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CENTER FOR MIDDLE EAST PEACE

Israel and the Middle East News Update

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News Excerpts

October 8, 2018

Times of Israel

Terrorist's Family Detained Amid Massive Manhunt

Israeli security forces on Monday detained the brother and sister of the terrorist suspected of shooting dead two Israelis and wounding a third in a brutal attack in the northern West Bank a day earlier, as a massive manhunt for the killer continued. On Sunday morning, Ashraf Walid Suleiman Na'alowa entered the offices of the Alon Group in the Barkan Industrial Park, near the settlement-city of Arie and fatally shot Kim Levengrond Yehezkel, 28 and Ziv Hajbi, 35. The suspect, from the village of Shuweika near Tulkarem, fled the scene, prompting a large-scale search of the area and a deployment of additional troops to the West Bank.

Ha'aretz

Defense Officials Fear Backlash of Collective Punishment

Intelligence agencies fear the mood in the West Bank could provide fertile ground for more lone-wolf attacks, which could completely alter Hamas' position, and pose a more serious challenge for the IDF than it faces in Gaza. Both the IDF and the Shin Bet argue that if the government responds to Sunday's terror attack with collective punishment, Hamas will be strengthened, and the chances of violence erupting in the West Bank will grow.

Times of Israel

PM Said to Tell Cabinet to Prepare for Gaza Offensive

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu warned ministers Sunday that Israel is preparing for the possibility of a military campaign in the Gaza Strip should the humanitarian conditions in the territory cause border clashes to spiral out of control, Hadashot news reported. Netanyahu spoke of the Palestinian Authority's attempt to "choke" Gaza. On Saturday, Defense Minister Avigdor Liberman ordered Gaza's fishing zones constrained due to the escalation of border violence along the southern frontier.

Times of Israel

Abbas Said Planning to Cut PA's Funding to Gaza

Angered by the reported funneling by Qatar of aid to the Hamas-run Gaza Strip, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas was said on Saturday to be planning on cutting the flow of funds to Gaza. Senior defense officials said Abbas was frustrated with UN Special Coordinator for the Middle East Peace Nikolay Mladenov, who facilitated the transfer despite his objections. The halt of some \$96 million that the PA sends monthly to the Gaza Strip could drive a desperate and cash-strapped Hamas toward conflict with Israel, security officials said, and expand violence into the West Bank.

Reuters

Sara Netanyahu Goes on Trial for Fraud

Netanyahu's wife Sara appeared in court on Sunday for the first hearing in the fraud trial against her, in which she is alleged to have misused state funds in ordering catered meals from high-end restaurants. According to the indictment, Sara Netanyahu, along with a government employee, fraudulently obtained from the state more than \$100,000 for hundreds of meals supplied by restaurants, bypassing regulations that prohibit the practice if a cook is employed at home. Netanyahu denies any wrongdoing. If convicted, she could face up to five years in prison.

Times of Israel

UNRWA Vows to Maintain East Jerusalem Services

The UN agency for Palestinian refugees vowed Saturday to continue operations in Jerusalem despite Israeli plans to remove it. The Relief and Works Agency, or UNRWA, said that education, health care, and other services to Palestinian residents of East Jerusalem are “important work.” On Thursday, Jerusalem Mayor Nir Barkat said Israeli authorities will take over the organization’s services, most notably schooling for 1,800 students, without giving an exact timeline. Barkat, whose term as mayor ends at the end of the month, accused UNRWA of failing those under its purview and instead inciting terror activity.

Ha’aretz

Israeli Lawmakers Allowed to Visit Detained US Student

Israel’s Population and Immigration Authority prevented opposition lawmakers from visiting an American student who is detained at a facility at Ben-Gurion Airport after she was denied entry to Israel over her alleged activism for the boycott, sanctions and divestment movement. Meretz leader Tamar Zandberg and lawmakers Mossi Raz and Essawi Freige, who arrived at the facility to visit Alqasem, were not allowed in. Four hours later, the three lawmakers were allowed in to visit the student. Lara Alqasem, a 22-year-old American citizen whose grandparents are Palestinian, arrived in Israel last week with a one-year A2 student visa issued to her by the Israeli Consulate in Miami. She was detained despite holding a valid visa.

