

Hamas ready for peaceful coexistence with Israel within the borders of 1967. Interview with Hamas-Leader Khaled Meshaal

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Khaled Meshaal ist the political leader of the Palestinian Hamas movement, which earlier this year came to power with a large majority in the free and democratic election in Palestine. In summer 2006 the Israeli Minister of Justice Haim Ramon publicly confirmed his government's order to kill Khaled Meshaal. In 1997 in the Jordanian capital Amman Meshaal survived a assassination attempt by Israel's secret service Mossad by a narrow margin. Currently the leading Hamas politician lieves in Syrian asylum in Damascus under strong security. Khaled who is a physicist is married and has three daughters and four sons. He was interviewed by Rainer Rupp (RR), a German journalist for the daily "Junge Welt", published in Berlin with nation wide distribution.

R.R. Mr. Khaled Meshaal, as a leading politician of Hamas you are on the assassination list of the Israeli intelligence service. How did you become a member of the Islamic resistance movement against Israeli occupation?

K.M.

Actually, I am one of the founders of the Hamas movement. Inside Hamas the most prominent figure was the late Sheik Ahmed Yassim. When the Hamas movement was established in the year 1987 I was 31 years old. I was among the people who had built up branches inside and outside Palestine. But the very idea of Hamas started already at the end of the seventies. The internal dialogue and deliberation lasted for more than ten years in order to establish a movement against Israeli occupation. But the very project of the movement had already been in my heart and in my mind when I was still at Kuwait-University. At the age of 21 I represented the Islamic movement in the students General Union at university.

R.R. For many years there has been the suggestion in the Western media that Israeli intelligence was instrumental in the creation of Hamas. I suppose you know about this story?

K.M.

Unfortunately this tale is told by some Arabs, Palestinian Arabs. It is an attempt to distort the image of our movement. We consider this charge as something so ridiculous, that we don't even bother to deny it. It is so illogical. How come, that Israel should establish an

organisation that will combat Israel, how is that possible?

R.R.The argument is, the Israelis helped to create Hamas in order to divide the Palestinian resistance and weaken the Fatah movement.

K.M.

Indeed, during the seventies the main Palestinian force that was combatting Israel was the Fatah-movement. Consequently Israel concentrated its fighting against Fatah und the other, smaller groups of Palestinian resistance, which existed in this period. At that time, however, Hamas was not yet properly established. We were only starting to build our social base in Palestinian society, by focussing entirely on social affairs, organizing help, building hospitals and schools, looking after the sick and deprived. In that era we were only involved in peaceful actions. This is why Israel did not do anything against us.

Because they did not know at the time, what was going on in our minds. But, while we were focussing outwardly only on social and educational work, at the same time we were secretly already training and preparing for our future resistance projects. Because the Israelis did not see this danger they concentrated their actions against other brigades, not against us. And it is this Israeli inaction against us, which some Palestinian Arab elements unfriendly towards Hamas present as “proof”, that Israel was supporting the creation of Hamas.

R.R.Recently Hamas’ relations with the Fatah movement have been very strained. Is there still a chance for a national unity government?

K.M.

There is a positive atmosphere between the movement of Hamas und Fatah to create a unity government. Since one month we have agreed in principle on the creation of such a unity government. Recently, however, some obstacles have started to appear. The first obstacle was that there were efforts to bring us back to a “government of technocrats”, not forward to the national unity government. This is how they want to remove Hamas from the government. And the second obstacle is that the guarantees for lifting the blockade are still not sufficient.

R.R.Guarantees? Guarantees from the West?

K.M.

Yes, from America.

We made an agreement, that once we have formed a government of national unity, the siege shall be lifted. Hamas is very serious about this. We are keen to end the suffering of the Palestinian people. But as our movement got the majority of votes and has most seats in parliament we also have the right to have the major influence in this government. The main dilemma now is that there are forces, which deny us this right.

R.R.One of the key issues is the so-called recognition of “Israel’s right to exist”. Is Hamas prepared to change its position on this matter? Especially as the West has made this issue a condition sine-qua-non for the lifting of the blockade against a Hamas-led Palestinian government.

K.M.

I think the Western world has understood by now that Hamas will never recognise Israel. How can I recognise the one who occupies my land? It is illogical that it is demanded of Hamas to recognise Israel. I am the victim. I am the man who is not free. I am the man living in the Diaspora away from my land. Israel has got a kind of a nation that was imposed as a "fait accompli" by the United Nations. We don't have a nation. More than half of the Palestinian people are living in the Diaspora, mostly in camps and they can't go home. Because of Israel they can't go home and we should recognise Israel? Who is actually in the wrong, us or Israel?

R.R. But the 2-state theory which the Americans are promoting - envisages a Palestinian state next to an Israeli state. Is this also absolutely unacceptable for Hamas?

K.M.

No. No. Let me say that the Hamas movement will only establish a Palestinian state within the borders of 1967, that includes the West of Jerusalem and the Westbank. Up till now Israel does not recognise this right for us. All the Palestinians are demanding is this right. But Israel keeps violating Palestinian rights and the West is unwilling to force Israel to recognise the Palestinian rights.

