palestinian brothers, we also take into consideration how much repercussions we should place on the shoulders of our country. . . .

Therefore, benefiting from this incident, I would like to issue the following appeal: In connection with everything that is being raised in the media, and everything that is said, plotted, or concocted by certain intelligence services here or there and presented as reports to the Arab rulers, I tell these rulers to examine all this very carefully. From the official, practical, ideological, cultural, and religious viewpoint as well as in the field, we have no such intentions and we do not want any struggle or enmity with anyone. Likewise, we do not stand at anyone's door to request anything. . . . During the most difficult days of the July war, when the Israeli Air Force was using over 100 aircraft to bomb our homes and centers, vil-

lages, and neighborhoods day and night, I said while under bombardment: we do not want anything from the Arab rulers. We thank them. I also said that day that we just wanted them to. . . . leave us alone. . . . By God, we do not want from you any political, moral, financial, or military support. Nothing. We just do not want you to harm us or to plot against us, or accuse us unjustly.

Of course that is as far as Hizballah is concerned. As for Palestine, on the contrary, we ask them [the Arab states] to shoulder their responsibilities, help the wronged and oppressed Palestinian people who have been suffering for the past 60 years. We want them to lift the siege around them and help them rebuild their country, their homes. [Meanwhile] they [the Israelis] are carrying out maneuvers and we do not know what they are preparing for the region and for Gaza, Lebanon, Syria, Iran, and the entire region.

I ask the Arab rulers to shoulder their responsibilities at a serious, sensitive, and momentous phase in the region in light of the stand of the current Israeli government, which is the most extremist, most obstinate, and most aggressive. Let them shoulder their responsibilities. Instead of sponsoring the resistance movement, and instead of supporting and assisting them, at least we should not harm and fight them. I say this with all sincerity and faithfulness. . . .

B2. HAMAS POLITBURO CHIEF KHALID MISHAL, REMARKS ON HAMAS CHARTER, PRESIDENT OBAMA, COMPARISONS WITH HIZBALLAH, AND OTHER MATTERS, NEW YORK TIMES, 5 MAY 2009 (EXCERPTS).

Khalid Misbal's interview with the New York Times was his first to a U.S. news organization in more than a year. The excerpts published by the Times on 5 May were taken from a five-hour interview conducted in Arabic over two days at his house in Damascus. Although the excerpts do not cover much ground that was not covered in Misbal's long interview with JPS in March 2008 (see the two-part Misbal interview in JPS 147-48), they are interesting in that they are clearly directed at the new Obama administration. The full excerpts of the Times interview can be found online at www.nytimes.com.

On the Hamas Charter and a Palestinian State:

The most important thing is what Hamas is doing and the policies it is adopting

today. The world must deal with what Hamas is practicing today. Hamas has accepted the national reconciliation document. It has accepted a Palestinian state on the 1967 borders including East Jerusalem, dismantling settlements, and the right of return based on a long-term truce. Hamas has represented a clear political program through a unity government. This is Hamas's program regardless of the historic documents. Hamas has offered a vision. Therefore, it's not logical for the international community to get stuck on sentences written 20 years ago. It's not logical for the international community to judge Hamas based on these sentences and stay silent when Israel destroys and kills our people.

On the Decision to Stop Firing Rockets:

There is a mistake committed by some international parties. They regard the firing of the rockets from Gaza as the starting point followed by Israel's response. It's the opposite. Israel is practicing the occupation. Israel is controlling every aspect of Palestinian life. Israel is imposing the siege. Israel is starting things and therefore you have the reaction. Palestinians defend themselves through firing rockets. Israel is responsible.

Not targeting civilians is part of an evaluation of the movement to serve the people's interest. Firing these rockets is a method and not the goal. The right to resist the occupation is a legitimate right but practicing this right is decided by the leadership within the movement. Resisting is based on evaluation and timing that take into consideration the following: maintain the right to resist and to respond to the occupation, keeping in mind the interest of our people and the hardship they are going through, and exposing the reality of the Israeli aggression and its policies.

On President Obama:

There is no doubt that he is speaking a different language. Such language is not only necessary to the international community but also to the U.S. administration after the heavy burden that was caused by the Bush administration and the neoconservatives.

Obama has been clear with his intention regarding a few issues: Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria, Iran. He has given a different speech to the Islamic world through the Turkish gate. But frankly when it comes to the Palestinian/Israeli conflict, we have still not seen a fundamental change either on the level of action or on the level of language. When it

comes to Obama, his language is different and positive. When it comes to [Secretary of State] Hillary [Clinton] it's the opposite. She is returning to the previous administration of Bush, especially when repeating the Quartet conditions as a condition for reaching Palestinian reconciliation. Her repetition has harmed the Palestinian dialogue and prevented it from reaching success to end the Palestinian division.

On Secretary of State Clinton's Proposal to Hamas to Join a Government that Is Similar to the Lebanese Model in which Hizballah Is a Member of a Government that Accepts the Arab Peace Initiative without Itself Relinquishing Its Resistance Card:

Any party that wins the majority should get to implement its program. That is the logic of elections. Is Obama implementing the Republican program? When it comes to Hizballah, if a party doesn't enjoy a majority and is being asked to participate, it's the party's right to say yes or no to the nature of the program. Hamas got the majority vote and the international community must respect the people's will.