Times of Israel

Settler Leaders Say Attack Won’t Sink Isle of Coexistence

Settler leaders have long touted West Bank industrial zones as beacons of coexistence, where Israelis hire and work alongside Palestinians, providing them with a decent livelihood. But Sunday’s terror attack at the Barkan Industrial Park threatened to chip away at that narrative, forcing supporters of such partnership to defend the practice. “We will not let this break us,” said Samaria Regional Council chairman Yossi Dagan. At Barkan, roughly half of the 7,200 workers at the site’s 164 factories are Palestinian, and half are Jewish.

Enough Grandstanding on Khan al-Ahmer

By Avigdor Liberman, Israeli Defense Minister

- Once again, the usual international chorus against Israel is flaring up, this time due to an Israeli government decision to implement a judicial ruling for the relocation of a small group of squatters from Khan al-Ahmar, a compound built illegally near Jerusalem. If the matter didn't concern the rule of law and the well-being of these people themselves, it could be written off as just another instance of Palestinian and international cynicism. But someone needs to speak up for common sense and reason. Khan al-Ahmar is a cluster of makeshift shacks erected illegally by members of the Jahalin Abu-Dahuk Bedouin tribe, which houses some 28 families, comprising about 135 people. The compound is situated precariously close to the adjacent highway, presenting an imminent safety hazard to its residents. In particular, the proximity of its makeshift school to the road poses an ongoing threat to the children who attend it. Like other illegal compounds built in a haphazard sprawl, with no basic infrastructure or planning, the living conditions are poor, the health risks many and the future bleak.
- The predicament of the residents is actually part of a much broader challenge in ensuring 21st-century health and living standards and infrastructure for nomadic communities, which typically need to be relocated to areas where such infrastructure can be provided reliably and feasibly. This is the case elsewhere in the world where governments must address the needs of such communities. To this end, for many years Israel has engaged in prolonged contact with the residents of Khan al-Ahmar to achieve agreed-upon solutions for their relocation to a nearby area, where their basic needs can be adequately met. This would include the free allocation of generous plots of land, provision of a proper water supply and sewage infrastructure, proper telecommunications and safe electrical connectivity, and the construction of a school.
- Unfortunately, swept up in the irresponsibility of a cynical Palestinian leadership, which has seized upon the issue as a gold mine for vilifying Israel, the residents have thus far refused. In doing so, they continue to expose themselves and their children to serious health and safety hazards, preferring continued destitution to achieving a genuine improvement in their situation. European and other countries that have come out against Israel on the matter are doing the residents of Khan al-Ahmar no favor. As has become too common when it comes to Israel, we again hear tired claims of illegality. Israel's High Court of Justice only recently ruled on the legality of the relocation, after a lengthy legal process in which the residents petitioned the Court. Despite the issue's urgency, successive Israeli governments, in meticulous respect of due process and separation of powers, were blocked for years from implementing governmental policy. This is the very same court that is broadly praised when it comes to relocating Jewish residents from their homes. As to those who would question the integrity of Israel's judiciary, few accusations are more spurious or more easily refuted. Numerous respected international

measures of judicial independence have consistently ranked Israel's judiciary among the most independent in the world, including in comparison to many liberal democracies.

- Thus, Israel's fiercely independent and highly respected High Court needs no lectures on jurisprudence from other countries, neither with regard to international law nor otherwise. I can imagine the uproar that would occur if Israel were to similarly question the probity of other countries' internal judicial processes. Some have argued that relocating the residents to proper homes several kilometers to the west will somehow preclude an eventual political resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. It is high time we replace theatrics with sensible discourse. In this regard, the idea that moving a small group of people within a several kilometer radius will prevent a resolution to such a complex historical conflict is absurd, to say the least. Does Israel need to heed such cynical grandstanding? Do these people really need to pay with their health and lives and futures for it? Not on my watch. The Israeli government will continue to pursue a real, practical solution to the plight of these people, far too long exploited by an irresponsible Palestinian leadership and its misguided supporters around the world. As always, the Israeli government will do so while abiding scrupulously by the law and while balancing the different interests at stake, including the genuine needs of the residents themselves. It is the legal thing to do. It is the moral thing to do. And despite the same old international clamor against Israel, it is the right thing to do.

