



The Palestinian National Project

& confronting
the annexation plan

vision

**Khaled
Mashal's**



publishing
Arab Thinking Forum

Introduction
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Palestinian leader
Khaled Mashal's
vision on
the Palestinian
National Project
&
confronting
the annexation plan

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Introduction

Israel's declaration of its intention to annexe 30% of the occupied West Bank in area C would be considered - if executed - a final bullet in the current failing negotiations. Meanwhile, any resistance seems to exist in Gaza alone as it has been crippled in the West Bank after being targeted by criminalisation campaigns since the Oslo Accord.

Furthermore, the deep fracture that has affected the Arab world, whether due to its preoccupation with its own internal affairs or through Israel's attempts to facilitate unacceptable breaches to normalise with Israel. We recognise that the Palestinian cause is going through a critical historical challenge that is different from all previous trials.

Since Israel's occupation of Palestine, it has continued to launch displacement and ethnic cleansing projects, from the time of Balfour's declaration through to Trump's declaration, and his deal with Netanyahu on the annexation project. This has not impeded Palestinians from developing new ways to resist this Zionist project by all their means.

These events are taking place amid Arab divisiveness and busyness, and whilst the Palestinian division continues. Palestinians seem to be alone in confronting a Zionist project that is working tirelessly to convince neighbouring Arab countries that it is a friend, not an enemy, in an attempt to replace the Palestinian narrative of the conflict with a Zionist one.

Within this critical context, the Arab Thinking Forum in London hosted a recognised figure in Palestinian political work, Mr Khaled Mashal, former president of the political office in the Islamic resistance movement Hamas. He presented his vision regarding this critical phase in the history of the Palestinian conflict and discussed the options he saw for Palestinians in light of the huge challenges ahead.

This discussion comes as part of a series of seminars by the Arab Thinking Forum to find ways to confront the deal of the century and the

annexation project. The Forum endeavours to hold discussions with Palestinian leaders from various national factions, to answer the question of 'what should be done?'

I held an exclusive conversation on Wednesday 1st July 2020, over two hours, titled "Palestinians and ways of confronting the deal of the century and the annexation project". Over the course of the interview, I presented Mr Mashal with questions regarding current affairs and pressing issues; how he would describe the Palestinian situation; reasons behind the continuous division amongst the Palestinians, and ways of achieving unity. He provided his vision to unite Palestinian powers in the framework of a united national program which would confront Judaisation, annexation and the deal of the century. The discussion also included questions around the possible and available Palestinian choices amid a political block and failing negotiations.

Regarding the difficulties faced by the resistance and the limitations of its allies, considering the current existing powers, Mashal concluded by stating that there are two choices regarding authority:

1. Dismantling the authority according to a national agreement and an alternative vision.
2. Change the role of the authority.

Changing the authority's role is a new vision that Mashal views as: "An important choice, emphasised by necessity and national responsibility. It is impossible to accept the continuation of the current authority's role with its security obligations in the interest of the occupation."

According to Mashal, both choices mean a confrontation with the Israeli occupation. He considers that before taking any choice, it is necessary to make a decision regarding the future of the authority in accordance with a national agreement and a complete vision and study of both choices. During the interview the Palestinian leader proposed



several founding ideas to form a national project. He believes that it will unite the various Palestinian powers and factions in: confronting the annexation project which, in his view, is the most dangerous; confronting the deal of the century; and advancing the Palestinian cause in general.

During his analysis of the current Palestinian situation, Mashal stressed that despite the situation carrying many challenges and dangers in its folds, it brings promising real opportunities. He summarises the challenges in three points:

First: The acceleration of US-Israeli projects that aim to end the Palestinian cause, namely the deal of the century. This is done by enforcing new realities, such as recognising Jerusalem as the capital of Israel and moving the US embassy there; accelerating settlement; annexation of more West Bank lands and legitimising the crime under US protection.

Second: The absence of an effective Palestinian player in confronting these procedures amidst the current internal Palestinian conflict, coinciding with the absence of a unified Palestinian leadership that has the vision, ability and readiness to take risks for the Palestinian cause.

Third: The disparity that afflicted the Arab and Islamic world's support for Palestine, whether by being preoccupied by their domestic issues or by Israel's penetration of some Arab regimes and normalising with them.

With regards to opportunities available, Mashal explained that the main opportunities are:

1. Unifying the Palestinian national front to confront the annexation and the deal of the century.
2. A fresh start and a renewed spirit for the resistance movement.
3. Turning the occupation's procedures on the ground to one that drains it.

4. It could be a historical opportunity to correct the way the world views the Palestinian cause and present it as a cause for national liberation from occupation and not a cause of negotiations, settlements and disagreement on mere details.

5. Increasing human and international isolation of the Zionist entity amidst the rising dissatisfaction with its confrontations, crimes and breaches of all international laws and customs.

Mashal explained that the exceptional danger of the annexation, in addition to the main danger of the occupation itself, lies in the fact that this process aims to legitimise the theft of Palestinian lands and besieging Palestinians in a narrow geographical area disconnected internally and externally. This is apparent as the targeted area for annexation is 30% of the total area of the West Bank; not to mention that the Jordan Valley alone represent 50% of West Banks' arable land that contains artesian wells which are considered one of the main water sources. Therefore, resisting the annexation project comes as a Palestinian priority at the current time, without compromising the main Palestinian issues: namely the liberation of its land, restoring Jerusalem and its sanctities, the return of Palestinian refugees, the release of detainees held in Israeli prisons, and the establishment of a full Palestinian state authority with Jerusalem as its capital.

During the interview, Mashal presented several suggestions and proposals which can be considered as foundations for a comprehensive Palestinian national liberation project. It can be summarised in the following:

First: Redefining the constants and the Palestinian national rights that entails a collective Palestinian consensus, without any compromises.



Second: Rebuilding the political institutions and the national reference for decisions represented by the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO). These have to be based on real democratic foundations where all Palestinians internally and externally, along with various national figures and factions, are represented.

Third: adopting a resistance program as Palestinians are still under occupation. The program must consist of all forms of resistance, including armed and national resistance.

Following a documentation methodology that the Forum follows in all its discussions and seminars with decision-makers, politicians, thinkers and public figures, we have transcribed and edited the content of the exclusive discussion with Khaled Mashal, and presented it in this paper to Arab and Palestinian readers, decision-makers, leaderships, and to all concerned with the Palestinian cause.

The Arab Thinking Forum considers this document to be a real national vision presented by Mr Mashal that contains specific and practical ideas proposed to present a national project to confront the brutal Zionist occupation. We consider it worthy of a wider national discussion and brainstorming sessions that the Forum holds, regardless of factions, affiliations and locations. These are the characteristics that Mr Mashal is keen to include in this project that he presents as a collective Palestinian project and not a partisan or faction. It is a project for the internal and external, and for every Palestinian man and woman regardless of their affiliations, beliefs, background or location.

Mohammed Ameen

Chairman of
Arab Thinking Forum - London

Elements of the vision

**Annexation resolution:
timing, dimensions,
dangers**

US-Israeli consultations regarding the implementation of the annexation plan

We start with this title as we discuss the national program to confront the annexation decision, for the outcome of these consultations were forced on the political scene. Therefore, it is vital to understand it carefully in its context to prevent decision-makers from miscalculating the event.

