

Israeli “aggression” ongoing in Gaza, media has shifted its attention to Lebanon: Interview with Hamas leader Khalid Mish’al

By [Global Research](#)

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Palestinian Hamas Political Bureau Head Khalid Mish’al has said that developments in Lebanon and the Palestinian territories have given hope that the time is nearing to defeat the “Zionist-US project” for the region and restore Arab sovereignty. He said that the “resistance” in Lebanon, Iraq and the Palestinian territories is “one battle”. Speaking in an interview on Al-Jazeera TV’s “Special Encounter” programme on 1 August, Mish’al dismissed allegations of Hamas and Hezbollah adventurism, arguing that Israel had left them no other alternative. He said that Israeli “aggression” was ongoing in Gaza but that the media had shifted its attention to Lebanon.

The following is the text of the recorded interview with Yusuf al-Shuli, place, date not given; broadcast by Qatari Al-Jazeera satellite TV on 1 August; subheadings inserted editorially:

[Al-Shuli] Mr Abu-al-Walid [Khalid Mish’al] let us begin with Lebanon. Do you not think that the fedayeen operation you carried out in Gaza, during which you captured an Israeli soldier, and the other operation Hezbollah carried out against the Israeli forces, during which it captured two Israeli soldiers, killed eight, and wounded others, were the reason for what is currently taking place in Lebanon?

Plans for Lebanon

[Mish’al] In the name of God, the Merciful, the Compassionate. You are welcome, brother Yusuf, and praised be God for your safe arrival here from the battlefield under these difficult circumstances. Regrettably, such a claim is being made in the region. Israel, and the US Administration behind it, is trying to depict its aggressive war on Gaza and Palestine in general, the West Bank, and on Lebanon – this terrorist destructive war – as simply a spontaneous, automatic, and forced reaction to Operation Dispelled Illusion by Hamas and the other factions, [Popular Resistance Committee armed wing] Al-Nasir Salah-al-Din Brigades and the Army of Islam, and Operation True Promise. This is not true. This is a fact and not a mere allegation. As you know, and as we said before, this operation came in response to the Israeli massacres and to a continuous war Israel launched against our people in Gaza and the West Bank after a series of massacres.

You may remember Huda Ghaliyah, the child whose family was killed on the Gaza beach. You may also remember the assassination of leaders like martyr Jamal Abu-Samhadanah and the leaders who were martyred before and after him. Extremely large operations were carried out against our people. There were killings, siege and starvation. Hamas participated

in the elections and formed a government. Nevertheless, it was exposed to aggression and war. Do you know that Israel killed more than 200 Palestinians between Hamas's election win on 25 January this year and 25 June when Operation Dispelled Illusion was carried out? This proves that we are facing a hostile war.

The Palestinian operation came in response to the enemy massacres and in defence of the people. This is a legitimate right in the existence of occupation. In the case of Lebanon, there is also occupied land and continuous Israeli violation of the Lebanese territories. Therefore, we did not carry out operations when there was no Israeli aggression against us or when Israel was not occupying our land or holding thousands of our people - men and women - in its prisons. There are more than 10,000 Palestinian men and women there. There are also Arab and Lebanese prisoners but the overwhelming majority is Palestinian. Therefore, we are the owners of rights and a cause. Our operations came within the context of legitimate defence of ourselves and our people and rights and in reply to the Israeli aggression and massacres.

Israel itself confirms that it had been planning aggression against Gaza and an aggression against Lebanon. In the case of Gaza, one week before Operation Dispelled Illusion, the Israeli press published an Israeli plan to invade Gaza or launch an aggression against Gaza and lay siege to it in order to handle the rocket issue and achieve other objectives related to the internal Palestinian situation, topple the government, and prepare the Palestinian stage for implementing Olmert's disengagement plan.

[Al-Shuli] You say that about 200 Palestinians have been martyred since Hamas's assumption of power during the past few months. Does this mean the Israeli onslaught against the Palestinians has increased after your assumption of power?

[Mish'al] Of course it did. Upon drawing a comparison we find that more than 210 or 220 Palestinians were killed in addition to the injury of hundreds in 2005, which was the year in which the Palestinian factions announced they would observe calm unilaterally in return for Israel's cessation of its aggression and release of prisoners. Israel, of course, did not release the prisoners but increased their number. Also, it did not stop its aggression. This happened in one year. From the end of January when the Palestinian elections were held to the end of June 2006, which is about five months, the Palestinian people gave priority to the political experience and elections although they were absolved of the need to observe calm because it expired in 2005. Nevertheless, Israel deliberately committed aggression against the Gaza Strip and West Bank, carried out assassinations and escalated the situation as if it wanted to provoke Hamas or say: You in Hamas cannot protect your people. That was one of the means to foil Hamas's political experience. Therefore, Israel in practice would not need excuses.