Sinwar: “Cease-Fire Means Quiet, End of Siege”

By Francesca Borri, Italian Journalist and Writer

- When I say that I met Sinwar, the Hamas leader in Gaza, the first question that I’m asked is where we met: in a tunnel? In a secret bunker deep underground? No, I reply. Most of our meetings were in his office in Gaza City. Sometimes just the two of us with only a translator, sometimes with aides and advisers. Some of the meetings lasted three hours, others half an hour. Sinwar and his men also took me on tours of Gaza. We visited stores, hospitals, government offices, even private homes. I spent five days in the Gaza Strip and I was free to talk about anything and with anyone I wanted. I went to my first meeting with Sinwar in a hijab, but very soon I was told that there was no need, and I removed it. There was no need to introduce me to Sinwar. My work as a journalist for Yedioth Ahronoth covering areas of conflict in the Middle East spoke for itself, and this was my second visit to Gaza in six months. But I am also certain that it is very important that the Israeli public, with all the inherent difficulty, know firsthand what Sinwar thinks, what motivates him and to what he aspires. I believe that the fact that Israeli officials hold talks with Hamas is another sign that the days have passed when listening to the other sides was considered illegitimate.
- Sinwar is a man who is used to listening to others. He never decides without consulting. But when he decides, he decides. He is resolute, firm, he does not concede easily. I was given the impression that he is a man who is willing to take important steps. And that is why he insisted that the interview end with the words that it does. Apropos words, throughout the entire interview he did not mention the word “Israel” once. Instead he used such words as “Netanyahu,” “the army,” “the other side,” and mainly, “the occupation.” On the other hand, I did not hear him use the term “the Zionist entity,” the term endeared to people who want to destroy Israel.
- Q: This is the first time that you have ever agreed to talk to the Western media—and to an Israeli newspaper yet. You have been the Hamas leader in Gaza for almost two years. Why did you decide to give an interview now of all times?
- “Because now I discern a true opportunity for change.”
- Q: An opportunity? Now?
- “Yes, now.”
- Q: It seems that another war is the more realistic possibility at the moment. At least that is how it seemed when I visited here last June: bullets flying, clashes on the fence, casualties and fatalities. Gaza bombed, rockets at Israel. More bombings. There were almost 200 people killed in the last round of violence.

- “And this while there was not a single person killed on the other side. But ‘war’ is a misleading term. It’s not that there is war in Gaza at some stage while there is peace on all other days. We are always under occupation; under attack. It’s just that the intensity of the attack changes. That’s all. “But since we’re talking about war, then a new war is not in anybody’s interest. Certainly not ours. Who wants to confront a nuclear power with four slingshots? And if we can’t win, for Netanyahu, that is worse than losing. Because this will be the fourth war. And it cannot end like the third, which ended like the second, which ended like the first. They will have to reoccupy Gaza. And I don’t think that Netanyahu wants another two million Arabs. No, you achieve nothing through war.”
- Q: It’s a little odd to hear this from a man like you, who comes from Hamas’s military wing.
- “I do not head a military militia. I am from Hamas and that’s it. I am the Hamas leader in Gaza. It is not a militia but rather something a lot more complex: a national liberation movement. And my first commitment is to act on behalf of the interests of my people. To defend them and their right to liberty and independence. You are a journalist of wars. Do you want war?”
- Q: No.
- “So why should I want war? Anyone who knows what war is does not want war.”
- Q: But you’ve been fighting your entire life.
- “And that’s why I’m not saying I won’t fight anymore. I’m saying that I don’t want any more wars. What I do want is an end to the siege. You take a walk on the beach in the evening, at dusk, and you see small children sitting on the water line and talking. They ask themselves what the world looks like on the other side. What life is like there. Listening to them breaks your heart. And this should break everyone’s heart. I want them to be free.”
- Q: Hamas is holding onto two Israeli civilians (Avera Mengistu and Hisham a-Sayed), and the bodies of two IDF soldiers (Hadar Goldin and Oron Shaul). To what degree is a prisoner exchange important in any cease-fire format?
- “It’s more than important. It’s absolutely vital. For me, it’s not a political question. It’s a moral imperative. I will do everything possible to release everyone who is still in prison. Your readers most likely think that we’re talking about terrorists, or at the very least, criminals. Car thieves. No. We are all imprisoned sooner or later. Read Order 101 (from the military laws applying to Judea and Samaria-FB). Without military permission, it is a crime to wave a flag or assemble more than ten people in a room, to drink tea and talk about politics. Maybe they’re talking about Trump, but they risk punishment of up to ten years in jail. For us, prison is a bit like a rite of passage into adulthood. Because if there is one thing that unites us, if there is something that truly causes us to be Palestinians, it’s prison.”