Currently, the US administration is not attempting to dissuade the Zionist entity from implementing the annexation plan. Indeed, the catastrophic idea came mainly from Washington, with Israeli phrasing, under titles such as the deal of the century and moving the US embassy to Jerusalem, followed by the annexation project.

US envoys tried to push for the implementation of the annexation to be postponed, especially considering some differences between partners of the Zionist government (Netanyahu-Gantz), and rather for the annexation to take place in stages and in segments. This is to fulfil two of their interests:

The first, is to influence the upcoming US elections in favour of President Trump who is baffled by the polls leaning in favour of his Democratic rival (Biden).

The second, deceiving the Palestinians and Arabs by pretending to retreat from the annexation decision, to curtail their angry reactions against it and pass the decision with minimal repercussions. Likewise, they attempt to neutralise Jordan's stance and distance it from the Palestinian position by delaying the annexation of the Jordan Valley.

Thus, US efforts are related to the execution and tactical management of the annexation. It attempts to pass them through deception, not to retreat from the decision or change its essence.

Therefore, it is necessary to continue to mobilise our resources for confrontation, and to continue our activities relentlessly and swiftly. A strong message should be sent to the enemy, as Gaza did through its warning missiles, which gave a clear indication of the readiness of the resistance. The West Bank, our people far and wide, powers and leaderships everywhere - at home and abroad - must take heed and be strongly present on the scene.

- **There are slight differences between the US and Israel concerning the tactics of implementing the annexation decision, but not the decision itself.** Netanyahu's concern is that Trump will fall in the elections and that he loses his exceptional ally who has supported him without limits. Therefore, he is in a rush, and at the same time in fear of the effects on the government coalition between him and Gantz. He also wants to achieve great strides on ground in hope that it will save him from facing trial.

The US administration, a strong supporter of the annexation, provides the necessary political environment, as well as absolute support for Netanyahu, and focuses on managing the annexation in terms of timings and tactics. This is done in a way that serves Trump in the election battle, especially during the successive crises he suffered from issues such as the Corona pandemic, the sharp division in US society, the uprising of the civil rights of black Americans, etc. It aims to reduce the repercussions of the decision and curtail Palestinian and Arab reactions.

The difference between Netanyahu and Gantz on the annexation issue is tactical and not over the essence of the decision.

This is a US deception that we must not fall for. We should assess the situation correctly and be strongly present with activities to confront the decision and measures taken by the occupation on the ground.

The current Palestinian status quo

To describe the current Palestinian situation, I would say that this moment in time is loaded with challenges and dangers. However, it carries real and promising opportunities. Such is life, a mixture of risks and hopes, challenges and opportunities. Those who carry causes and projects should assess the challenges and risks objectively, and have a firm belief in the justice of their cause, as well as confidence in their abilities. There are numerous opportunities that can be turned into action on ground.

The three most prominent of these challenges and risks are:

First challenge: The acceleration of Israeli-US plans to settle the Palestinian issue through new headlines such as the deal of the century, the annexation decision, and the Judaisation of Jerusalem, in addition to previous plans and titles.

Second challenge: The absence of effective Palestinian players and a unified leadership that bears the responsibility of leading this historic moment with a clear vision, effective resistance tools, and a defiant spirit ready to take risks for the sake of our homeland. Rigidity and weighty calculations are not effective tools when it comes to leadership, especially when leading their people to liberation.

Third challenge: The dysfunctionality that afflicted the Arab and Islamic region through blood baths, division, polarisation and conflict, as well as the unacceptable breaches of normalising with the Zionist entity that occurred in some countries and with some leaders and political and intellectual elites.

The most important opportunities that arise from these challenges and risks which can be acted upon are:

First: Unifying the Palestinian national front to confront the annexation plan and the deal of the century.

Second: Renewing the spirit of the resistance movement and having a fresh start.

Third: Turning the occupation's procedures on the ground into tools that pre-empt them.

Fourth: Correcting the image of the Palestinian cause before the world and presenting it accurately as a case of national liberation from occupation, not an issue of settlements, negotiations and disagreements over some details.

Fifth: Working to deepen the international and humanitarian isolation of the Zionist entity, in light of the increased anger and resentment of its violations and crimes in breach of all international laws and customs.

Is annexation the most dangerous issue affecting the Palestinian cause?

The occupation remains the root and the cause of the problem. As for annexation, it is undoubtedly extremely dangerous to our cause and people. Indeed, it is essentially legitimising the occupation, theft of land, displacement of people, control and Judaisation of Jerusalem and its sanctities.

In terms of significance and aims, it seeks to legitimise the occupation and theft under a false cover. If previous Israeli-US projects and plans blessed the occupation, accelerated settlements and permitted aggression, indeed the annexation seeks to legitimise all that.

The decision is serious given the enemy's strategy in controlling the largest area of land, displacing the largest number of people and squeezing them into the narrowest area of their homeland. This will lead to economic, social and political crises which are ultimately intended to displace our people and cause immigration to eliminate the dream of liberation, return and independence.

As an example, annexation of the Jordan Valley, which represents more than a quarter of the West Bank and half of its agricultural area, it would mean depriving its people of this significant water and agricultural stock. Furthermore, it aims to isolate Palestine from Jordan geographically, and then politically.

The annexation comes at a time of Palestinian division and absence of effective resistance which intensifies the dangers of this decision. The West Bank was subjected to the criminalisation of any resistance and prosecution of men and weapons. The security coordination was a stab in its back, as it prevented effective popular resistance against the occupation, settlements and Judaisation process. The annexation decision came at a critical time as the West Bank appeared to the Zionist entity as an easy prey.

It is clear that the decision came at a time when Arab and Islamic countries are going through dire conditions as most countries are pre-occupied with their own concerns, conflicts and divisions. They were targeted with organised normalisation, albeit limited, but a dangerous breach that is condemned.

The danger of annexation does not mean reducing the Palestinian scene to only that. Main national headlines - liberating the land, restoring Jerusalem and the return of refugees - are always at the forefront of our Palestinian priorities. They are the basic components and symbols of the cause, in addition to liberating our prisoners and sanctities. These major issues are the basis of our vision, discourse and resistance. It is the essence of our programs and always on top of our agendas and priorities. Indeed, it is for these core issues that battles are fought, resistance is heightened and sacrifices are made with one's freedom and life, while tolerating the pain of siege and oppression.

For example, the effort and sacrifices the resistance made to release prisoners and detainees from the occupation's prisons were immense, as it is considered a national issue and a great concern for our people. Thousands are still behind bars, including women, children, the sick and elderly, and hundreds are subject to life sentences. Certainly, Gilad Shalit's prisoner exchange, also known as Wafa al-Ahrar, was not the first and will not be the last until all those heroes are freed.

The official discourse still remains under the main headlines: land, Jerusalem, refugees and prisoners. However, there needs to be greater implementation of their concept and effective strategies and mechanisms for action to meet the importance and sacredness of these issues. For example, the strategy of resistance in all its forms should not be neglected to obtain various power cards in addressing these issues.