Those who claim that we brought destruction to Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon say so as if they are talking about a state or entity other than that of Israel and as if Israel is a meek state that spreads peace in the region, does not attack anyone, and does not occupy the land of anyone and as if we are the ones who attacked it, occupied its land and killed its people. The picture is the opposite. Let me explain an important issue here. I said the Israeli press published the plan. In the case of Lebanon, several sources indicated that the US Administration and the Zionist entity had a premeditated plan to commit aggression against Lebanon and remove Hezbollah from the south. I will explain this. The Israeli press yesterday quoted [Israeli Chief of Staff] Dan Halutz as saying: We have trained for two months on a plan to occupy southern Lebanon or send Hezbollah away from the south. This

shows that there was a premeditated US-Israeli plan.

[Al-Shuli] Is this then the reason for the US Administration's decision to give Israel time to finish its attacks?

[Mish'al] Of course, because the US plan has not achieved its aims yet. It is faltering and failing and it will fail, God willing. What is the plan? This is one battle whose headlines and area are different but whose US-Zionist aims are almost the same. The US Administration declared war on so-called terrorism after the September incidents. Under this slogan it occupied Afghanistan and then Iraq. This war has failed in practice. It was foiled by the valiant Iraqi resistance and resistance in Afghanistan. They then came up with the slogan of Greater Middle East, but this has failed too, because the democracy the US Administration sought to promote produced hostile forces and results that did not please the US Administration. It produced forces hostile to the US policy in the region. Today the US Administration speaks through [US Secretary of State] Condoleezza Rice about a New Middle East.

In the past they proceeded from Palestine. Palestine was the location where the US-Zionist plan to subjugate the region started. The nation did not succumb. On the contrary, it was united in the battle of Palestine. Then the issue of Iraq came. Iraq was the US Administration's launching pad to spread its influence, subjugate the region and draw new maps. But the US Administration's sinking in the Iraqi mud and the steadfastness of the Iraqi people and their resistance foiled the US Administration's plans also at this station. Today the US Administration considers its aggression on Lebanon the start of subjugating the region and drawing new maps. The battle is, therefore, one.

US goals

I believe that by this battle under the headline of a New Middle East or any other headlines the US Administration seeks to achieve two main goals. The first is redrawing the maps of the region in a manner that subjugates it to the US-Zionist agenda. The US policy in the region has priorities. It wants to weaken the forces of objection and subjugate the countries which it considers rebellious. It wants to weaken the Arab situation and place the region in the service of the US interests. The Israeli role is the only role in the Arab and Islamic region that is accepted by the US Administration. In order to subjugate this region and control it in accordance with the US agenda, all elements of power must be weakened. The resistance and the opposition front are among the elements of power which should be destroyed in Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and Afghanistan. Any Arab country, which partially or wholly objects to such plans militarily or politically, will also be fought in all sorts of ways and even blackmailed. Oil as a source of power must be controlled.

No Arab or Islamic country in this region is allowed to possess nuclear energy. This explains the issue of putting pressure on Iran and waging an early battle with it. The issue has to do with the unity of the nation. This fragmentation of the nation and incitement of differences among it are all meant to subjugate the region. This is the first goal.

The second goal is protecting the Zionist entity. The United States wants to secure the safety of this entity. Any state, resistance, movement or trend posing a threat must be struck in order to secure Israel. It is in the interest of the US Administration to secure this Zionist base in the region.

Therefore, we are before a Zionist-US scheme. The war on Lebanon is an American war practically run by Israel. Hence, we are today before a war planned in advance. Hamas's operation in Palestine and Hezbollah's operation in Lebanon were used as an excuse to launch this war. This is the truth. We should not accuse ourselves as Arabs and Muslims of bringing war to the region. The war was already there against us. The war against the nation did not stop for even a minute. The nation's wounds are bleeding in all arenas.

Adventurism

[Al-Shuli] Some larger Arab countries accused you and Hezbollah of embarking on adventures and causing the destruction or loss of your homeland. Their accusations might be true. What is your opinion?