- Q: To a certain degree, you achieved more through kidnappings than through rockets.
- “What kidnappings?”
- Q: Gilad Shalit, for example.
- “Gilad Shalit was not a kidnapping victim. He was a prisoner of war. You understand why we don’t talk to reporters a lot? A soldier is killed and you publish a picture of him on the beach. And your readers think that we went and killed him in Tel Aviv. No. This young man was not shot to death wearing a bathing suit and standing on a surf board, but rather wearing a uniform and holding an M-16, while shooting at us.”
- Q: And if there is a cease-fire, you won’t try to kidnap soldiers?
- “When there is a cease-fire, nobody will be shooting at us, right? So of course nobody will be taken prisoner.”
- Q: Quiet in exchange for quiet?
- “No. Quiet in exchange for quiet and in exchange for an end to the siege. The siege is not quiet.”
- Q: And for how long?
- “That’s not the point. What really matters is what happens in the interval on the ground. Because if the cease-fire means that we are not bombed but continue to live without water, without electricity, without anything—if we continue to live under siege, there is no point. Because the siege is a kind of war, only by other means. And furthermore, it is also a crime according to international law. There is no cease-fire under siege. “But if Gaza returns, slowly, to becoming normal, if it not only receives humanitarian aid but also investments and if there is development—because we are not beggars, we want to work, to study, to travel, like everyone else. We want to live, and to live on our own: if we begin to discern change, we can make progress. Hamas is doing the maximum to respect the cease-fire. But there will be no peace without justice. And without freedom there is no justice. I do not want a peace of graves.”
- Q: The Israelis fear that you will exploit the cease-fire to reorganize and rearm and then, in half a year or a year, you will resume the fighting. Why should they trust you?
- “First of all, it’s important to point out that I’ve never gone to war. War came to me. And my question, in all honesty, is the opposite: why should I trust the Israelis? They left the Gaza Strip in 2005, but they just reorganized the occupation. Before they were inside, and now they’re

blocking the borders. But yes, trust between the sides is exactly the point. And perhaps this is our mistake—to always think who should take the first step, me or you?”

- Q: I understand. But again, if the cease-fire doesn't hold up...
- “But maybe, once and for all, we will try to imagine what will happen if it does succeed? Let's imagine what Gaza once looked like. Did you happen to see pictures of Gaza in the 1950s, when we were one of the most popular summer destinations in the Mediterranean?”
- Q: Yes, I've seen those pictures.
- “But now too: did you see how amazing our youth are? They brim with talent, they are filled with energy, they are so creative. A group of 20 year-olds built a 3D printer to produce the medical equipment that we lack. That's Gaza. It's not just poverty. Not just barefoot children. Gaza could be like Singapore, like Dubai. But let's let time do its work. Time will enable the sores to heal. “Bassam,” he points to one of his advisers, “lost a son who was killed in an air strike. Your translator lost two brothers. The man who brought you tea, his wife died of an infection. It was nothing, a small scratch. But we have no antibiotics. And she just died, for no reason, because of something that you could pick up at a drug store. Do you think that this is easy for us? But let's start with the cease-fire. We will give our children the lives that we never had and they will become better than us. Right now, emotions are too high. The memories, the traumas, the resentment. But let's give them a different life, and they will build a different future.”
- Q: During a cease-fire, will Hamas hold onto its weapons? Or will you agree to live under the umbrella of international protection, in the style of the “blue helmets,” UN peacekeeping troops?
- “What? Like in Srebrenica? (In July 1995, about 8,000 Bosnia civilians were killed near the city of Srebrenica, even though it was declared a safe zone by the UN. UN troops in the area did not intervene in an attempt to stop the massacre).
- Q: I surmise that the answer is no.
- “You surmise correctly.”
- Q: So again, sorry for repeating myself: what will happen if this cease-fire doesn't work? After all, to this day, all the attempts to reach an agreement were shot down by extremists on both sides.
- “The agreement that you are so sure about still does not exist. Hamas, and almost all the other Palestinian organizations are willing to sign it and uphold it. But as of now, there is only the occupation. And after having said all this, it's important to make it clear: if we are attacked, we will defend ourselves. As always. And we will have another war. But then, in a year, you will still be here and I will again tell you that you achieve nothing through war.”