• **The Israeli occupation is launching a new war against us through the annexation plan, to continue its ongoing wars targeting our land, people and sanctities.**

Our duty is to confront the occupation and turn its aggressive violations into draining tools that raises the cost of the occupation. Otherwise, we facilitate the occupation's plans which will tempt it to expand in their excursions, and with time it will be become a clean and low-cost occupation.

Free nations, with Palestinian people at the forefront, adhere to their right to resist the occupation, and to offer all kinds of sacrifices to end it and force it to leave.

A Palestinian national program to confront the annexation plan

Program themes

The dangers of annexation, its dimensions and implications, especially considering the historical moment the Palestinian cause is going through obliges us to agree on a serious initiative for a national program for confrontation.

The following are the most prominent features of this program and its themes:

FIRST: The Palestinian leadership, and leaders of the resistance in all its factions, should collectively take a clear decision to open confrontation with the occupation, in response to its decision and measures of annexation. That is, transforming the Palestinian position into one of unanimous rejection and into energy to mobilise resistance effectively by confronting the occupation on the ground - publicly, politically, diplomatically and with all other possible means.

Thus, we send a strong, clear and effective message that our real bet is on the choice of resistance and confrontation, exhausting the occupation and disrupting its procedures and plans. We should be clear that the period of political settlement whereby we were exhausted by the enemy with no real gains is over - a period in which they exploited it as a cover for furthering their settlements, Judaisation, land theft and destruction of Palestinian resources. Thus, we transfer the Palestinian frame of mind from the box of division and questions on authority, to confrontation and questions on struggle. This is an important shift in Palestinian thinking and behaviour at this complex historical moment.

SECOND: Sending a message of trust, credibility and seriousness by enacting the decisions that were taken by Palestinians over recent

years and months and turning words into actions. This includes decisions to end security coordination with the occupation and not committing to the signed agreements, including the Paris Economic Agreement. Work must be done to liberate the Palestinian economy from its dependence on the occupation, and to rebuild it to become an economy of resilience and resistance, not an economy of formal authority. This path is extremely important in terms of enhancing the confidence of our people in its leadership and their seriousness and ability to meet their responsibilities. Only then will people work with confidence, continuity and creativity.

THIRD: To mobilise our people everywhere, at home and in exile, to support this strong and unified position and direct them to resist and engage in all available means and programs, each according to their circumstances, to confront the annexation scheme and bring it down. Let our strategy be: to turn the enemy's actions on the ground into exhaustive tools that drain it and let's turn the tables.

In this context, a detailed program for each region and its capabilities and options is derived, so that efforts are integrated and joined towards the general national goal.

- **The West Bank**, and its centre Jerusalem, is the main area for confrontation, since it will be the main target of the annexation plan. Therefore, it is a national duty to revolutionise it in the face of the occupation with all available forms of popular resistance - varied and comprehensive - and through direct contact with the occupation's soldiers, settlers and land grabbers. This includes sit-ins in the targeted areas for annexation, including the Jordan Valley, setting up solidarity tents and effectively transforming the enemy's procedures into tools of self-exhaustion. The West Bank also needs political and public presence that restores its vitality and influence, and reinforces its essential role, particularly at this historical moment.

It is true that the West Bank is suffering, and is burdened with wounds and restrictions, but it stands on a great legacy of struggle, and holds great will power, energy and creativity. Its record is a testament to this through the many uprisings and confrontations, including the confrontation that forced the occupation to retreat from placing electronic gates at the doors of the Aqsa mosque.

The West Bank must be released and turned into an obstruction in the face of the occupation, not an exhausted easy target.

- **Gaza** is where resistance is at its best, and it is truly the shield and protector of our homeland. Hopes and confidence are always placed on resistance. Gaza is an essential part of this battle and was never absent in fulfilling its duties.

When talking about Gaza's role in the resistance program in general, and in this confrontation in particular, four angles emerge:

First: Defending the people, land, and political will in the face of Israeli aggressions, wars, sanctions and siege.

Second: Its systematic role in the liberation project in combination with other Palestinian fronts due to the capabilities and multiple options that the resistance in Gaza holds.

Third: The repository of expertise and experience which provides the various Palestinian resistance fronts with the necessary expertise, capabilities and advanced military thinking that has been refined by wars and fierce confrontations.

Fourth: Confronting the annexation decision with a set of military steps carefully selected in terms of methods, tools and tactics. That is besides confrontation through popular events, return marches, incendiary airplanes and balloons, etc.

- Palestinians in the **1948 occupied territories** hold a special and important position on the confrontation map through their unique experiences and indispensable roles, along with their deep patriotic spirit that made them victorious over imprisonment and remain committed to their Arab identity, homeland and people. They endured many confrontations with the occupation in defence of their lands and refused to be deported. Today, they are a major partner in this confrontation, especially since they were, and still are, targeted by the annexation scheme, the theft of land and the displacement of people from these areas.

Their available confrontation options are multiple; at the forefront is the struggle to defend the land, which they hold a glorious history in since Land Day in 1976; and standing against displacement, which is the next step in the annexation process and part of the long-term Zionist strategy. Additionally is their influential role in defending Jerusalem and the blessed Aqsa Mosque, confirming Palestinian presence and enduring battles on all fronts - national, religious, political and symbolic. They have always formed a depth and extension that provides what our people in Jerusalem and the West Bank need in terms of participation, solidarity and support during difficult times.

- **Our people abroad** - in camps, places of refuge and extended presence - hold a great legacy in the struggle for many decades. They have many capabilities and options throughout the world, and many platforms including organisational, popular and trade union frameworks, such as the People's Congress for Palestinians abroad and others. They have active communities in various continents that have influence, relationships and successful experiences in working for the cause. They can be mobilised in the face of the annexation plan.

This includes public, media and political events along with sit-ins outside Israeli embassies and consulates, and working alongside the free people of the world for the Palestinian cause. Other forms of struggle are available according to each country, especially the continuous

historical role of camps in the neighbouring countries for their symbolic, human resource and strong presence they provide to the issue of refugees and their right to return.

FOURTH: The mobilisation on an Arab and Islamic level, both official and popular, and working to rally the nation around our cause through confronting the annexation. There is no doubt that when our action is initiated by a unified and effective Palestinian position on the ground, it will have a greater chance to change the mood in the region. The Palestinian cause can re-emerge at the top of the nation's priorities and concerns, as it was before. The Zionist hubs' penetration needs to be restricted to weaken and isolate them. That is when the nation's true convictions and feelings will be steered towards the cause, and their confidence will be boosted in the Palestinian strategy, its leaders and those in charge.

The nation's countries, forces and elites are generally preoccupied with their concerns and current issues, and exhausted by field, political and intellectual disputes. Nevertheless, Palestine still has an engrained position in the nation's conscience and mind. The challenge today is how to activate this position and provide it with a new spirit. This is not only possible but necessary, and the key to that is through actions and not words, and by restoring confidence and avoiding blame. Mobilising our cause on the ground and politically with a renewed spirit is imperative to win everyone and expose the ugly face of the Zionist entity as an occupier, murderer and thief, not a negotiator or partner in an illusory peace.