[Mish'al] Our homeland has long been lost. We did not have a real authority or real state in Palestine even after the Oslo accord. Our land is occupied and our sovereignty is incomplete. Actually we do not have sovereignty. There is aggression on the land, sanctities and the Palestinian human being. There is continuous war and bleeding wounds. There are detainees and displaced people. More than half of the Palestinian people are outside Palestine. Jerusalem with its Islamic and Christian holy places is exposed to continuous Judaization and its people are forced out of it. Also the southern part of Lebanon was occupied. It was the resistance which restored the land. If we talk about who restored the homeland, I think the answer will be in favour of the resistance. The resistance regained the south after an 18-year occupation. The one who regained Gaza and forced Israel out unconditionally was the resistance. I think the Arab nation knows who was responsible for the loss of the land.

I simply and quietly ask away from any tension or provocation: If resistance is adventurous, what option is proposed to the Palestinian people and the Arab and Islamic nation so that they can get rid of occupation and regain their land and rights? Has an option that can really rescue the people from occupation, return rights to them, and end their suffering, pains and wounds been proposed to our nation and its peoples, particularly the Palestinian people? Throughout the past decades, settlement plans were proposed to the Palestinian people but Israel foiled them. UN Security Council resolutions were issued but Israel foiled them. Regional and international initiatives were proposed but Israeli foiled them. Arab initiatives were proposed in the past and present for decades, including the Arab initiative in Beirut in 2002, but Israel foiled them. Israel trampled on and destroyed the signed agreements with its tanks. People and their resistance movements should not be held responsible for things they did not do. The people were forced to take up resistance.

Frankly and clearly speaking, if the people of the region had found another means other than resistance to liberate their land, restore their rights and dignity, and get rid of occupation, they would have used it and would have been satisfied with it. Our resistance is a means and not an end in itself. However, all options and promises were given to our people, especially the Palestinian people, but these did not achieve anything for them. Therefore, they resorted to resistance. When our people resorted to resistance, they regained some of their land and began to march along the path of liberation and victory. It is a painful path, but pain, killing and destruction exist in both cases. This means if we abandon the resistance and become satisfied with talk about the peace process, reconciliation and promises, death and destruction will not stop and settlement activity will increase.

During the Oslo period, settlement activity redoubled. If we resort to resistance, there will be sacrifices and a heavy price. This means we pay the price in both cases, but there is a large difference between paying the price along the path of resistance when you are the decision-maker and the side that takes the initiative and inflicts pain on your enemy to force it to make concessions, and paying a heavy price when your dignity is squandered and you do not possess anything while waiting at the side of the road.

Continuing “resistance”

[Al-Shuli] In view of what happened and continues to happen in Gaza and Lebanon, are you capable of resistance and steadfastness?

[Mish'al] I said that there is pain in all cases. We feel pain. We do not love the spilling of blood. On the contrary, we want to safeguard the blood of our people and nation. But what can you do when forced to wage the battle? I can confirm to you, brother Yusuf, that our people and the resistance were forced to fight today's battles in the Palestinian and Arab arenas because the so-called international community stood helpless before the Israeli belligerence. The US Administration, whose decision is influential in international politics, is today not only biased towards Israel but also the side which is running the battle and providing a cover for it. After all these crimes in Lebanon and earlier in Palestine, the US Administration rejects a cease-fire. It even prevents the UN Security Council from condemning the Israeli aggression against Palestine as happened during the past week or against Lebanon even after the Qana massacre. This means it is the US Administration which provides all this cover and support for this aggression. Therefore, these are battles we were forced to wage.

When our peoples, particularly the Palestinian people and the Lebanese people, saw that the international community did not do us justice and did not give us a ray of hope or a horizon at the end of the road, we found ourselves forced to adhere to the option of resistance. As to whether this option is feasible, I say yes it is feasible. It is feasible because it accomplished things in Gaza and southern Lebanon and will also accomplish things in the future, God willing. Our land, particularly in Palestine, and the occupied Arab land in Lebanon and the Golan Heights, will not be liberated except through battle and resistance. Let me frankly ask if Egypt could have regained Sinai – even if this later came within the framework of a political settlement – had it not waged the October 1973 war? It would not have restored a single square metre of the Sinai if it had continued to live the atmosphere of the defeat of 1967. Homelands cannot be restored except by sacrificing life and blood. This is the law of nations and the path to liberation.

[Al-Shuli] The first Qana massacre was committed in 1996 and the second in 2006. Shall we expect other massacres as happened in Gaza and Jenin? Is this the hallmark of war with Israel?