- Q: The concern is that you do not have the ability to restrain the extremists on your side who will try to sabotage the agreement.
- “I think there is a profound misunderstanding: we’re not talking about psychopaths. We are not talking about violence for the sake of violence. The people whom you dismissively call ‘extremists’ reflect protest and act out of ideology. And that is basically the thing we have to address. Not what they are, but rather what motives them. We will try to understand them. Because there are no military solutions to political problems. And in this case there are only political problems.”
- Q: Your main weapon, the rockets, almost never succeed in getting passed the Iron Dome system. And Israel responds to your rocket fire with far more powerful missiles. Thousands of Palestinians have been killed. Do you think that rocket fire is to your benefit?
- “Let’s make it clear. Armed resistance is our right according to international law. And we not only have rockets, but also thousands of tools used in the framework of the resistance. That is a question that you must ask more of yourself than of me. This is a question that all of you, the journalists, should ask yourselves. We only become a story, an item, when there is blood. And not just here. If there’s no blood, there’s no news. If there’s no blood, nobody pays attention to you, nobody listens to you. But the problem is not the resistance. The problem is the occupation. Without the occupation, we would not have rockets, rocks, firebombs. The drones, the bombings, nothing. We would all have a normal life.”
- Q: You spoke earlier about the smuggling tunnels that enabled you to bring food into the Gaza Strip in order to survive. But you also have tunnels that infiltrate into Israel territory and in the last war (Operation Protective Edge) you used them to kill Israelis. How do you justify this? And what do you say about the suicide bombings, which for years was the main component of your strategy?
- “The goal of the resistance is that our message reach the other side. The language of resistance depends on the language that the other side understands. In the 1970s, Arafat and the PLO had the weapon of hijacking airplanes because the goal was to tell the world the story of the Palestinians, which until then, almost nobody knew of its existence. Today none of us dreams of hijacking an airplane, because there would be no point. The tools of resistance change according to context, whom you want to address and the language that the other side understands. If tomorrow I plan a terror attack, I will be the top headlines in all the newspapers. But when I talk about a cease-fire, like now in this interview, it’s harder to listen to me. In fact, the fact that you are sitting here and are insisting on asking me about the armed resistance gives me to understand that this is the only language that truly interests you and the only language you react to. Do you see? You talk about violence and I’m the one talking about peace.”

- Q: But do you think the rocket fire helped you?
- “Obviously not. Otherwise, we would not be here talking. But what did the occupation achieve? What does it serve? Raising murderers? You saw the film of the soldier who shot at us as if we were barrels? And he laughed. Once there were Jews like Freud, Kafka, Einstein. They were famous thanks to mathematics. For philosophy. Today it’s because of the UAVs. For executions without trial.”
- Q: And now you have a new symbol: incendiary kites and balloons.
- “The kites are not a weapon. At most they burn a wooded area. A fire extinguisher is sufficient to put it out. If it’s not a paper tied to a string, it’s a rag dipped in gasoline, while every Iron Dome battery costs 100 million dollars. The kites and balloons are not weapons, they’re a message: you are immeasurably stronger than us, that’s true. But you will never win, never.”
- Q: But the Palestinians in the West Bank, under the same occupation, have chosen a completely different path: appealing to the UN, to international institutions.
- “And that is also vital. It’s all vital. All the means are justified. But if you will permit me: in Gaza, the international community is part of the problem. When we won the elections legally and freely—the response was the boycott, the closure. We suggested forming a government together with Fatah. Not once, hundreds of times. But nothing: the answer was the blockade and that’s all. That is also your responsibility (the international community’s-FB). And now too. You are telling Hamas: let’s hold negotiations only if Fatah is also involved. And then you tell Fatah: we will hold negotiations only if Hamas is out of the picture. The internal disagreement from the last years, which caused us to be were roundly criticized, are also the result of the blockade. And I understand Ramallah: if there is a national unity government, they risk not getting a single dollar. They risk bankruptcy.”
- Q: The blockade on Gaza is because the international community considers Hamas to be a terror organization that does not follow the rules of the game.
- “What game? The occupation?”
- Q: The Oslo Accords. The two-state solution.
- “And does Oslo still exist? Was Oslo not an excuse to divert world attention, by means of unending negotiations, while in the meantime to continue to build settlements all over and to erase any possibility of a Palestinian state? It’s been 25 years, and what have we achieved? Nothing. And why insist all the time only on Oslo? A lot of agreements have since been signed, such as the prisoners document in 2006, in which we decided what our common strategy is—Hamas, Fatah, all of ours. A state in the 1967 borders with Jerusalem as its capital. With the