FIFTH: To mobilise the regional and international arena with a unified Palestinian stance, discourse and diplomacy. This is in order to present our Palestinian cause before the world in its true form, as a cause of liberation from occupation, away from the lies of political settlements and negotiations. This entails correcting the direction of the cause and its image amongst nations and governments, gaining sup-

porters and partners in our just battle. Then we proceed to delegitimise and besiege the Zionist entity by pursuing it in various international forums and arenas.

• **What resources do we have to offer for this seemingly high-ceiling program?**

We have plenty, including:

- Immensely resilient people who do not surrender, holding onto their land, rights and just cause. They have been resisting for 100 years, and they have a tremendous reservoir of giving, ability, creativity and persistence. By the grace of God, they have a long and rich experience that no other people have.

- Creative resistance, especially with the current experience in the Gaza Strip. Gaza was able to progress and develop its weapons and military ideology despite the conditions of siege and the drying up of their resources, and in the absence of the traditional factors under which liberation movements usually operate.

When the West Bank is set free, it will provide another great experiment in creative resistance, forcing the occupation to leave. What it possesses in terms of history, resources and long experience further increases our confidence in the role it can play.

Our people, wherever they exist, can be creative in deriving appropriate forms of resistance.

- A dignified nation, even when depleted and riddled with wounds, will always remember Palestine. Despite the attempts of some to export corrupt elites to the front in hope of receiving Israel as a partner and part of the solution, and not an enemy and the root of the problem.

The nation is our protector and our true partner in this conflict with

all that Jerusalem and Palestine represents, be it religiously, politically, historically and emotionally, and the dangers and challenges that the Zionist entity poses to its security and interests. Restoring the nation's role, partnership and momentum in this conflict is a fundamental priority and one that is possible. Each obstacle has a key, action, discourse and it is essential to bring to the front our partnership and unified struggle.

- An international sphere that is becoming increasingly irritated by Israel's vulgarity and aggression, and impatient with the occupation that is becoming a moral and political burden.

The US and other countries still support the Zionist entity endlessly. However, distress over the practices of the occupation, its crimes and nonsense started to increase internationally at a governmental, parliamentary, political, journalistic, intellectual and academic level. The Zionist entity has become concerned, especially from the growing calls for a boycott on an international level.

Focusing on the human dimension of the conflict, and working to cut international support from the Israeli occupier, is a basic building block in our general strategy for liberation and elimination of the occupation, and is part of our special strategy today to confront the annexation decision and the deal of the century.

The bottom line is: How to invest our assets and activate them correctly in the right direction towards our clear goals. It is well known that the world does not support those who do not seek victory for themselves, and until others support us, we must defend ourselves first. In a nutshell, the way to this is: leadership, vision, and a political and resistance program to a level suited to our national goals.

• Is the balance of power working for the benefit of Palestine or for the Israeli occupation?

Never in history were the powers on the side of the people facing colonial corruption. The occupation and settlement forces were always stronger than the people they occupied and attacked. Yet, nations defeated them eventually and gained victory, such as the Algerian people in their great revolution, the people of Vietnam, the people of South Africa, and Arab and Islamic nations who were liberated from the colonialists following bitter revolutions and sacrifices.

The nations who sought liberation seriously and courageously won. That means that, although the balance of power is important, it is not the only consideration and must be understood carefully to deal with its imbalances in a serious, reasonable, competent and creative manner.

I am all for being realistic, but in a revolutionary way, not an impotent one. This means that we analyse the balance of powers objectively and seek to improve and alter them relatively and qualitatively in our favour, even if not necessarily equal. For example, Gaza along with the resistance in the West Bank and all of Palestine was not more powerful militarily than the Israeli occupation when it forced Sharon to withdraw from the Gaza strip and dismantle the settlements. However, any conflict is governed by many complex factors, especially when it is between a free nation and an intruding occupation; a land owner and a murderer and thief who came from overseas.

- **Regarding the Arab situation, and some attempts at normalisation with the Zionist entity**, despite its danger and condemnation, it does not diminish the value of the authenticity of the Arab-Islamic protection to us in our struggle with the occupation.

Cases of normalisation in the past were individual and scattered, and today they are driven and flagrantly supported by some governments and elites. Arabs, in general, used to sacrifice for Palestine, and some today seek to sacrifice Palestine for their own agendas. Some

worked in line with the deal of the century, albeit in secret, in the hope that they would force Palestinians and the rest of Arabs to work with it. They discovered that they were unable to do that, neither by providing a Palestinian cover for the deal, nor by mobilising a supportive Arab position for it.

Normalisation, despite the massive efforts that support it and after many decades of attempts to enforce it as a fait accompli, did not even rise to be a phenomenon. Rather, it is a situation linked to some isolated and intellectually influenced elites seeking fame and interests. In fact, normalisation remains rejected by the majority, and will not be socially rooted with intellectual and political entities in the region. The goodness in this nation is immense, original and profound. Committees resist normalisation in the Arab and Islamic world, and recognised figures stood against normalisation with courage, from amongst leaders, presidents, parliamentarians, writers, journalists, and athletes who refused to meet with Israeli athletes in international forums, etc. An honourable record of rejecting and resisting normalisation exists in the nation. Meanwhile, there is a record of shame crammed into the corner of history for some of the normalisers. However, honour remains at the forefront in quantity, quality, value and status.

- **The current preoccupation of Arab and Islamic countries with their internal affairs does not mean that they have lost interest in Palestine, nor that the issue of Jerusalem is no longer a priority.**

The difficult reality of the nation is understood. When oppression, bloodshed and confiscation of rights are imposed, they cannot be blamed for being preoccupied with their own concerns and issues. Rather, we say to them: "You are our extension, and we support your rights and aspirations for freedom, justice and a decent life. We stand by our nation as it stands by us."

However, I would warn that the dangers of the Zionist entity are not far from them. Or as few may think, that this entity is a supporter of their causes, or can be part of the solution for the region's crises. Indeed, it is the root of the problem; the central enemy of the nation and the source of many of its crises. Its presence in the heart of the nation continues to constitute the greatest danger to its security, interests, unity and revival. Moreover, this entity is one of the main factors that extended wounds and prevented success in achieving goals of struggles and sacrifices

I say to all people of our nation: "Preserve the unity of your countries and people while pursuing your legitimate demands for freedom, justice, dignity and democracy. Rise above polarisations and conflicts based on ethnicity and sect, for it does not serve our nation, but rather serves its enemies who are concerned with tearing the nation apart, even if some seem to support the demands of the people; they actually prolong its suffering and support the oppressors."

Despite the deep suffering of the nation, as soon as there is an escalation or aggression against Gaza, targeting of Jerusalem and the Aqsa Mosque, or any concerning event in Palestine, they forget their wounds and rise to support Palestine and its people. Chants for Palestine return to its arenas. That is evidence of the nobleness of its people and Palestine's status in the hearts of the nation.