[Mish'al] Before commenting on the second painful Qana massacre and in continuation of my reply to the previous question on resistance, I would like to stress that resistance is feasible and it accomplished things, but can resistance hold out? I say yes it can hold out. Resistance does not create a military balance. Resistance cannot stand in the face of the Israeli power from the perspective of the military balance. But resistance in Palestine and Lebanon has proved its ability to hold out. Since the start of the intifadah in 2000, Israel has been unable to decisively settle the battle in its favour for six years. The resistance held out.

The Lebanese resistance held out in southern Lebanon. Israel used all its military arsenal, committed all massacres and aggression, used its air and naval forces, and tried to advance on the ground during the past three weeks, but it failed and the resistance held out. Resistance has proven its ability to hold out and accomplish things. Therefore, it is an object of hope. This is an extremely important point, brother Yusuf. Therefore, we should not argue about the resistance because we will then lose the only element of power we have to protect ourselves and repel harm and aggression and end the Zionist occupation.

“Massacres”

As for the issue of massacres, yes, these massacres are a hallmark in the history of Israel and the Zionist movement even when this movement was made up of gangs before 1948, that is, before the establishment of their entity, which usurped our land. It is a hallmark in Zionist history. Every prime minister has to leave his stamp in his black record. A massacre must be there under his name. This barbaric and aggressive behaviour of the Zionists stems from two things. The first is their nature. When we refer to the Koran, we only do what is right. Almighty God says: “Is it that whenever there comes to you an apostle with what ye yourselves desire not, ye are puffed up with pride? Some ye called impostors, and others ye slay!” [Koranic verse] This means they committed murder and carried out massacres against prophets and apostles because they became arrogant.

When Israel reaches a dead end and when its military machine fails to score victory or defeat the resistance, it commits massacres. This is a natural behaviour. I have a paper which proves this mentality. It is a fatwa by rabbis. The blood of the Qana people - tens of children, women and the elderly - was spilled. Nevertheless, the rabbis of the Zionist entity came with a fatwa in which they said: In accordance with the Jewish law, there are no innocent people among enemy ranks at war time. They added that all talk about ethics only weaken the morale of the Israeli army. Imagine how they commit all these crimes with a clear conscience. Therefore, the Almighty God translates this and expresses it in the truest manner by saying the following about their spiteful aggressive mentality: “They say, there is no call on us (to keep faith) with these ignorant (pagans).” [Part of a Koranic verse] A Muslim, Christian, Arab or non-Arab is considered ignorant by the Zionists and, therefore, there is no objection to killing him. There is no sanctity for his blood, money or honour. This is the first interpretation.

The second reason for these massacres is the desire to subjugate others. They know that when they fail to defeat us in a military battle, they commit massacres to subjugate the ordinary people and make them turn against the resistance, army or state. They applied this method in 1948. You know about the massacres they committed in 1948 and in the 1950s and 1960s against Palestine, Lebanon and Egypt, and the Arab planes which they shot down, killing the people on board. Israel condones the shedding of blood. It committed massacres in the whole world because it does not care about mankind. The Qana massacre was committed again today after the first one 10 years ago. Massacres were perpetrated before and after Qana. Massacres are perpetrated in the Palestinian arena every day. Dr Nabil Abu-Zilmiah’s house was knocked down over the heads of its people and a whole family was killed. It was the family of a Dr Nabil Abu-Zilmiah, a professor at the Islamic University. They killed child Rawan Hajjaj with her sister. Huda Ghaliyah’s family was killed before that and Huda was left homeless on the beach of Gaza.

Chief of Staff Dan Halutz, who is today perpetrating massacres in Lebanon, is the same person who perpetrated the Hayy al-Daraj massacre in Gaza about four years ago when he

assassinated martyr Salah Shihadah and destroyed a house and even a whole neighbourhood, killing 17 Palestinian men women, and children. Accordingly, we are facing a mentality that is infatuated with blood by nature. It does not mind killing other people. This is part of the fatwas issued by their rabbis and this is their historical record, which is described by the holy Koran and by our history with them. Their military mentality is based on subjugating peoples through killing. They are now destroying the people. What is taking place in Lebanon is destruction of infrastructure and killing of human beings, animals and all that moves on earth. This is revenge. They are superior militarily. Nevertheless, they take revenge from the people when they fail in their confrontation of the Palestinian or Lebanese armed resistance. This is their mentality. The United States covers their crime and prevents the UN Security Council from condemning it.

Palestinian role in Lebanon

[Al-Shuli] What role did the Palestinians play in Lebanon? Is there a role they can now play in the midst of this war in southern Lebanon? They are about 400,000 in number and most of them are in the south.

