

Hamas negotiator on Israel's ceasefire violations and new barriers

As Israel violates the ceasefire with relentless attacks on Gaza, The Grayzone's Aaron Maté sits down with senior Hamas negotiator Basem Naim in Doha, Qatar. Naim survived the Israeli military's attack on a gathering of Hamas officials in September. He discusses the UN-endorsed demand that Hamas disarm without a path to Palestinian self-determination; faltering efforts to unify Palestinian political factions; the bid to free political prisoners including Marwan Barghouti; the new Syrian government's interdiction of weapons shipments to Hezbollah, and more. Guest: Dr. Basem Naim. Doha-based Hamas negotiator and former head of Gaza's Health Ministry. ||| The Grayzone ||| Find more reporting at <https://thegrayzone.com> Support our original journalism at Patreon: <https://patreon.com/grayzone> Facebook: <https://facebook.com/thegrayzone> Twitter: <https://twitter.com/thegrayzonenews> Instagram: <https://instagram.com/thegrayzonenews> Minds: <https://minds.com/thegrayzone> Mastodon: <https://mastodon.social/@thegrayzone> #TheGrayzone

#Aaron

Dr. Basem Naim, thank you for joining me. Please, you're welcome. Right now, we're in the first phase of the so-called ceasefire. During this period, Israel has killed more than 360 Palestinians. It's not living up to its requirements when it comes to allowing in aid—it's still blocking so many essential supplies. Now there's a push to move to the second phase, where Netanyahu says Hamas will disarm, and this is the main Israeli objective. What, to you, is the state right now of the so-called ceasefire? And will you disarm? Will Hamas disarm during this second phase?

#Guest

Thank you very much for having me here in Doha. When we received the proposal at the beginning, it was clear to us that part of the requirements are in the hands of Hamas and the other resistance factions. A lot of other issues are, more or less, general Palestinian issues. Palestinians have to decide about them when it comes to the future of Gaza, the future of the resistance, the future of statehood, and all other matters. Therefore, Hamas signed the Sharm el-Sheikh deal in this context — that this is what we can do from the point of view of Hamas, together with the other Palestinian factions directly involved in the battle in the Gaza Strip.

And this was considered by the Americans, by the mediators, as the face-to-face phase. When it comes to the first phase, Hamas has fulfilled its obligations—you could say 100%. We have handed over all prisoners, and we are nearly done handing over all bodies in the Gaza Strip. We were totally committed to the ceasefire agreement, but on the contrary, Israel was not committed to any element or any part of it. As you mentioned, until today—58 days after the ceasefire deal—more

than 350 Palestinians have been killed during this time. Most of them are children, women, the elderly, and other civilians. More than 950 have been wounded.

On average, there were more than 640 to 650 incidents during this time, which means that every 24 hours we had at least 10 to 12 incidents — a new attack from the Israeli side. It could be the demolition of a house, the killing of a Palestinian, pushing the yellow line, attacking fishermen, and so on. Therefore, unfortunately, and as many had expected, despite all these violations — which were reported very professionally to the mediators and to the Americans — no action was taken to oblige Israel to abide by this deal. On the contrary, when it comes to any Israeli demands, all actors are working day and night, tirelessly, to meet those requirements.

But when it comes to the Palestinians, for example, the Rafah crossing was supposed to be opened immediately after handing over the last living Israeli prisoners. Until today, Rafah is still closed. Thousands of wounded people, students, women, and children are waiting to leave the Gaza Strip. Thousands are also waiting to come back into Gaza to join their families. But Netanyahu, despite this, is refusing. When it comes to aid, around 500 trucks are entering Gaza today, but most of it is trade, business, profit. At most, one-third of what enters Gaza is aid, and even that doesn't meet the people's needs.