Therefore, it is our responsibility to continue our just fight against the occupation, and to keep our cause alive and present. Only then, will the nation support and unite around us, and the free world will increase its support for us and distance itself from Israel, which will be counting its days. Rising is followed by retreat and fall; that is one of God's laws of justice in the lives of people and nations. When it struggles, sacrifices and continues the path of liberation, freedom and independency, it will win and achieve its goals and regain its land and rights.

• **This does not translate into underestimating the enemy.** Serious resistance should be aware of the enemy's military, security and technological power, and its intertwined connections and interests with major countries around the world, especially the US. Despite this, we note a clear set of evidences indicating the decline of the Zionist project, such as:

- Expansion was one of the most important policies of the Zionist entity. However, under the pressure of resistance and the successive uprisings, it was exhausted and was forced to withdraw - it withdrew from the Gaza Strip, just as it withdrew from southern Lebanon, and built buffer walls in the West Bank and other places.

- One of its main strategies was to wage wars on the land of the enemy, but here they are today, and for years now, fighting inside the state of Israel, which is our stolen homeland. This land is no longer immune or safe from being bombed by the resistance's missiles and drones.

- The occupation was accustomed to fighting Arab armies and built its army and military strategy on that basis. It was always proud of its ability to defeat them, except for some exceptions. Today, however, it is exhausted by the resistance, which disturbed its calculations and strategies. The army lost its ability to win for decades despite the many battles it fought against the resistance.

This is extremely important, as it relates to imposing the strategy of psychological defeat, making the enemy lose hope in gaining victory over us. This affected their leaders and soldiers' confidence in the face of the courageous and creative heroes of the resistance and popular support.

- The Zionist enemy besieged the resistance, obstructed its weapons and supplies and deprived it of its strategic depth, means of supply and shelter which are basic factors and rudimentary conditions for

the victory of revolutions and liberation movements around the world. However, the enemy was astonished that the Palestinian resistance overcame these obstacles and adapted to the imposed circumstances. It was able to manufacture its own weapons and missiles and develop its capabilities, expertise and military vision. The resistance proved that it can operate with remarkable efficiency under highly critical circumstances, which in turn intensified many of the occupation's crises and struck its internal front, security theory and morale.

- Amongst the achievements of the Palestinian resistance is that it managed to expose Israel to the world and reveal its ugly face. It shattered the deceiving image that it presented to the world, that of an oasis of democracy in the Arab desert, that possesses the same values as the free world!

- It is necessary to highlight the great difference between the positive impact of the resistance, uprising and popular confrontation, with the occupation. Indeed, this is in our favour and shows the true image of our enemy as a murderer, criminal and a violator of all values and norms; as well as the resistance's effect in draining the occupation and forcing it to retreat. In contrast, the negative impact of negotiations and settlements enhances the image of the enemy and presents it to the world as a partner and peacemaker. Although the negotiations were unable to achieve any significant accomplishments in our favour, the occupation exploited this as a cover to impose more of the status quo through: settlements; annexation; land theft; judaisation of Jerusalem and changing its features and violating its sanctities; the siege on Gaza and the aggression against it; the division of the West Bank and implanting it with settlements; executing the displacement policy and striving to change the demographic equation.

- Further proof of the decline of the Zionist entity and the distortion of its image is the depth of political and societal division in its ranks, as well as the division of its political parties and forces, and the

intensified struggle for power amongst them. Moreover, the spread of corruption amongst its leaders and elites and the repetition of elections in a short period due to the difficulty of forming government coalitions indicates the struggles they face. Despite differences in military capabilities, there is reluctance in the fighting spirit among its soldiers and affiliates, in comparison to the will of the Palestinian resistance.

The Palestinian national project and how we can rebuild it

Historic introduction

To know the extent of the problem that we are suffering from today in the absence of an inclusive Palestinian national project and the void it creates, we must return to the recent past when there was a recognised Palestinian national project, with minimal disagreement or conflict.

Since the emergence of guerrilla action in the 1960s, followed by its factions entering the tunnel of the Palestine Liberation Organisation (PLO) in 1969 and being in its leadership, institutions, organisations and popular frameworks, necessary elements were available to build the national project and form its image which united forces working for the cause. They agreed on its vision and objectives, the definition of national rights and constants, resistance, the political program, the reference for decision-making, and its leadership - how it is formed and elected.

At that time, the Palestinian national project was reasonable, which may not have satisfied everyone's requirements, but it did provide a sufficient limit for compromise and acceptance, a sense of partnership in responsibilities and decision-making and engagement in leadership institutions.

Moreover, there was no disagreement about national rights and constants as everyone supported the liberation of Palestine from the river to the sea. There were no disagreements about the means, mechanisms, and the importance of resistance and armed guerrilla action as part of the struggle and political program. They differed over some of its forms, such as hijacking planes, but not over the basis of the program, which was armed struggle and resistance in all its forms.

When the dispute began over some new political proposals, such as the PLO's Ten Points Program in 1974 and others later, the Palestinian Rejectionist Front was formed, and some of its factions used to suspend their presence in the leadership institutions then return to them later, and so on. Nevertheless, there were always grounds that united all and disagreements were far less than the agreements. Indeed, the national project tent accommodated everyone.

However, since the Oslo Agreement and proposals that preceded it years before, a sharp political division surfaced in the Palestinian arena at a time when an inclusive national project was absent. The disagreement over Oslo and the new political approach that shaped its philosophy emphasised a blatant divergence and division over the Palestinian national project. The disagreement related primarily on the political vision, definition of national rights and constants, and on the resistance program and tools. This was negatively reflected on the confidence in institutions' leadership, references in decision-making, and the method of national decision-making on major issues. Many became absent in these institutions, in addition to the absence of Hamas and Islamic Jihad in the first place, as, since their inception, both organisations did not find a real and objective opportunity to engage.

Since then, a unified Palestinian national project has been absent, and the Palestinian division has been entrenched, even before events of 2007, around many of the main national issues and questions.

In my view, most of our problems today stem from the absence of a comprehensive national project that is clear to all powers, leaders and the general masses and their political and intellectual elites.

Therefore, the question of the national project should be at the top of our agenda and our priorities today. Arriving at a national program that is agreed upon will provide a fertile environment for resolving many differences. It will restore our national unity and institutions' leadership

and aid in achieving effective partnership in struggle and decision-making according to a political and resistance vision that is agreed upon.

This would push our Palestinian cause forward and give it a new momentum in spirit, vision, strength, confidence and prestige.

The priority today is to bring this issue to the discussion table and to reach an agreement to recognise the national project and work together to restore its contents and fundamental components.

Components of the Palestinian national project A vision to rebuild

First: Redefining the Palestinian national principles, rights and goals; with land, Jerusalem, the right of return, etc. being at the forefront of its issues.

It is not correct for the endeavours of some in the past, under the pretext of necessity and the need for interim programs, which led to a long and exhausting path of negotiations, settlements and setbacks, to become a reference for the abolition of the original vision of the cause. This would be a violation of the rights of our people and their national constants, and should not be the reason to disagree today on the definitions of land, rights, goals and borders of stolen homeland, in a twist of near historical and geographical facts. This is more important at a time when the enemy turned its back on all agreements and treaties, and ended the so-called two-state solution, leaving no peace or settlements, with accelerated procedures to impose a full Zionist vision!