right of return for the refugees, of course. It's been 12 years and you continue to ask us: why don't you agree to a state in the 1967 borders? My sense is that the problem is not us."

- Q: It seems that the side that is opposed at the moment to a cease-fire is not Israel but rather Fatah, which fears letting Hamas have an achievement.
- "An achievement? A cease-fire is not for Hamas or for Fatah. It is for Gaza. What is important, as I see it, is that people realize that Hamas is here, that we exist, that there is no peace without Hamas. Because we are an inseparable part of Palestine, even if we lose the next elections. Not only that: Hamas is part of the history of the entire Arab and Muslim world, which includes Islamists, secular, nationalists and socialists. "But after having said that, let's refrain from using the word 'achievement.' Because it insults all the terminal patients who are this moment standing on the border and hoping that it will open; all the fathers who this evening will not have the courage to look at their children because they will have no supper to give them. What achievement are we talking about? I was in jail for 23 years. 23 years that nobody will ever give back to me."
- Q: What did you learn in prison?
- "A great deal. Prison shapes you. Particularly if you are Palestinian. Because you live among walls and roadblocks, with restrictions of every kind, and only in prison do you finally get to know the other Palestinians, and you have time to talk and think about things. And also to think about yourself. About what you believe in, about the price you are willing to pay. Yes, I learned a great deal. But I would not wish it on anyone to be in prison. Not to anyone. Not even to the soldier who shoots at us through barbed wire fences like at barrels and laughs. And he does not know that one day he could also end up in prison in The Hague for 25 years."
- Q: At the International Criminal Court?
- "Certainly. I repeat: There is no peace without justice, and we will seek justice in The Hague."
- Q: It is clear to you that some Palestinians may also find themselves as defendants in The Hague.
- "According to international law, we have full right to oppose the occupation. The court will investigate everything that it sees fit to investigate. But still, it has a vital role. And not just because in order to stop crimes it is necessary to punish the criminals. Its role is also vital for the victims. Because only [the legal] process makes it possible to recreate and get past the events. On this matter, no third party can come in place of the victims. No political agreement can cover up their suffering and turn over a new leaf."
- Q: What is life like here in Gaza after 11 years in which the borders have been closed?

- “What do you think it is like? Fifty-five percent of the population is under age 15. We are not talking about terrorists; we are talking about children. They do not hold a party membership card. They are afraid and that’s it. They are just children.”
- Q: Eighty percent of the population in Gaza subsists on humanitarian aid and 50 percent are starving. But throughout all these years, Hamas has found the resources to build its tunnels.
- “That is lucky. Otherwise, we would all be dead. But what you are saying faithfully reflects Zionist propaganda. It’s not that we built the tunnels and then, as a reaction, the siege began. First there was the siege, and then, in order to survive, we had no choice but to build tunnels. There were periods when not even milk entered here.”
- Q: You understand what I meant. Don’t you think that you bear responsibility for the situation?
- “The responsibility rests with those who closed the borders, not with those who tried to reopen them. It is my responsibility to cooperate with anyone who can help us to finally end the unjust siege, which only causes death. This cannot continue. In the current reality, a blowup is inevitable.”
- Q: But you could have bought milk instead of weapons.
- “If we are still alive, it’s clear that we bought milk. Milk and much more: food, medicines. We are two million people here. Do you have any idea what it means [to provide] food and medicines for two million people? Only a small part of the tunnels serve the resistance. For without them, if you don’t die of hunger, you will die in bombings. And for the resistance Hamas uses its own funds, not public funds.”
- Q: So you are saying that Hamas governs the Gaza Strip well.
- “What do you think, that running Gaza is like running Paris? For years we were in charge of many municipal institutions, precisely because we are known for our efficiency and integrity. And then, in 2006 we won the general election. From that moment the world isolated us. There is no electricity, that is true. And that affects everything. But do you think that we have no engineers? That we aren’t capable of building a turbine? Of course we’re capable. But how? With sand? You can have the best surgeons, but what good is that if you ask them to operate with a fork and a knife? What should astonish you people is that we in Gaza are still alive.”
- Q: Hamas marked the 30th anniversary of its founding last December. How is Hamas of today different from Hamas of 30 years ago?
- “What did you think about us 30 years ago?”
- Q: 30 years ago I was eight years old.