Can you imagine that today we are negotiating about eggs, about meat, frozen meat — we're negotiating about very simple things. The list of so-called dual-use items includes thousands. I heard yesterday that the Americans and others in the CMCC center managed to persuade the Israelis to allow 15 out of these thousands to enter the Gaza Strip. According to the deal, we're supposed to have heavy machinery enter Gaza to lift the rubble, open the streets, and recover our bodies — our beloved people. Thousands of women and children, brothers and sisters, are still under the rubble now, more than two years later.

We have to take clear steps in rehabilitating electricity, the water network, municipalities, hospitals, and clinics. None of this has happened until today. Therefore, when we talk about the second phase, we can't really say that Hamas is the main actor in it, because, as I said, many of the questions about the second phase have to be answered by all Palestinians — all factions, including the PLO, the PA, and so on. But how can we move to the second phase if Israel keeps violating the first phase, which is much simpler and clearer? It's simple: you hand over prisoners, you get your prisoners, you open the borders, you allow aid to come in, you start the rebuilding process. None of that has happened.

Therefore, I think talking about the second phase is a very problematic and very complicated question. But when it comes to the second phase, I think Palestinians were marginalized in all the structures that will deal with it — whether it's the board of peace, the executive body, or the technocratic body. Palestinians, in general, were totally marginalized. They are not part of any of these structures. I think we have a lot to say. First of all, when it comes to the board of peace — after 100 years of struggle — to have a new guardianship, like the British Mandate after the Balfour

Declaration, I think this is unfair. And no Palestinian, not only in Hamas, will accept such a clear repetition of the British Mandate or any form of guardianship.

Therefore, we have said it clearly: yes, okay, now it's a UN Security Council matter. Unfortunately, the UN Security Council has given the Americans all the support and permission to implement this plan without any clear terminology, even in some cases in contradiction to UN resolutions. But we have said, okay, if it is, de facto, to have a board of peace, this board of peace's function has to be limited only to supervising the implementation of the ceasefire agreement — to make sure that all parties are committed to their duties, to supervise, finance, and help rebuild the Gaza Strip, to help Palestinians restart their lives again. But not more than that — not to intervene directly in the lives of Palestinians, how they rule themselves, their laws, the judiciary system, or even internal security issues. When it comes to the ISF...

#Aaron

The International Stabilization Force.

#Guest

International Stabilization Force... We have said, yes, okay, we welcome any force near the borders to separate the parties — between the Palestinians and the Israelis — to supervise the implementation of the ceasefire agreement, to report violations, and to prevent any kind of escalation. But according to the vision of the Palestinians — all Palestinians, by the way — they should have nothing to do inside the cities. They have no role or duties to carry out inside the cities, no involvement in Palestinian daily life or with regular Palestinian citizens.

#Aaron

So you would support a force stationed on the outskirts of Gaza, basically acting as a barrier between the people of Gaza and the Israeli army, but not inside Gaza?

#Guest

Yes. This is our clear position — the position of all Palestinians. And by the way, you can see it's nearly the same stance as all Arab and Islamic countries. That's why many countries are still very reluctant to send their soldiers into Gaza, because the situation is still not clear.

#Aaron

But let me ask you — you mentioned these foreign countries, including the Gulf states. They supported Trump's so-called 20-point peace plan. It was codified, as you said, in the recent UN Security Council resolution that passed. Russia and China didn't veto it. And that plan does call for

Hamas to disarm, which is what Israel will fixate on. Are there any conditions under which Hamas would disarm?

#Guest

First of all, we cannot say that we Palestinians were happy to hear that all these countries supported the Trump plan without any modifications to make it more balanced. Unfortunately, this plan talks about major issues — big topics — but without any details, without a clear executive plan: how to do it, how to form a board of peace, who is forming that board, where the limits are, the ISF — the International Stabilization Force — the executive body, and the relationship between that executive body and the technocratic body ruling Gaza.

All these questions are written in vague language, without any details. So we were totally shocked that it passed in the UN Security Council. I believe most of those countries supported the plan and the UN Security Council resolution only with the idea of ending this genocide. They were under the threat that if they didn't agree with the plan, the war would return, and Netanyahu and his government would be given all the green lights and support to continue the genocide.