Second: Adopting a program of struggle and resistance politically, and on the field, that suits the gravity of our cause and is capable of realising our rights and achieving our national goals.

Our cause is a matter of national liberation from occupation, with the main issues being liberating the land, restoring Jerusalem, returning refugees, liberating prisoners, achieving independence, and establishing our state with full sovereignty on the homeland. Thus, resistance in all its forms must be the basis of the program, along with action and mobilisation in all fields - political, diplomatic, public, media, cultural, legal – in order that our struggle and political program fits with our goals, constants and rights.

Under a unified vision, program and decision, we can manage our resistance to the occupation in a smart and courageous way to maximise results and achievements. Moreover, we can maximise its impact on the enemy by diversifying means and tools, and alternating between armed and popular forms of resistance according to the circumstances. Palestinian history is full of this diversity, with intelligence in innovation and creativity, startling the enemy with new forms of struggle such as revolutions, uprisings, guerrilla action, armed resistance, and popular confrontations, until a solid base for resistance was indeed built and weapons were manufactured in Gaza. This represents the core of a Palestinian army, that is a tool for liberation and an asset for the future.

Third: Reconstructing institutions' leadership and decision-making process on true democratic foundations and based on national partnerships between all Palestinian forces and components.

The basis for this is the PLO, as it is concerned with our people at home and in exile, and is the vehicle capable of gathering all forces, components, personalities and audiences.

This includes, of course, the issue of the Palestinian Authority and reunifying its institutions, and agreeing its future, function and responsibilities.

Within the framework of this vision and based on partnerships in leading institutions and a consensual democratic spirit, it is imperative to restore the original role of the PLO in leading the national project, setting the vision, making decisions and managing the conflict to pass the current state of marginalisation. This was emphasised by the absence of the PLO except for minimal ineffective presence, or when its signature was needed to legitimise agreements.

• Our focus on the priority of building the consensual national project should not distract us from our current noble struggle against the annexation plan and the dangers imposed by the deal of the cen-

ture and its repercussions. This is our current priority which needs collective mobilisation in our open confrontations with the occupation

Simultaneously, we continue in our efforts to reach a common vision on the national project. This might be the most appropriate time as major projects often need heated circumstances to help in their development, such as an open battle with the occupation, as it fuels patriotism, strengthens internal unity, emphasises partnerships in resistance, and predicts common dangers and challenges.

Moreover, entering an atmosphere of dialogue and consensus on a national project, while joining in confronting the annexation plan, will motivate all parties to ask key questions related to its three elements. The first question is on the constants, rights and national goals; the second is regarding resistance and the political program; and the third is on the unity of institutions' leadership and the reference of decision-making.

While all this would fuel enthusiasm and inspire a collective spirit in confronting the occupation, the importance of these key questions and the need for real answers become apparent, especially since the topics of these questions are exposed to great dangers threatening Palestinian's future. From another perspective, our endeavours to answer these questions as we live a patriotic ambiance while resisting, will facilitate the consensus around the answers to these questions. This is particularly with the development of successful practical examples that are expected in an atmosphere of coordination, cooperation and decision-making.

Palestinian reconciliation and rearranging the internal state

- Division is a wrong state and an exception; national unity is the essence and foundation in the lives of peoples and nations, more so in a state of resistance and confrontation with the occupation.

- Rebuilding the Palestinian national project requires logic and objective discussions on reconciliation and unifying Palestinian ranks to create a political, psychological and practical environment that facilitates building a comprehensive vision of a national project. Therefore, it is important to achieve reconciliation and rearrangement on a domestic level, and build its political institutions on solid foundations. This includes democracy, assimilation of all, and real partnership in decision-making and taking responsibility.

- To succeed in overcoming past failures, it is necessary to recall the main factors behind the obstruction of reconciliation efforts and their repeated attempts. The most important of these factors are:

The first factor: External interference, especially Israel and US, and preceding that was the international quartet when it laid down its conditions, resulting in blackmail and political and financial pressures, and the subordination of funds granted to the bargaining authority.

Our enemies, of course, have an interest in the continuation of our division, and thus they stand against any serious step for reconciliation. But the decision is ours, and we are the stakeholders, and the historical responsibility is to end the division and quickly move away. I believe that the impact of this factor related to external interventions and pressures has decreased recently, although it has not stopped. This means that the greater responsibility rests on our shoulders, and when we insist on our domestic reconciliation and unity, external factors become limited in influence.

The second factor: The instability of the concept of a national partnership, as forces and factions, to the extent that it is entrenched in our struggle and political life, and in the management of decisions, institutions and programs.

It seems that Palestine has been affected by the same issues that the political sphere of the Arab world has faced; that of monopolisation of the ruling parties - if they exist - and monopolisation of decision-making, authoritarianism, and dealing with other powers from a perspective of dependency or attachment.

A true national partnership is the most important key in achieving reconciliation and ending the division. Under the umbrella of partnership: everyone is present, everyone is a winner and the biggest victors are the people and the cause.

The third factor: It is an extension of the previous factor, as some fear the consequences of engaging in a common national struggle and political program, representing the spirit and essence of the resistance, along with other elements and components of the program.

The past long years have entrenched a deep divide in concepts and visions regarding the resistance, including its options and methods; and about political programs and their tools and tactics. These have caused some Palestinian parties to be unwilling to move outside their comfort zone, whether they succeeded or failed, particularly since they fear the consequences of re-engaging in resistance and open confrontation with the occupation at all levels, and the cost it might entail.

- There have been political documents we have agreed upon as Palestinians over the past years, such as the National Accord Document of 2006, the programs and papers that we have adopted in the framework of multiple reconciliation agreements, and the first national unity government in 2007. We believe they all serve to form common denominators for a single national struggle and political program, and

they encourage everyone to engage with and work side by side with the nation's partners, without any party abandoning its own convictions, nor making anyone in this partnership totalitarian in their vision and decision, nor a guardian for others.

- **Overcoming the above obstacles with such an outlook is the correct entry point to achieve reconciliation and rebuild our national unity.**

We should not respond to any external interferences or pressures. We address our fears and differences amongst ourselves in the spirit of mutual rapprochement and consensus on common denominators. We can work according to them, whilst ensuring they are compatible with the essence of our cause, rights and national constants. This should be done in a way that is suitable to the challenges and risks facing us stemming from past experiences.

In short, our national unity, achieving reconciliation, and working together from a position of partnership in responsibility and decision, is not superfluous, nor a choice, but rather a duty and necessity, especially at this crucial moment of our Palestinian struggle.

- **Which comes first? Achieving reconciliation, agreeing on a political program, rebuilding the PLO or building the national project?**

All these titles are of special priority and importance. They are intertwined with each other in origin, and some of them overlap, so it is imperative that we all strive to reach an agreement and a common vision around them. The agreement would provide ground for a comprehensive national unity, in all its dimensions, to be attained.