[Mish'al] You know that the Palestinians in Lebanon are spread in the south, the central region around Beirut, in the north and in camps. Our people in Lebanon are guests of Lebanon and its people. Under this barbaric aggression against Lebanon and against the Lebanese people and the resistance, and in spite of their modest capabilities and small houses, the Palestinian people are hosting the brotherly Lebanese people who were forced out of their homes. This is a duty dictated by Palestinian feelings of chivalry, religion, Arabism and neighbourliness. The Palestinians are thus returning the favour the Lebanese did to the Palestinian people by hosting them. It seems that it is the destiny of the Palestinian and Lebanese people to have their blood mixed together and to have a common destiny and provide support for one another. Therefore, you saw the marches staged in Gaza, Ramallah and the West Bank. The people raised the beautiful slogan of "from Gaza to Beirut we are one people who will not die". The Palestinian and Lebanese people will not die as long as they adhere to their land and right and rally around the option of resistance.

As for Palestinian participation in the military battle, you know that throughout the past three weeks there were air and naval strikes and indiscriminate artillery and tank shelling. The attempt to advance on the ground was limited and it was repulsed from Marun al-Ras and even before Bint Jubayl. The attempt was repulsed at an early stage. There is no battle on the ground to occupy Lebanon. If this happens, God forbid, every Lebanese and every Palestinian will defend this land because this is an Arab land and all will defend it. As you know, brother Yusuf, the Palestinian citizen is always loyal to his nation. He always takes the initiative to perform his duty. Praised be God, this aggression united the nation in spite of its pains.

"Disengagement between the two battles"

[Al-Shuli] But voices were heard in the Palestinian arena, in addition to other Arab voices, demanding disengagement between the two battles in Palestine and Lebanon. What is the purpose of these calls?

[Mish'al] This is wrong regardless of the motives. Any Palestinian or Arab talk about disengagement between two battles regardless of the motives will eventually serve Israel. Israel and the US Administration behind it want to market the idea of disengagement and try

to make promises to ease the aggression on the Palestinians so that Israel can devote itself to its major aggression against Lebanon. Such promises by Israel or the US Administration are false. This is proved by the fact that when talk began about stopping the firing of rockets, aggression intensified. Twenty-four Palestinians were martyred in Al-Shuja'iyah and other parts of Gaza on one day. This is practically half of the number of people killed in the Qana massacre on one day. This happened in the midst of talk about disengagement. Nobody trusts Israeli promises. This is a sly Israeli-US tactic designed to deal with every case separately rather than spare Palestinian blood. Israel does not seek to protect our people or make an offer to protect our people. It only wants to isolate one side and focus on the other instead of waging two wars at the same time. It will then swoop down again on the Palestinians.

[Al-Shuli] This takes us back to the disengagement of tracks, which happened during the negotiations. The Syrian track was separated from the Palestinian track and the Palestinian track was separated from the Jordanian track.

[Mish'al] Yes, history is repeating itself. Separation was there in the negotiations and here in the war. Israel is launching a war against Palestine, Lebanon and the nation.

Arab leaders

[Al-Shuli] Israel is launching a war against Palestine, Lebanon and the nation, but the Arab leaders have failed in more than one meeting and the foreign ministers have also failed to hold a summit or adopt a position to break the siege imposed on Palestine or Gaza before the war on Lebanon. Now they have failed to adopt a position on Lebanon, where about 1,000 people have been killed and thousands of others have been wounded in 20 days. Why?

[Mish'al] Let me stress that we are waging one battle. The battle of Palestine, Lebanon, Iraq and the nation is one battle. None in the Arab region should think he is -

[Al-Shuli, interrupting] Who? Is it the resistance or -

[Mish'al, interrupting] This is a flaw. This is not the battle of Palestine or Lebanon alone. This is the battle of the nation. Why? I explained the nature of the Zionist-US scheme. Therefore, if the hostile side sees the scene of the battle so large, the Arab and Islamic side should see it in the same manner in order to shoulder its real responsibility. It should not consider this the battle of the Palestinians and Lebanese. With regard to the issue of Arab inability and failure to hold a summit, this, of course, is regrettable. It is regrettable that the Arabs are unable to hold a summit or adopt a unified position when the Muslim and Arab blood is spilled in Palestine, Lebanon or elsewhere. Instead, there is confusion. There is a split in the Arab position. There is defeatism, weakness, inability, and perplexity by some. Regrettably, there are sometimes discordant voices. This is actually an unenviable Arab position. This tempts Israel to do more.