#Aaron

That's pretty much what the Trump administration said. The UN ambassador, Mike Welch, said that if you don't support this, then you'll be responsible for any resumption of violence. Yeah. Yes, this is the thing — even though the violence is still continuing, there's real bombing in Gaza.

#Guest

Yes. When it comes to the question of disarmament, I have to say our position in the following context. We Palestinians are a people under occupation — and have been for 77 years. History didn't start on October 7th. This genocide has been taking place, but at a slower pace, over the past 77 years. Maybe not everyone knows that. Between 2000 and 2023 — I mean before October 7th — 20,000 Palestinians were killed across different areas. But it happened on a daily basis: five here, seven tomorrow, in Nablus, in Hebron, in Gaza, and so on. Therefore, it didn't start on October 7th. We are still occupied. We have every right to resist the occupation, as all people under occupation have done — in France, in Algeria, in Vietnam, in South Africa.

I think international law guarantees people under occupation the right to resist by all means, including armed resistance. But if we talk about the situation today, in realpolitik terms, we can say, okay, we can discuss this demand for Hamas to disarm — but first, within this context, no one can deny us the right to defend ourselves and resist the occupation. At the same time, there should be a clear political track with a well-defined timeline that leads to a Palestinian state. Then we would be ready to hand over all these weapons to the new, independent Palestinian state and integrate our fighters into its army.

Before that, we could go for a ceasefire agreement of five, seven, or ten years. During this time, if we have a vision for a political solution and a ceasefire lasting five to ten years, we could consider storing or freezing the weapons. But I don't think any Palestinian is ready today to be disarmed or to hand over his weapon to any party, because on the other side, I have no guarantees that Israel won't attack us again and again. On the second day after disarmament, I can imagine Israel asking the IDF to leave the area within 24 hours — and within 48 hours, Israeli tanks would be everywhere in the Gaza Strip.

#Aaron

Maybe even here in Doha too, where they've already attacked you — maybe.

#Guest

I see today what Israelis are doing in Lebanon, for example. There's a deal, there's a ceasefire, there are guarantors — and despite all that, they're attacking every day, everywhere. Therefore, the term "disarmament," I think, is not acceptable to any Palestinian — not only in Hamas — unless we have a comprehensive approach, with political negotiations within a limited time and a well-defined process. We're not ready to repeat the story of the Oslo Agreement. Instead of five years, now we're talking about thirty-two years, and in the end, we have nothing — a big zero, or even worse than a big zero. We're talking about more settlers, more confiscations, more annexations. Therefore, the term "disarmament," I think, is totally rejected by every Palestinian. But we are ready to go for a comprehensive approach — first, to separate the humanitarian track from all other issues.

We cannot accept that Netanyahu is insisting on blackmailing Palestinians by using their needs — food, medicine, and free movement through the crossings — in order to implement his own security plans. We have to separate this completely. It has nothing to do with security or political issues. Second, we need to see a serious political track to negotiate a Palestinian state on the '67 borders, and then to find security arrangements that would allow for a long-term truce — freezing or storing the weapons so they're not used at all during this period. We're also asking that our security arrangements be protected from Israeli attacks. Israel totally controls the Gaza Strip and can attack it anytime, anywhere. I think within this context, we can talk about how to arrange the issue of arms.

#Aaron

But just staying on this issue of the UN Security Council resolution — you have a measure now with international approval. Again, Russia and China did not veto it, and the Gulf states supported it. But it tries to have it both ways: it says Hamas has to disarm, and, as you were saying, it doesn't offer any path to self-determination. All it says is, "We recognize self-determination as the aspiration of the Palestinian people, and maybe one day, if the Palestinian Authority reforms to our liking, we can give Palestinians a state." You're saying that's not enough. So if they're not willing to give you a path to self-determination, Hamas would not disarm — but you would be open to a long-term truce.