Even when President Bush talked about a Palestinian state, it was not clear cut. And Ariel Sharon and recently Ehud Olmert have made a lot of reservations about Bush's proposal. They are rejecting the idea of an Israeli state within its 1967 borders. They want an Israeli state, which includes parts of the Westbank. Actually President Bush had even agreed to Sharon's proposal for Israel to keep all of Jerusalem. And he agreed with Sharon to choose the right Palestinian leader who would accept all this.

R.R. Have I understood you correctly that you would be prepared to negotiate with Israel and accept it within its borders of 1967, before it started its wars of aggression, stealing Palestinian land?

K.M.

Good, that has been made clear.

R.R. In the West Hamas is generally depicted as being absolutely against talks with Israel and that Hamas only wants to drive the Israeli Jews into the sea.

K.M.

This is not correct. Killing Jews is not our aim. For centuries we have lived in Palestine peacefully with Jews and Christians of all kind. We are fighting Israel because it occupies our land and oppresses our people. We are fighting Israel to finish this occupation. We want to live freely on our land just as other nations. We want to have our own country just like other people. But the Zionist movement came from all over the world to occupy our land. And the real owner of the land has been kicked out. This is the root of the problem.

Because of many factors, we now accept to build a Palestinian state within the borders of 1967. But that doesn't mean that we recognise Israel. But we are prepared to make a long term truce with Israel. Accepting the status of Israel without recognising it.

R.R. But, no recognition? Doesn't that mean continued tensions and war?

K.M.

No. There are plenty of examples where no recognition does not mean war. China and Taiwan for example have not recognized each other but they trade and cooperate with each other. – By withholding a formal recognition we just don't want to give Israel the legitimacy for having taken our land in the first place.

R.R.It is no secret, that for many years under the Fatah-government the Palestine security services have been trained and equipped by the Americans, namely the CIA. Is it therefore not reasonable to assume, that a whole lot of people in the movement of the Palestinian president Mahmud Abbas are secretly working for the Americans and Israelis, some possibly in top positions? How far could you trust Fatah if you were to build a national unity government together?

K.L.

This problem is well known for us and for the rest of the Palestinians. But not all of the people of Fatah are of this kind. There is a huge motivation within Fatah which is "nationality". They are our partners in the resistance. But there are others, the people you spoke about. That is a fact. We know the problem quite well and we are dealing with it. Moreover, the relationship is not, by necessity, always based upon trust.

R.R.Do you think that this problem is also at the root of the difficulties you are having right now with Fatah in creating a unity government?

K.M.

Yes, that's right. This is one of the problems. Unfortunately, there are these factors and pressures which are following foreign agendas that influence negatively the Palestinian arena. But the patriotic forces are the ones that are going to win. The Palestinian people have confirmed this in the latest democratic elections.

R.R.Is Hamas the movement of religious fanatics, as it is portrayed in the West? A movement with which one cannot deal? Yet, Hamas has been accepted and invited to Moscow by the Russian government and here (in Syria) you are guests of a secular state. Is this all a disguise? Which is the true Hamas.

M.K.

Well, let me give you an example. We have for instance good relations with Christians

R.R.Are you actually working together with the Christians in Palestine?

K.M.

Yes, with some of them.

This image of religious fanaticism has been fabricated by Israel and the American administration. It is an image that does not reflect the facts. You know that the American administration gives itself the right to classify people just the way they like. But how can

respectable states in Europe, like Britain, Germany or France, be influenced by this propaganda. Should they not search for the truth themselves? Should they not form their views on the basis of reason instead of rumours and hearsay.

But how should the West discover the truth about Palestine and Hamas? First the Western journalists should come here to meet the people and see the facts with their own eyes. Go to Palestine and see how the people live. Listen to what the people have to say. Listen to leaders of Hamas and other Palestinian movements. You should learn the truth through direct contacts and not through others. And if you want to know about Hamas then go and meet the people from Hamas. We are ready for dialogue.

If you are looking for reasons, why Hamas won the election, then it is because the Palestinian people trust us and because Hamas reflects the feelings and the aspirations of the Palestinian people. And if you scrutinize Hamas closely then you will not find any corruption whatsoever. But you will find, that Hamas is very close to the people, that it is really serving the needs of the people. And if the people of Palestine elected Hamas, then the will of the people should be respected, also by the West.

R.R. But what about the reproach of religious fanaticism?

M.K.

That is easy to refute. If Hamas was a movement of religious fanatics, it wouldn't have been elected by the Palestinian people, because in Palestine there are many groups. And there are also Christians, who work together with us. For instance one of the Members of Parliament in Gaza who was elected on the Hamas list is a Christian doctor. And the majority of Muslims and Christians gave him their vote. The fact is, that the ideas of Hamas are moderate. We practice tolerance with everybody. And we deal with Muslims and Christians at the same level. And on this level we deal with everybody, either religious, liberal or secular, either inside or outside of Palestine. And we have relations within the Middle East but also in Europe and Africa. Hamas is an open movement. We do not combat Israel because they are Jews but because they are occupying our land.

R.R. The West is reproaching you, that in this fight against Israel you are committing acts of terrorism.

M.K.

No. There is a major difference between terrorism and resistance. We are against terrorism. Resistance is not terrorism. What Israel is doing is terrorism. What we are doing is resistance. Because it is a reaction against the Israeli aggression and a reaction against the Israeli occupation of our land. The resistance is the legal right to defend ourselves.

END.

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