[Al-Shuli] This prompted the Israeli Prime Minister [Ehud Olmert] to cite the position adopted by some Arab and Islamic states in order to continue the war.

[Mish'al] Of course, this is Zionist slyness that is meant to further confuse the Arab position. However, the nation on the official level will sooner or later discover that when it acts in this way it will be making a big mistake not only against Palestine, Lebanon or Iraq, but also

against itself. Any weakness or defeat, God forbid, here or there, will negatively reflect on the whole nation. Likewise, any victory achieved in Palestine, Lebanon, or Iraq will be a victory for the nation. I think the Arab leaders and governments know what will happen if the US Administration manages to bring the situation in Iraq under its control after having occupied it in 2003. US hegemony over the region will then have no limits and the Arab countries will be open to more pressure, threats and interference. Therefore, steadfastness and valiant resistance in Iraq checked the US influence and US advance. The wall of resistance in Palestine and Lebanon is what is protecting the nation today. Any crack in this wall, and there will be no crack, God willing, will reflect negatively on the nation. Therefore, this is a responsibility before God and history. If the Arabs and Muslims have not thought of a positive step for the sake of our people in Palestine and Lebanon, let them do so now for the sake of their own interests and future and the future of the Arab and Islamic nation. We are today facing one battle.

Arabs

[Al-Shuli] What can the Arab people do now? There are demonstrations in more than one Arab country and there are voices and calls for stopping this aggression, but these are not heeded by the Arab regimes. Are you satisfied with the current Arab situation?

[Mish'al] The Arab situation has official and popular aspects. We have talked about the official aspect. It is not satisfactory, of course, although we are aware that the Arab situation is difficult. There is US pressure and different balances of power. We know that the official Arab situation is not easy.

[Al-Shuli] Are you trying to find an excuse?

[Mish'al] No, I am not trying to find an excuse. We do not believe the Arab situation is in its best shape. There is negligence and a state of tension in the Arab situation. Eventually, what is done will be done in self-defence, in addition to its being a defence of the brothers and common destiny. This is regrettably the official Arab situation. As for the people's situation, I have always said that the Arab street has always been in good shape. The street of the Arab and Islamic nation has always been good, praised be God. It is good in the Palestinian homeland, Lebanon and Iraq. Whenever aggression against our nation intensifies, the Arab and Islamic street rises with its free and large masses and its Islamic and national forces and movements. The Arab street is in good shape. You saw how the people demonstrated in the streets of the Arab capitals. This is a good sign, praised be God. I wish the official position was on the level of this street. I think that the more the US Administration and the Zionist entity commit aggression and massacres to break the will of the nation and subjugate it, the more they fuel the fire of national zeal and the more the nation rallies around the resistance. Day after day the Arab and Muslim masses feel that resistance is their only historic option. Therefore, they serve us by doing what they do, but the price is, of course, heavy through the blood that is spilled on the land of Palestine and Lebanon.

Extradition from Syria

[Al-Shuli] Let us go back to the first point about the war on Lebanon. About three days before the war, the United States' UN representative called on Syria to extradite or deport you from Syria. Is there any relationship between this war and what happens in Gaza and the call for extraditing you, considering you the person primarily responsible for the

operation that took place in Gaza and for the capture of the Israeli soldier?

[Mish'al] Of course there is a relationship. There is a relationship between the war taking place in Palestine and Lebanon on the one hand, and the pressure put on Syria, the call for extraditing me, and the assassinations carried out here and there on the other. This is part of an all-out war against the nation and the resistance. There is resistance inside which must be struck. There is resistance in Lebanon which must be struck and disarmed. There are resistance leaders in the Arab countries and these must be struck and pursued. What is wanted is silencing the voice of the resistance.

[Al-Shuli] In view of these threats and pressures, do you think it is possible to [words indistinct] Syria?

[Mish'al] I think that recalling the past tells us about the possibilities. You know that after the aggression on Iraq and its occupation in 2003, [Colin] Powell came to the region as [US] secretary of state and made specific demands on Syria but it did not comply. The pressure is old. There are US and Israeli pressures and threats. Nevertheless, Syria did not change its position. It maintained its originality and continued to embrace the resistance factions and resistance leaders as well as the sons of our people. Its political language also did not change. This is the outcome of this honest experience. The one who goes back a little can tell the future Syrian position. I do not think any free and proud person will agree to submit to the unjust US-Zionist demands, especially since our presence in Syria and the Arab region is due to the aggression on Palestine, the occupation of Palestine, and the displacement of the Palestinian people. Resistance exists because occupation exists.