#Guest

Is that correct? Look, how many UN Security Council resolutions have been issued in the case of Palestine or the Palestinian-Israeli conflict up to today? A lot. Why does this one, in particular, have to be implemented by any means? The first one — when Israel was recognized as a full member state in the UN — was based on two conditions: first, building an independent Palestinian state; second, giving Palestinians the right to return to their homes. These were the conditions. Therefore, the legitimacy of the State of Israel is under serious question.

First, I'm talking about UN resolutions — the Security Council resolutions of 1948, 1949, and 1950. So, if we're going to implement international legitimacy, international law, or UN resolutions, we have to deal with them as a package. It can't be selective, only what serves Israeli interests. The other point is this: even when we discuss this UN Security Council resolution, it talks about opening the borders, allowing all aid into Gaza, opening Rafah in both directions, protecting humanitarian aid, and calling for a full ceasefire. How can I talk about a full ceasefire and about implementing the so-called second phase while Israelis are still killing our people? We're talking about 350 killed and 950 wounded. Therefore, either we take it as a whole, or we leave it as a whole.

#Aaron

In terms of what self-determination would look like, you mentioned the 1967 borders. Is it the official position of Hamas that if Israel actually offered, for the first time — which it never has done, despite a lot of propaganda — a Palestinian state in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem, which for Palestinians is already a big compromise, just 22% of your stolen homeland, for Hamas, would that be enough? Would that be a legitimate form of self-determination — a state in that small parcel of land?

#Guest

Look, first of all, I think we have to use different terminology to be fair. Why should Israel "offer"? It's not Israel's duty to offer. It's our genuine right to have an independent state, and Israel is recognized by the UN as a sovereign state based on there being another Palestinian state. Therefore, it's not a gesture from Israel to offer or not to offer. This is a genuine right, regardless of the position of the Israelis. And it's the duty of the international community to use the seven principles — or the relevant chapter of the UN Security Council — to oblige Israel to respect international law and to give the Palestinians all their genuine rights.

But when it comes to an independent Palestinian state, we in Hamas have said many times that if all Palestinians can come to a common ground and agree on an independent, self-sovereign state on the 1967 borders, we will be very cooperative, very positive, very open-minded. We are ready to facilitate it. But again, this means a fully independent state and a guarantee of the right of return for

all Palestinians who were forcefully displaced in 1948 from their homes, cities, and villages. This is both an individual and a collective right. No one can deny me the right to return to my old village or city. After that, it will be the decision of this future state.

It's not the decision of each party. I'm not asking every American—individuals, men and women, or parties—about their position toward Taiwan. This is a state decision: whether to recognize Taiwan as an independent state or as part of China, whether to give the UN Security Council seat to China or to Taiwan. This is the decision of the state. Therefore, if all Palestinians accept this, we will facilitate it; we will be very positive. It has to be a fully independent, self-sovereign state. Palestinians have the full right to return. After that, whether the state recognizes Israel or not—that's a question for the future.

If we have this state for 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 years, we might have a new generation who can think of other options—of coexistence, of one state for all groups. This is a future question, a hypothetical question. Because I think it's unfair to ask someone today who has seen with his own eyes his father, his mother, his brothers and sisters killed in front of him, executed live on air by Israeli soldiers and supported by the Israeli government—to ask him, as a victim squeezed into the corner of the prison that is the Gaza Strip, to answer political questions about the future of Israel or the future of the two-state solution. This is not my duty today. My duty is to fight and to struggle for freedom and dignity.

#Aaron

Before October 7th, Hamas had this position that they were open to a long-term truce. And even some members of Hamas, including you, said that a state within the 1967 borders was acceptable—or at least worth discussing. What was the response from Israel and the U.S. when you tried to make these overtures, when you tried to discuss this compromise?

#Guest

I think the Israelis—all of them, from the extreme right to the extreme left—have never seriously considered or supported the idea of two states. The best offer ever discussed from the Israeli side was to have a political entity that's less than a state.

#Aaron

That was during the term of Yitzhak Rabin, who was the founder of the peace process.