Previously, despite the clarity of this entanglement, the participants at the reconciliation table were keen to avoid entering into the thorny details of the disagreement about the political program and the

national project, lest it distance them further. Everyone was keen on ending the division and reaching a reconciliation agreement and unifying political institutions as a matter of priority.

Today, we can discuss all these issues at once to establish a comprehensive understanding and agreement. To aid in this process, we must strive to provide a positive climate for reconciliation and hold joint meetings at different levels, particularly at the level of the general secretaries of the factions, or the temporary leadership in place. Moreover, we must fortify the environment for joint national action on the ground, and in politics, in the face of the annexation plan and the measures taken by the occupation. All of this will create a political and psychological environment that will help in researching these big national titles and facilitate reaching an agreement among the national community.

It would also move us from thinking about questions of authority, division and internal discord, to questions of liberation and conflict with the occupation, building the Palestinian national project, and strengthening our national struggle and political unity.

Today, the various Palestinian national forces and recognised figures are more prepared than any other time to enter collectively a common political and resistance program to face the annexation plan, and its related dangers and challenges.

The first responsibility now is with the Palestinian Authority's leadership and the PLO. They should initiate an urgent meeting for all Palestinian leaderships, to hold dialogue and discuss the confrontation plan and the various national issues. This is to attempt to emerge with a common vision and decision, and a unified movement and political action.

- **It is objectively incorrect to put the political settlements against resistance by saying: the first failed and the second is under siege, so what is the alternative?!**

This convergence is incorrect, and this shorthand assessment is wrong. It is true, the political settlement did fail, as confirmed by today's facts and results over the past decade. This was because it was built on a false foundation and an illusory appreciation, and was managed incorrectly. The players in the negotiations approaching the settlement abandoned the cards of power they possessed and hastened to reap the fruits, which resulted in what we have seen.

This is not the way peace is made nor is it the way negotiations are managed. If one loses a strong presence on the field and comes to the negotiating table exposed with no power cards, project partners or popular support, they will not achieve anything except what the enemy allows in terms of crumbs.

It is true that the resistance was besieged, but it did not fail. Rather, it had many accomplishments on the ground; it strengthened people's confidence and disrupted the enemy's calculations. The resistance under the siege developed, flourished, innovated and outperformed itself, and stands strongly today against the occupation.

The solution is not to search for a third way, but to adhere to our natural choice of resistance, and to work together to develop, strengthen and protect it. This should be within a framework of a comprehensive struggle and political strategy, where we fight our battle and manage decisions as a unified front.

This is the only path to achievement and success, freedom and liberation. Palestinians are not an exception; these are the facts and laws of life; this is the continuation and legacy of nations.

Between dissolving the Palestinian Authority and changing its function

If the decision was related to establishing a new entity, the natural position would be to not establish an authority under the occupation, because it would only exist under imposed restrictions and security, political and economic obligations. The experience of the Palestinian Authority (PA) - under the political roof of the Oslo Agreement and the economic Paris Agreement - is proof.

But the question today is related to an existing authority; what can be done with it?

• **The option to dissolve the PA is possible, and has its motives, reasons and requirements.**

Let all security and political obligations be thrown at the occupation's face, for it is the only beneficiary from them, while being a burden on us and a continuous squander of our image, interests and domestic front. Let the enemy assume responsibility for the daily living necessities in the territories it occupies, as stipulated by international laws. Let us devote ourselves to our resistance and our open battle with the occupation, and provide the need for steadfastness to our people until we attain salvation, liberation and true independence. Only then can we build a free state, not a hostage authority.

But the choice of dissolving the PA requires a basic objective condition, which is the national consensus on this matter. Otherwise the result would be an internal conflict between us, our preoccupation with ourselves, and the transfer of the crisis to our arena, instead of our conflict being with the occupying enemy.

• **If national consensus to dissolve the PA is not possible, then the only remaining option is to change the PA's function.** It is a

choice demanded by national necessity and responsibility. Indeed, accepting the continuation of the current authority's function and its security obligations in favour of the occupation is unacceptable.

Is the change in the function of the authority possible? Yes, it is possible and realistic, but it has an expensive price. If we regard this matter a necessity and one of national interest, then let us pay the price and bear the consequences. We already pay a lot and sacrifice because of the occupation; that is the foundation of the problem. If we are paying anyway, let it be towards freedom and resisting the occupation, not for submitting to its conditions and dictations, which are certainly at the expense of our security, interests, rights and independence.

• **On the issue of combining resistance and authority, is it possible?** Or will the authority be at the expense of the resistance, because it limits and occupies it with responsibilities of the daily life of people, and burdens it with the authority's calculations and pressures? Dismantling this issue helps to find a solution and reach the correct vision, away from confusion.

When you are in a state of resistance against the occupation, no authority should be created in the first place. This is so it does not distract or restrict you, and so you remain focused on the responsibilities and priorities of the resistance, and provide the factors of steadfastness for your people. But when you find yourself facing the reality of an existing authority that was established under occupation under known circumstances, and was a controversial topic domestically, then you are faced with two options. Either you take the initiative to dismantle it, which requires national consensus as mentioned previously, or you seek to change its function and role, which requires great efforts and joint national work to achieve this goal. But we have no other choice, as it is not right for the authority to remain in its current state, and become a burden on our people, instead of being a burden on the occupation.

The choice of changing the function of the PA inevitably leads us to a state of combining resistance and authority. We believe that combining the two is possible, and in fact, since the authority is already present, there is only one thing to be done. This is what Hamas and other resistance forces have worked on in Gaza, and as a result, endured a lot of suffering without failing in their responsibilities towards the resistance and repelling the aggression. In fact, it succeeded under the circumstances to arrest Israeli soldier Gilad Shalet in the battlefield. This led to securing a swap deal with the occupation to release many of our prisoners.

Therefore, the option of combining resistance and power is possible, despite its difficulties and consequences, as the enemy will exert all forms of pressure and sanctions on the authority, besieging and targeting it. Indeed, this is what we have witnessed and continue to witness today in the occupation's dealing with the government administration in Gaza today, and in the West Bank during the years of the second intifada when the authority combined between resistance and politics.

This is the fate of any nation living under occupation, who will face suffering under all circumstances, but will never abandon their innate mission, that of resisting occupation and confronting it until they attain their freedom, liberation and independence.

There is a special case in Gaza today, and since the occupation left and dismantled its settlements there in 2005, despite its continued siege and waging of successive attacks and wars against it. What do the forces and factions there do for their people and towards the management of their daily affairs?

This is a different case that requires formulating a way that combines its responsibilities in managing the daily affairs of its people and strengthening their steadfastness, as well as its national duty in continuing resistance, preventing aggression, and working on a liberation

strategy. This is done alongside all forces, factions, and our masses at home and abroad.

This realistic example indicates the nature of the Palestinian situation in its multiplicity and disparity within the same Palestinian geography. But it is combined simultaneously by the unity of purpose and destiny. For we are one nation, with common goals and ambitions, that of liberating our homeland, taking back Jerusalem, returning the refugees and living like the rest of the world's nations - free, independent, free of occupation, supervision or restrictions. Under the ceiling of our cause and common goals, roles are divided. Forms of resistance and political actions vary, each according to their surroundings and circumstances.