On National Dialogue with Fatah:

We have suggested a way out and have proposed it during the Cairo talks. The national unity government should be based on what was agreed upon in Cairo in 2005 and during the Mecca talks in 2007 and the national reconciliation document of 2006. Hamas and Fatah have accepted all of that and signed them. It's the logical way out sponsored by Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Another way out that was proposed by Hamas is a temporary unity government without a political program until the next election. Why impose conditions? Both options have been rejected, which shows there is no intention and the external interference by the United States, Israel, and the Quartet is hindering the ending of the Palestinian division. The Quartet's conditions are not logical. Hamas will continue its efforts to reach reconciliation. We will be flexible with all ideas.

On a Truce with Israel and the Release of Captured Israeli Soldier Cpl. Gilad Shalit:

[Former Israeli Prime Minister Ehud] Olmert is behind the failure to reach an agreement over the truce and Shalit. We are ready to finalize both agreements regarding the truce and Shalit at the same time. They

go in parallel but they are not to be mixed together. Each is separate from the other.

ISRAEL

C1. GERSHON BASKIN, "GILAD SHALIT, HAMAS, AND OLMERT," *JERUSALEM POST*, 9 FEBRUARY 2009 (EXCERPTS).

Less than a month after Operation Cast Lead (OCL) ended, an Israeli peace activist who had occasionally served as an unofficial emissary between Israel and Hamas revealed that ten days before the operation's launch the Olmert government had rejected Hamas's back-channel offer to negotiate the renewal of the interrupted cease-fire, as well as a prisoner exchange involving captured Israeli soldier Gilad Shalit. Gershon Baskin, co-founder and director of the Jerusalem-based Israel/Palestine Center for Research and Information, wrote a detailed account of the episode in the Jerusalem Post, concluding that it gave the lie to the government's claim that OCL was a "war of no choice." The full text of this article can be found online at www.jpost.com.

Two weeks before Israel launched its attack on Gaza in response to a breakdown of the *tabdiya* (cease-fire) with three weeks of barrages of Qassam rockets and mortar shells against its civilian population, I met with a senior Hamas personality in a European capital. This person is connected and in contact with the Hamas leadership in Gaza and in Damascus. Over the past 950 days since the abduction of [Gilad] Shalit, he has transmitted messages for me back and forth to the Hamas leadership in Damascus, including a letter from Noam Shalit to Khalid Mishal on 8 September 2006 that led to the release of the first sign of life from Gilad . . . [to] the Egyptians on 9 September 2006.

We spent several hours talking about the conditions to renew the *tabdiya*. Since the abduction of Shalit on 25 June 2006, my involvement behind the scenes has been in holding unofficial talks with various Hamas leaders in Gaza, Damascus, and elsewhere, all seeking to advance the negotiations to bring Gilad home. For two and a half years I had been trying to bring about a direct secret back channel bypassing third-party mediators in order to speed up the process.

Initially, when Hamas proposed such a channel about one month after the abduction, Prime Minister Ehud Olmert rejected it

with a knee-jerk response that "we don't negotiate with terrorists." About a year later, I received permission from the government to see if it was possible to open up the direct secret back channel. Until two weeks before the Gaza war, Hamas refused.

My talks with the Hamas leader in Europe [in December 2008] focused on two main issues: convening a secret direct back channel and linking the prisoner exchange for Shalit's release to the renewal of the cease-fire and the ending of the economic siege on Gaza. For about two years Hamas had rejected the linking of the prisoner exchange with the cease-fire and the end of the siege. Since, however, this had been the initial position of Hamas immediately following the abduction of Shalit, as was communicated to me some three weeks after the abduction (a call for a cease-fire, opening the borders, and the prisoner exchange), I appealed to the Hamas leader to go back to the original demands but to include an agreement to bypass the Egyptian mediators through a direct secret back channel.

Our talks led to his agreement to get the approval of the Hamas leadership for this proposal. We concluded our talks with a note handwritten by him on the new proposed framework. We agreed that I would approach the Israeli leadership, and he would get the approval of the Hamas leadership. We further agreed that both of us would be directly involved in the talks along with others who would be appointed by the leaders on both sides.

I returned to Israel and ten days before the war broke out I wrote to Olmert, Defense Minister Ehud Barak, and Foreign Minister Tzipi Livni that Hamas was willing to open a direct secret back channel for a package deal that would include the renewal of the cease-fire, the ending of the economic siege, and the prisoner exchange for the release of Shalit. I further indicated that Hamas would be willing to implement the agreement on Rafah, which included the stationing of Palestinian Authority personnel loyal to Pres. Mahmud Abbas in Rafah and a return of the European monitors. I communicated the same message to Noam Shalit and asked him to make sure that Ofer Dekel, who is charged with the Shalit file by the government, received the Hamas "offer."

I waited for a response from one of the people who received my letter. Nothing. No response. When the war broke out I understood that the decision to go to war had already been taken, and that the

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