#Guest

Something less than that—but no one in Israel was speaking clearly or loudly about the right of Palestinians to have a fully independent, self-sovereign state. When it comes to the Israelis... look,

the Israelis usually use terminology that reflects these policies. For 70 years now, they've been talking about "Palestinians," or even those living inside the cities as "Arabs." They don't talk about Palestinians because they don't want to recognize them as a people, as a nation. When it comes to the Americans, unfortunately, for the past 77 years—whether Democrats or Republicans—all of them have blindly supported Israel's position.

Therefore, despite all the agreements between Israel and the Palestinians—in Oslo, in Wye River, in White Plantation, in Camp David—they were always supporting the Israeli position. I think the Americans were never fair or just, and they have consistently supported Israel's position. And I have to say, if the Americans are really serious about what they talk about when it comes to the Middle East—about moving forward toward prosperity, stability, calm, peace, the Abraham Accords, and all these terms—there's no way to reach those big goals without solving the Palestinian question.

Any attempt to bypass the Palestinians or the Palestinian question leads to exactly what we saw on October 7th. October 7th was an act of defense against occupation and siege. It was a response to years of neglect of the Palestinians, to efforts to avoid or push aside the Palestinian question, and to the idea of going directly to the Arabs without addressing it. If the Americans are really interested in peace, stability, and prosperity here, the only way is to solve the Palestinian question and help the Palestinians gain their genuine, just national rights. Otherwise, they might be able to impose any plan—Trump's plan or any other—by all means, but it's only a matter of time before the next explosion.

#Aaron

When it comes to solving the Palestinian question, as a member of a Palestinian faction, how can you solve it if you're so divided? There was something called the Beijing Declaration, reached among the Palestinian factions over a year ago, that talked about a pathway to unity—but it hasn't happened. What is the relationship between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority? And can they be part of a Palestinian future if they're so widely seen as collaborating with the Israeli military, even supporting the genocide, and clearly making a lot of effort to exclude Hamas from any future?

#Guest

Unfortunately, we are divided. This is reality—I cannot deny it. We've made a lot of efforts, not just in the last 20 years. We've met many times, for thousands of hours, in Cairo, Mecca, Algiers, Moscow, Beijing, Istanbul, and Doha, trying to achieve unity and reconciliation. Because we believe—I'm talking about Hamas—we believe that unity is not a choice; unity is a must. Because we are divided, I think we've failed to build on what happened over the last two years and on the huge international support for the Palestinian cause. I think there was a great chance to gain some political support—for example, for a state on the 1967 borders—but we failed because of our division. This is one of the reasons. As I said, we've made a lot of efforts, but we have failed. In Beijing and elsewhere, in Cairo, we met with 14 factions, including Fatah from Ramallah.

And we all signed one document. But unfortunately, when our brothers from Fatah went back to Ramallah and presented the outcome of these talks—which was accepted by all factions, there was a consensus about it—it was dismissed and thrown in the trash by the leadership there. I think, unfortunately, they still believe they can find a way to peace, or to a Palestinian state, with the Israelis. And based on this wrong assessment, they continue to respond to Israeli demands one after another, even though we've seen clearly that the Israelis keep making new demands every day. At the same time, they give a free hand to the settlers to annex more land, attack Palestinians, and even deny the financial support needs of the PA in Ramallah. Therefore, we believe this approach has failed.

The Oslo track of 1993 has failed. On the contrary, the results are disastrous. Before Oslo, we had at most 80,000 settlers in the West Bank. Today, we're talking about 800,000 to 1 million. Back then, there were only a few settlements in the West Bank; now we're talking about areas that are totally annexed de facto. Today, there are Knesset members—ministers, police, universities, everything—operating there. They can buy land. The Judaization of Jerusalem is ongoing, with people being evicted from their homes on a daily basis. They're changing the status of the Al-Aqsa Mosque, all against international law and against the agreements between the PA, Jordan, and the Israelis.