- “Exactly. We have changed just as you have changed. Just as everyone has changed. It was 1988. The Cold War. And the world was much more ideological than today. Black and white. Friends and enemies. For us too. But in time you learn that you can find friends, and enemies, even where you least expect it.”
- Q: The Hamas charter still remains relatively black and white.
- “Why do you ask me about a document of principles from 30 years ago and not about everything that came later, and reflects the evolution of Hamas? We are talking about many dozens of documents, and there is everything inside: Our relationship with civil society and with all the other political movements; the regional and international context. And the occupation, of course. The answers to all your questions are there. And frankly, we thought that you people had gotten the message. After all, there is a dialogue with Hamas. Once again, we are not a fleeting phenomenon. There is no future without Hamas. But you continue to ask us about something from 30 years ago. Like about Oslo. So just as with Oslo—I have the impression that the problem is not ours.”
- Q: So who has a problem?
- “Those who insist on treating us like an armed organization and nothing more. You people have no idea what Hamas really is. Just one statistic: half of the salaried employees are women. Would you believe it? You look at the resistance, which is the means, and not at the end, which is a state based on democracy, pluralism and cooperation. A state that will honor human rights and freedom. That will cope with internal differences of opinion using words, not weapons. Hamas goes far beyond its military activity. We are a social movement, more than a political one. A movement that organizes meals for the poor, schools, clinics. That has always been true.”
- Q: But many people, when they think about Hamas, do not think about meals for the poor, but rather about suicide bombings, about rocket fire. To the Israelis you are a terrorist.
- “That’s what they are to me, in light of the crimes they have committed against us.”
- Q: What kind of life do you want for your children?
- “A life of Palestinians, of course. With their head raised high, always. I hope that despite everything, they will have the strength not to give up. Until the day that they have freedom and independence. I want our children to dream about becoming doctors not in order to treat the injured, but in order to cure cancer. Like all children around the world. For them to be confident of their Palestinian identity so that they can be much more than Palestinians.”

- Q: And what about the children on the other side of the border? The ones growing up under the threat of rocket fire? Those who don't know exactly what Hamas is, and only want to live like every child in every normal place around the world?
- "My hope for them is just like my hope for us. That they will be free one day. Because there are walls on both sides. When you close my border, you are closing your own border. And when you occupy my life, for all intents and purposes I am also occupying your life."
- Q: So in the meantime, you will continue with the demonstrations that you organize every Friday at the fence? Sometime you are there in person.
- "I will only tell you two names: Ibrahim Abu Thurayeh and Fadi Abu Saleh. They were 29, both of them. And both were in wheelchairs. Two of the many amputees of the latest wars. And then you understand that here you are not shot to death because you pose a risk, for what kind of risk can you pose when you are in a wheelchair to an army that is on the other side of a barbed-wire fence, hundreds of meters away from you? No, here they don't kill you because of what you've done, but because of who you are. They kill you because you're Palestinian. And that's it, there's no way out."
- Q: If you had to sum it all up for me in one sentence, what is the main message you would like to convey to the readers?
- "That it's time for a change. To end the siege. And finally put an end to the occupation."
- Q: And do you think that they'll believe you?
- "You were here in June, like dozens of other journalists. And your piece (which was published in Yedioth Ahronoth) was the harshest against us. And you are also translated regularly into Hebrew. And yet, here you are again. Sometimes the messenger is also the message. You will leave here and write. Will they read you? Will they listen to you? I don't know. But I have made my move."
- Q: You seem to have a lot of faith.
- "I just know that it's time for a change."