Let the one who wants to stop resistance in the region in general end the occupation. This is our logic and the logic of Syria and all Arab countries. They know the truth. Let aggression and occupation end first. Resistance and escalation in the region will then end. The US and Israeli call for stopping the resistance, disarming it and handing over the captured soldiers while Israel is doing whatever it wants, is a call none accept.

[Al-Shuli] Controversy was triggered and fatwas were issued on Hezbollah's position and whether it should be supported or not as a Shi'i party. What do you think of these fatwas?

[Mish'al] I think getting preoccupied with such talk and making such a classification does not serve the Arab or Islamic interests. It does not serve the nation in its battle against US-Zionist aggression. No one should deceive himself or ignore the objective fact that there are differences in the Arab region. There are sectarian, ethnic and political differences. There are also differences within the one country and among the countries just as there are differences among other nations. There are differences among the European countries, for example. Wars were even launched among the European states, which are all Christian.

These differences do not mean there will be wars and conflicts, but they require us to unite in the main battle. Yes, there are partial and secondary contradictions and difference. These are understood and they have their historical reasons, but they do not mean that we should not coexist and reach agreement. The ones who have differences are the ones who hold dialogue, reach agreement and find common denominators. We belong to one nation in spite of these differences and we unite in the one battle the nation is waging against its enemies. This is the logic of religion itself to which we appeal. This is the logic of reason and politics, and the logic of the national and pan-Arab position. This is the logic of the person who cares for the future and destiny of the nation. Therefore, I call on the entire nation to

rise above these differences. These differences have their own atmosphere, tools and dialogue. When the battle rages against the enemies of the nation, we cannot but unite in order to protect ourselves and the nation's resources, future and history, and protect this land against any violation by the invading forces.

Gaza

[Al-Shuli] Let us go back to Gaza. Do you think Israel's preoccupation with the war in Lebanon has eased the pressure of the war you say Israel is launching on Gaza daily?

[Mish'al] No, it did not ease it in practice. On the contrary, since the start of the hostile war on Lebanon three weeks ago, more than 100 Palestinians have been martyred. Since Operation Dispelled Illusion, about 170 Palestinians have been martyred, including 100 martyred during the past 20 days when the Zionist and US aggression began on Lebanon. This means Israel has not eased its aggression but what happened is that the major event shifted to Lebanon. The media began to concentrate on Lebanon, giving less attention to what is taking place in Gaza. This has perhaps tempted Israel to commit more aggression against Gaza and the West Bank. They have even knocked down the PNA [Palestinian National Authority] headquarters in Nablus. The killings continue in all neighbourhoods of the West Bank and Gaza Strip cities. They are now using a new method. They contact the owners of houses and buildings by telephone and warn them that their houses will be destroyed within minutes. Massacres are perpetrated in Gaza, the West Bank and Lebanon in order to punish the people so that they would abandon the resistance and so that we would have internal crises and fail to unite in the one battle. But praised be God, the awareness of the people and their forces and factions increases our unity.

After the elections

[Al-Shuli] Some accuse you of having brought the Palestinian people destruction, blood, siege and starvation since your assumption of power in Palestine. How would you respond to these accusations?

[Mish'al] First, this is the option of the Palestinian people. We did not impose ourselves on our people. The people elected us through the ballot box. The US Administration and the world marketed democracy but were not patient with the results. They could not tolerate seeing the resistance elected through the ballot boxes. Therefore, we did not impose ourselves on anyone. Second, who said things were all right before Hamas formed its government? Aggression and killing were continuing. The number of detainees rose to 10,000 male and females. Settlement activity increased. [Former Israeli Premier Ariel] Sharon's plans and afterwards Olmert's plans continued to adopt unilateral solutions and impose facts on the ground. There was further confiscation of the land, continued construction of the wall, and Judaization of Jerusalem. There was emphasis on the Israeli decision to cancel the right of return and on the well-known four no's. Things were not all right, but they were covered up in the presence of an authority and Palestinian reality. Things were blocked. Even when we the Palestinians acted in solidarity with the PNA presidency in 2005 by accepting the initiative to observe calm that year, none respected it. Neither Israel nor the international community respected it and the countries of the region in general could do nothing. The true situation was bad.