Therefore, we feel it has failed. It was a big disaster. That's why we've called, time and again, to come to roundtable talks—those who believe in the political track and those who believe in resistance—to find a way to draw a roadmap for the Palestinian future. And I think all other factions are also committed nationally and are pragmatic enough to find a compromise between these two paths to serve the future and the strategic Palestinian interests. But unfortunately, until now, there's been no response from the PA in Ramallah, especially from the PA leadership. I believe this is also partly because of pressure from outside—I'm talking about Israel.

I'm talking about the Americans. I was in the government as minister of health, and it was clear when Netanyahu said to Mahmoud Abbas once, "Either peace or terrorism." I mean, either peace or reconciliation with Hamas. Even Obama said it: either Israel or Hamas—you cannot choose both. This pressure from outside, along with the complicated situation on the ground, makes it extremely difficult. But I think we have no choice other than to be united, to come together around one table, to study all the experiences of the last 30 years, and to find a middle way—a compromise, a roadmap—so we can together serve the Palestinian interests.

#Aaron

According to polls, Hamas has more popular support in Palestine than Fatah, the faction of Mahmoud Abbas. Yet the most popular political leader is a member of Fatah, Marwan Barghouti, who is a political prisoner, as you know. Now, Hamas has tried to free Marwan Barghouti. Why have you pushed so hard for the freedom of someone who's not even from your own faction? And why is Israel so resistant to freeing someone who's widely seen as the Palestinian Mandela?

#Guest

One of the goals of the Al-Aqsa Flood operation was to free prisoners—to get back our prisoners, all of them or at least some of them. And at no time were we talking only about our prisoners, I mean Hamas prisoners. We were talking about all prisoners. Therefore, during the negotiations, we presented a list of prisoners we were asking to be released from all factions. And finally, out of 250 Palestinian prisoners who were released in this deal—those who were sentenced to life—155 of them were from Fatah. The rest, around 90, were divided among Hamas, the PFLP, Islamic Jihad, and others. Maybe Hamas was the second or third faction whose own prisoners were released. So we are not acting to defend only the interests of our movement or our faction.

This is one. Second, we believe that releasing someone like Marwan Barghouti, Ahmad Saadat—the General Secretary of the PFLP—and other major leaders could influence the Palestinian political arena. It might change the dynamics of the Palestinian leadership. Therefore, having Marwan Barghouti, Ahmad Saadat, and others released could help us achieve the goals we've talked about—unity and reconciliation. And also, in the end, Marwan is a Palestinian prisoner who was arrested because he resisted the occupation, and that's a noble cause. We have to fight to support him and to get him freed, because he wasn't arrested for drug dealing or any criminal act. He was arrested because he helped a resistance group struggle for their nation.

#Aaron

The president of Syria, Ahmad al-Shara—formerly Mohammed al-Jalani—was just here in Doha for the Doha Forum. When he was asked about his past as the former leader of al-Qaeda in Syria, he pointed out that nobody ever calls Israel a terrorist for killing 60,000 civilians in Gaza, and he said that should be considered terrorism. So that was a word of support for the Palestinian people. But at the same time, al-Shara was just praised by the commander of CENTCOM, Brad Cooper, for cutting off weapons shipments to Hezbollah. And Hezbollah paid a very big price to stand with Hamas and resist Israel after October 7th. What's your opinion of Syria cooperating with the U.S. to cut off weapons shipments to Hezbollah—Hezbollah, which helped resist Israel and has paid a big price for it?

#Guest

As a general principle, we in Hamas—and this is stated clearly in our charter, especially in the new political document issued in 2016–2017—do not interfere in the internal affairs of any of the countries around us. These countries have to decide for themselves their political agendas, coalitions, and goals. What we believe is that we, as Palestinians, are occupied and oppressed, and we are calling for support from everyone in the region and beyond—Arabs, Muslims, and free people around the world—to help us achieve our goals. And of course, when we talk about support, we are looking for stronger backing from our neighbors, especially those who are suffering from the same enemy.