The future and other circulating issues in the aftermath of the failure of political settlements

- **The issue of searching for an alternative to the US role, which is completely and utterly biased towards the Zionist entity, does not constitute a correct start in re-evaluating the Palestinian stance.** Indeed, this means remaining in the political settlement remit and betting on negotiations and insisting on re-producing them despite their utter failure.

Elevating the issue of searching for a new promoter, other than the US, will continue to be another futile journey of wandering and running after a mirage. Furthermore, it has been proven to supporters of the political settlement option themselves, that no one in the international arena can substitute the US role; neither the European Union, nor the Russian Federation, nor others. Indeed, the Zionist entity will not accept it in the first place.

- **The correct approach is to search for a new vision and a different approach to our strategy in confronting the Zionist arrogance and occupation, outside the limitations of the failed settlement.** Thus, the move to the international arena, as well as Arab, Islamic and regional arenas, will be within the context of a comprehensive strategy. It confronts the occupation on the ground, while providing factors of steadfastness and the requirements of confrontation. Moreover, it will seek to mobilise all forms of political, material and moral support.

This does not mean that we, as Palestinians, are asking our brethren in the Muslim nation and friends around the world to fight on our behalf, nor are we asking them to move with us from the political settlement box to the combat box in its traditional sense. Indeed, we know

they will not do that, nor are they capable of doing that right now, especially under the current condition of the Arab and Islamic world, where they are suffering from weakness, division and bloodshed.

Rather, we declare to everyone that we have left the absurd political settlement option, which has exhausted us for a long time, proving its failure following bitter experiences, and instead we adopt a strategy of confrontation and exhausting the occupation through resistance. On this basis, we invite all to join us in support and solidarity, each according to their circumstances and capabilities. We are sure that we can win this battle, forcing the occupation to retreat and accept our rights. It is widely apparent that this enemy does not respect the weak, and does not deliver unless it is placed under pressure and force.

There is no doubt that our people have built an exceptional image throughout history, through their courage, determination and creativity in resisting, as well as their superior ability to withstand the occupation. Indeed, when our brethren and friends around the world see us united as Palestinians behind this serious strategy, they will respect our decision and stand by us, and their confidence in our ability to succeed and win will be strengthened.

Deal of the Century and opportunities

The initial plan of the US-Israeli's deal of the century was to implement it fully in one go, after easing its way with economic incentives. But they were astonished by the Palestinian consensus in rejecting it, and the refusal from most of the official Arab and Islamic world. Even those who secretly supported it could not push the Palestinians and Arabs to accept it.

The US and Israel were thus forced to delay and postpone the plan. They resorted to applying it in stages and in instalments to facilitate its passage on the ground with minimal repercussions. Such was the transfer of the US embassy to Jerusalem, the US administration's official recognition of the annexation of the Golan, and the financial targeting of UNRWA in attempt to cancel the refugee file. Attempts to facilitate normalisation and other breaches of the Zionist entity succeeded only within a limited segment of the Arab world and a marginal fragment of elites, who are controlled and directed. Then there was the occupation's decision to annex an important large part of the West Bank under US cover.

In other words, the US-Israeli calculations were not accurate, and things did not turn out as they expected. The difference in calculations prompted the US administration and the occupying state to change tactics, and they overlooked the official announcement of the deal of the century to the option of implementing it in stages as a fait accompli. This does not reduce its threats, but makes it relatively easier to confront, as there was a complete Palestinian opposition and it lacked an official Arab representation.

Hamas's political relations

Despite some Arab countries changing their policy towards the movement, and without disputes or blame, as we, and other sincere individuals in our nation, have no interest in being preoccupied with arguments and disagreements regarding our battle with the occupation, especially at this historical moment.

However, it is an opportunity to remember Hamas's adopted policies as part of its political relations with Arab, Islamic and other countries. In brief:

- The movement focuses on the priority of its struggle with the Zionist entity, so there is neither conflict nor battle with anyone except with the occupying enemy.

- It does not interfere in the affairs of others, nor will it accept anyone to interfere in its affairs, and it is not a party to any conflict or crisis in any country or arena.

- At the same time, the movement is keen on Arab and Islamic national security, and the interests and stability of the Muslim nation. Our hand was, and always will, remain extended to our brethren in Arab and Islamic countries, as well as our friends around the world, to cooperate with them on common causes, for the benefit of all, and in a way that serves our people, our cause and our resistance against the occupation.

- The movement's values and duties obligate it to thank everyone who supports and stands with the Palestinians, and to extend appreciation and gratitude. However, this does not mean that our decisions are

subject to anyone, for we are not in the pocket of any country, regardless of their affiliation or classification, and whatever their support is for us. Our decisions are and will always remain independent and free, and interference from anyone will not be allowed.

- The gratitude that is extended to all those who supports and join in the battle against the Zionist occupation does not mean that we condone or support their policies and agendas in the region or elsewhere.

Conclusion

At the end of this discussion regarding the vision, national project, resistance program, rearrangement of the Palestinian internal state, the accelerating challenges ahead of us, the complexities of our reality and harsh calculations governing the regional and international arena around us, the question of optimism, confidence and belief in the future becomes not only legitimate but necessary.

We are certainly optimistic and confident about the future, and that we will emerge victorious, God willing. Optimism and confidence are inherent characteristics of leaders, and everyone striving for a cause.

We do not lack optimism or dream about it, for that is the state of the weak or the bystander. Those who change history and strive for causes create optimism and inspire it amongst their people. They formulate conditions on the ground to strengthen this optimism and transform it into a reality rather than just 'hope'.


To reach that station, sacrifices must be made and exceptional courageous leaders, who are aware and wise, must be prepared to take great risks. Courage is accentuated when accompanied with wisdom.

Leadership requires responsibility, wisdom and the ability to take risks and lead resistance on the occupied land at large, to fulfil our

rights and greater goals.

In the spirit of this vision, along with being prepared to provide sacrifices for our struggle, we are certain of victory and optimistic about the future of Palestine. We are confident in our ability to liberate our land, restore Jerusalem and our sanctities, free our prisoners, return our refugees and achieve independence, God willing.

“Permission [to fight] has been given to those who are being fought, because they were wronged. And indeed, Allah is competent to give them victory.” [Qur’an 22:39]



This discussion comes as part of a series of seminars by the Arab Thinking Forum to find ways to confront the deal of the century and the annexation project. The Forum endeavours to hold discussions with Palestinian leaders from various national factions, to answer the 'question of 'what should be done

1st July I held an exclusive conversation on Wednesday over two hours, titled "Palestinians and ways of ,2020 confronting the deal of the century and the annexation project". Over the course of the interview, I presented Mr Mashal with questions regarding current affairs and pressing issues; how he would describe the Palestinian situation; reasons behind the continuous division amongst the Palestinians, and ways of achieving unity. He provided his vision to unite Palestinian powers in the framework of a united national program which would confront Judaisation, annexation and the deal of the century. The discussion also included questions around the possible and available Palestinian choices amid a ,political block and failing negotiations