It was not Hamas which brought the Palestinians a disaster. The situation was already bad, but what happened later was an attempt to punish the Palestinian people for their free

choice. The Palestinian people chose Hamas, so they had to be held responsible for their choice in the form of starvation, blocked salaries, closures, denial of government powers, military escalation, increase in the number of detainees, and threats to impose a unilateral solution through Olmert's plan. Israel tried to isolate the Palestinians from the whole world as a punishment so that the Palestinian people will break away from the resistance and so that Israel can deal with Palestinian reality the way it wants. Israel wants to take the land, attack the people, and deprive them of the freedom of running their internal affairs the way they want. It wants to interfere in everything. Therefore, it was not Hamas which brought about destruction. Destruction was brought about by this international and US injustice and Zionist intransigence, which has a US and international cover.

The Palestinian government tried to do the impossible in order to serve its people, but there was an unprecedented embargo. The government is usually given 100 days, but we were not given even 100 hours or 100 minutes. War was launched on the government right from the first day. In the same way as the Qana massacre is considered a mark of disgrace on the forehead of Israel, the US Administration and the international community, which remains silent over the Zionist-US injustice, the Israeli crimes in Gaza and the West Bank are also a mark of disgrace on the forehead of all these parties. The experience the international community and the region had with the Palestinian government formed by Hamas, which came through the ballot boxes in fair elections, is a mark of disgrace for all those who raise the slogans of democracy in the world. This is so because they did not respect the Palestinian people's will.

[Al-Shuli] The United States and Israel were not the only ones to participate in the embargo. Some Arab parties also participated in it. Why do you then accuse only the United States and Israel?

[Mish'al] I said this is a mark of disgrace on the forehead of everyone who speaks about democracy and everyone who participated in this embargo. It is a mark of disgrace on his forehead and he is responsible for it. I think the people know the names and details. I do not have to talk about them.

Where next?

[Al-Shuli] One last question to which I want a frank answer: In view of the current situation in Palestine, Lebanon and Gaza, where is the conflict heading?

[Mish'al] Undoubtedly, we are going through painful stages. We are bleeding, our houses are being destroyed, our peoples are being punished and our states are being destroyed by this comprehensive destruction. There is a flaw in the balance of power, international injustice and Israeli and US bullying, to which no one in the world can put an end. Undoubtedly, it is a difficult reality. But allow me to tell you, brother Yusuf, that from the midst of this rubble, suffering and pain I see real hope and light. This is not illusion at all. It is not a misplaced hope. The main lesson learned from the current battle regardless of its tactical results and what will happen tomorrow and what will be imposed, is that I am confident that the will of the resistance will not break, neither in Palestine nor in Lebanon, Iraq, Afghanistan, nor in the Arab and Islamic area in general.

We, together with our fathers and grandfathers, who underwent Palestinian suffering in the past, as well as the people of today, wonder if the moment will come when we can defeat Israel and restore our rights and land. Is it possible to do so under the current weak Arab

situation, the Zionist technological and military superiority, the nuclear arsenal and the unlimited US support for it? Every stage we pass through these days enhances our belief that our hope is real.

When Israel was forced to leave southern Lebanon in 2000, it was a bright spot. It is possible to defeat Israel. Undoubtedly, an all-out defeat takes time, efforts, stages, accumulation of efforts and capabilities. However, it was a [bright] spot on the road. When we forced Sharon to leave Gaza and dismantle the settlements, including Netzarim, which he used to consider like Tel Aviv, this was a bright spot on the road. Since 2000, Israel has been engaged in an open battle, for six years, with the Palestinian people. So far, it has not managed to inflict defeat. We consider this a glimpse of hope. After three weeks [of Israeli military action in Lebanon], Israel is still helpless before Hezbollah. We consider this a glimpse of hope.

In other words, I can say with full confidence that Israel today is no more capable of achieving victory. There is no doubt that it is capable of destruction. It can cause huge destruction, but it cannot triumph or impose defeat on the nation or the Palestinian, Lebanese and Iraqi resistance. Therefore, we are before a turning point. This brings us closer to the picture we imagine. This picture is no longer far to reach. It is getting closer and the moment will come when the course changes and the nation becomes capable. Today the nation is capable of steadfastness. Israel is incapable of scoring victory or decisively settling the battle. We are today capable of steadfastness. We have made some gains.

All of this is a true indication that the day on which we will score an overall victory, defeat the Zionist-US project in the region, liberate all our homeland, regain our holy places and restore our initiative, dignity, sovereignty over our land, and our possession of our resources is no longer imaginary or far-fetched. The moment to do so is gradually approaching. Victory comes only from the almighty God.

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