I mean, Lebanon has territory occupied by the Israelis, as does Syria and Palestine. Therefore, we are expecting strong support from all our brothers and sisters in the region, especially those who are fighting against the same enemy. What we are looking for, and what we have stated publicly, is that we wish Syria unity, stability, and prosperity, and that it stays within the context of the region, working to get rid of all kinds of occupation and colonial power hegemony. Therefore, sooner or later, I think Syria has no choice but to be in line with all those who are fighting against the Zionist occupation and the colonial powers supporting it. But how they do it, and when they do it—that is their decision.

We cannot decide for them. For us, Hezbollah is fiercely fighting, struggling, and defending its own land—which is occupied—against continuous Israeli aggression. And therefore, yes, we believe that it deserves to be supported by everyone in the region. But again, generally, we don't interfere in all these details between different countries and groups. We believe that Palestine has to be the compass for all free people in the region and beyond, all united behind the Palestinian struggle, regardless of nationality, race, color, ethnicity, or even sectarian group. We believe that any divisions in the region, especially sectarian ones, serve only the Israelis.

#Aaron

Last question. Going back to polling, all the Palestinian polls show that Hamas retains a strong base of popular support, including in the West Bank. But there are Palestinians—and I know some of them in Gaza—who say, “We didn’t give Hamas a mandate for October 7th. We didn’t sign up to sacrifice our entire lives, our homes, our territory for this cause.” So what would your message be to them?

#Guest

That Hamas is still enjoying such strong support is expected. I’m aware of a lot of polls done before October 7th, mostly by independent research centers and so on. It was clear that Hamas still had strong support, but when people were asked about Hamas as Hamas—with its vision, ideology, and political program—the support was lower. The support was much stronger when it came to the idea of resistance. I mean, there’s a group that supports Hamas as Hamas, but when it’s put in the context of resistance, a much larger portion of the Palestinian people support Hamas, Islamic Jihad, and others. I think it was something like 35 or 36 percent supporting Hamas itself, but when it came to Hamas’s resistance and Jihad’s resistance, it was around 90 percent.

Second, yes, I have to respect any opinion coming from Palestinians—whether they are with Hamas or against Hamas—because in the end, they are, like me, the owners of the land. They have the right to express their opinion, for or against. But I think everywhere today—for example, in the United States or in the most democratic countries in Europe—you have a government that enjoys a majority, and this government serves the interests of all people, based on being legitimately elected.

Hamas was an elected government by the vast majority of Palestinians, and therefore, deciding to go in one direction or another is legitimate.

But that some people are against this—I think you'll never have full consensus behind any decision in any country. It's normal and expected, especially after such a hard, brutal confrontation, to have this kind of discussion, to have different opinions, and to have some people who disagree. But this should never be about accusing someone of being a traitor or a spy. No. Every one of us is against the occupation, generally supportive of the resistance, but we might have different opinions about how to do it, when to do it, and why. For me, even before October 7th, we really had only one choice: either to die from an Israeli rocket or to die from the lack of medicine and food.

Therefore, there was no choice to have a better life or a better future. Most of the discussion was about whether to die very publicly—live on Facebook—or to die in silence because of the absence of medicine and food. I think we chose to stand up, to defend our people, to resist, and to raise our voices against the prison—to knock on the doors of this prison and tell everyone that we are still here, we are struggling, and they have to solve this problem. The problem is not with the Palestinians who acted in self-defense; the problem is the prison itself. We are not just looking to improve the conditions of the prison—we are struggling to get rid of the prison.

But again, I have no choice but to respect their opinion—especially people who have lost their loved ones during these last two years, their houses, most of their assets. At the same time, I've lost myself. I've lost my son, my mother, part of my family—my small family—and also my extended family; maybe seventy or eighty were killed. I'm not speaking from Doha as someone far from these sacrifices. I share the same suffering, I pay the same price. But again, in the end, someone has to decide, someone has to take the lead. We have to respect that the vast majority have chosen this path to deal with the occupation.

#Aaron

Dr. Basem Naim, thanks so much for talking to me. Please. You're welcome.